

End-of-Life Decisions

By Pamela Morgan

Synopsis

Siblings argue over their mother's condition. One is bound and determined to care for her until the end, while the other wants to discuss end of life care.

Cast of Characters

Ann - 20s-30s, she loves her family dearly but values her time and independence.

Stu - 20s, he carries around a past he's not proud of and seeks to make amends.

Person - any age, ethnicity or gender, a bit nosy, likes to give advice.

Place

A library in a small town.

Time

Present day.

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Person sits at table, back to audience, headphones on. Ann is browsing books on a shelf. Stu enters, he does not see Ann immediately. He absently browses the books when he notices her over the book shelf.

STU

Ann? What are you doing here?

Ann starts and slams the book closed, sliding it off the shelf and out of view.

ANN

Just...um...I'm looking for...a book.

STU

A book. You're over thirty minutes from your house, you haven't been a library in probably over a decade, and you're suddenly looking for a book.

ANN

Yes, I needed a book.

(quieter, quicker)

And this is the only library I've ever been to.

STU

Uh huh.

ANN

What are you doing here?

STU

This is my library.

ANN

Your library, like you own it.

STU

No, my library as in my tax payer dollars pay for it.

ANN

Your tax payer dollars like you have a job or own a house.

STU

Fine, Dad owns the house so vicariously through his tax payer dollars.

ANN

Well good for you, Stu. You vicariously own a library.

STU

What book are you reading?

ANN

Are you vicariously a librarian now too?

Stu comes around and snatches the book from her, reads the title and drops it like poison.

STU

You can't be serious.

ANN

Stu, we have to start thinking like this.

STU

No. Just...no.

ANN

She's not getting better and you can't keep putting your life on hold to take care of her.

STU

(loudly)

I'm not putting my life on hold!

(quieter)

I'm not pulling the plug on her. I will fight you tooth and nail. We are not doing that. How can you even- How dare you- Oh my god!

ANN

It's not only me, Stu.

STU

What is that supposed to mean.

Beat.

What does that mean, it's not only you? Who else?

Pause.

(loudly)

Answer me, goddamnit!

(quieter, to Person)

Sorry, it's my sister, we're talking.

(to Ann, library voice)

Answer me, Ann. Who else thinks this way?

ANN

Dad!

PERSON

(removing headphones)

You guys should probably keep it down.

ANN

You keep it down and stay out of our business.

STU

She didn't mean that, sorry. We'll keep it down.

Person shrugs, puts headphones back on.

Quit acting like that, could you be a normal person for once?

ANN

For once? You come to the library to attack me for trying to take care of our family business and now I'm the one not acting right?

STU

I didn't come here to attack you, okay! And take care of our family business? You call this taking care of our family?

Stu shoves the book on the table.

ANN

Yes. Yes, I call it taking care of our family business. I call it doing what needs to be done. I call it listening to Dad and what he needs, regardless of how I feel about it.

STU

You always took his side, always.

ANN

What are you talking about?

STU

Remember that Christmas when we all decided, as a family, that we would get a new dog to replace Bailey? And then Dad changed his mind at the last minute and I was crying and Mom was so upset and what did you do?

ANN

You are unbelievable.

STU

That's right, you took his side. Or that time when Mom was going to let me go on the Senior class trip, and Dad said no, and you took his side again and I didn't get to go! But when you were a senior, you got to go on a class trip!

ANN

(loudly)

Because my class trip was to Great America and your class trip was to Italy!

STU

But you still got to go and then took Dad's side when he said I couldn't!

ANN

You are no seriously comparing this to a puppy and a senior class trip. Let it go, Stu. This isn't about sides.

STU

It is about sides, only this time, Mom doesn't get a say in the matter.

ANN

I think you just want all the say in the matter. As usual. Nobody wanted a puppy that Christmas, Stu, but you. Mom only caved because you pulled tears and made her feel badly for never getting you your own pet.

Dad didn't want one either, because he knew he'd be the one stuck walking it and playing with it and feeding it, because you sure as hell wouldn't.

STU

I would have!

ANN

The only good thing that came out of Mom's accident is that you finally grew up and started taking responsibility for something other than yourself.

STU

Nothing good came out of Mom's accident!

ANN

I didn't mean it that way. I...I know that...

Awkward pause.

Why did you come to the library?

STU

I came here because I needed-

Stu chokes up. Ann lets him have his space, awkward and a bit uncomfortable, sitting down at the table with her book while Stu brings it under control.

I needed a break. I needed to get away, I needed some...I don't know, space, I guess.

ANN

Right. And you're not putting your life on hold.

STU

(getting loud)

I'm not putting my life on hold!

(remembering, quieter)

I'm not, stop saying that.

ANN

What would you call it, Stu? You left your job, you left your boyfriend-

STU

Ex boyfriend.

ANN

Ex-actly. You've moved back home, you're not doing anything with your life right now.

STU

I am doing something with my life right now, Ann. I'm taking care of Mom. Something that Dad can't do, something you won't do. Who else?

Ann looks at him levelly, seriously, almost harshly. She slides the book across the table at him with one finger. A beat as he stares at her.

We are not doing that!

PERSON

Hey, I don't mean to be overhearing, but you're kind of loud, for a library I mean.

Stu gets up and walks away, to cool off.

ANN

Except you are eavesdropping, Chad/Karen, on a very private and personal conversation between me and my brother.

PERSON

First of all, my name's not Chad/Karen and secondly, I'm not the library police or anything, but I am trying to study.

ANN

Then move! Get up and move! There's a whole library. Don't sit there all high and mighty and tell us to shut up, just get your butt up and walk away. That's all you need to do.

STU

(to Person)

She doesn't mean that, I'm so sorry. We're just going through some things right now, with our mother and-

ANN

S/He doesn't need to know our business.

PERSON

Neither does the entire library.

ANN

Fine, since Spencer/Dolores over here obviously needs to know, our mother is a vegetable. Okay? Are you happy?

STU

Stop it. Stop calling her that and stop acting this way. We're in a library.

ANN

No, I'm not going to stop. She's a vegetable, she's been a vegetable for four years. She can't talk, she can't move, she can't eat, she can't even breath on her own. The only way she can communicate is through blinking and she doesn't even do that!

STU

(angrily, shouting)

Shut up! Shutupshutupshutup!

PERSON

(to Ann, awkwardly after a silence)

It's not Spencer/Dolores, either, and maybe lay off a little. She's your mother.

ANN

Are you serious? I make a peep and get told to shut up, he screams and you're all, oh cut him some slack, would you? You have no idea what you're talking about. We have all watched her suffer, we have all had to put our lives on hold, waiting, hoping that one day she would wake up. You don't think I was by her side every day for the first year? I read her books, I told her stories, I cried and begged for her to come back to us. But the cold hard truth is that she's not coming back. She's not going to wake up!

(to Stu)

There will never be a world in which Mom is back to her old self again. Never. She's going to lay in that bed and waste away, day after week after month after year. With nothing to do, trapped in her own body and in her own mind, with no one's voice but yours to hear. And Dad wants to move on and I want to move on and you...

STU

I what? I want to take care of her? Don't want to watch her die? I want to be a good decent human being?

ANN

Screw you, you want to feel good about yourself. You treated her like crap. She stood by you for years, she supported you through everything: the abusive boy friend, the drugs and partying. She paid all your bills, while you played the misunderstood artist. You never called or visited. Dad wanted to cut you off, but she wouldn't. You're not trying to be a decent human being; you want to feel good about being the worst possible son.

Stu opens his mouth to say something, and then closes it. A long heavy pause.

PERSON

(awkwardly)

So...the librarian has called security to come and ask you to leave.

ANN

You need to stop, dude.

PERSON

I wish I was joking. I'm really sorry for what you're going through.

ANN

We don't need your sympathy.

PERSON

I know. But for what its worth, good luck, I guess. You too, man. With whatever you decide.

Person exits quickly. Pause.

ANN

What an asshole.

STU

Was I really the worst son a mom could have?

ANN

Oh, Stu, no you weren't the worst. Or the best. Don't all kids treat their parents like crap? But you were 22 when Mom had her accident, you never got a chance to make amends.

STU

I can't let her go, Ann.

ANN

You have to let her go. We have to let her go. Stu, its been four years. Four long and very difficult years for all of us. You think any of us are taking this lightly? You think Dad wouldn't want the love of his life back, that I wouldn't want my mother here when I got married and started a family?

STU

You're getting married?

ANN

Yeah, Chuck asked. I said yes.

STU

Congrats, I guess.

ANN

Thanks, I guess.

STU

I still think he's an asshole.

ANN

He still thinks you're an asshole.

STU

I want her back. I want to tell her how sorry I am for...for everything.

Stu starts to cry and Ann puts an arm around him.

ANN

So do I, Stu. So do I.

Long pause, as Stu struggles to compose himself with Ann's comfort.

STU

Maybe...maybe we can look at this book together. "Making End-of-Life Decisions." God.

Stu lifts the book so audience can see the title.

I'm not saying I agree but...

ANN

But it doesn't hurt to look. And talk about it. Only talk. That's it.

Ann looks in the direction the Person went, getting nervous.

And sneak it out of this library, because she really did call the security.

Ann grabs the book and gets up to leave.

STU

Ann, wait. Thank you. I love you and...I'm sorry.

ANN

I love you too, Stu. So does Mom and she forgave you long before her accident. Now, tuck this under your coat and let's go!

They exit quickly.

BLACKOUT.