

FLYING

A story of the immortality of the human spirit and
the transcendent power of love.

by

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EXT. THE BEACH - DAY

From a blue sky the sun shimmers off an indigo ocean. An unhurried swell rises and breaks onto an arc of white beach and, just beyond the waves, gannets twist in white spirals down into the clear water. Josie (about 7 years old) walks backwards along the edge of the water, her concentration focused intently on the pink kite straining against the line in her hands. Further down the beach, unnoticed by Josie, Emma (aged early/mid 60s) watches her from the edge of the surf. Her figure, blurred by sea mist and heat ripples, has the uncertain quality of a mirage

INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Long white curtains billow and swirl through French windows thrown open to the sea wind. Inside, the rushing air creates a soft medley of sound against the rumble of waves: the rattle of letters, the restless, shifting pages of books and magazines, the whispers and sighs of the curtains. Paintings, ceramics, and vases of flowers fill the room with vibrant colour. Emma lies apparently asleep, her face gaunt and pale, lined with dark shadows. Her son, Chris (aged mid 30s), stands framed in the bright windows, watching his daughter flying her kite on the beach below. His face is drawn and full of loss.

EMMA

You're here.

Chris gathers himself and turns with a fragile smile. He moves to the bed and embraces her. She clings to him with fierce intensity.

CHRIS

We caught the first plane we could.

Emma nods, closing her eyes against tears. Chris struggles to contain his own emotions.

EXT. THE BEACH - DAY

Josie concentrating on flying her kite. Her father is walking through the soft sand towards her, some way off still. His voice is almost lost in the noise of surf.

CHRIS

Josie.

Intent on her kite, Josie doesn't hear him.

CHRIS

(closer,
impatiently)

Josie.

She hears him this time, but pretends she doesn't.

CHRIS

(crossly, walking
right up to her)

Didn't you hear me?

Josie's face closes, assuming a mask of careful nonchalance.

JOSIE

No.

CHRIS

Your Nana's awake.

Reluctantly, Josie begins to wind in her kite. Her apprehension shows.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM/HALLWAY - DAY

Josie and Chris cross the living room to the bedroom door. The house is cool, shadowed, and still, the furnishings from another time. An old clock beats out a hollow rhythm against the muted sounds of the ocean. Josie surveys this hushed, alien environment with apprehension, clutching her kite like a talisman. Chris, wrapped up in his own internal world, is oblivious to his daughter's reaction. Near the bedroom door, he turns her around to make awkward adjustments to her hair and clothes. This is an unfamiliar role for him.

JOSIE

I wish Mum was here.

CHRIS

(wearily)

So do I, but she's not, so
let's not start that again.

CHRIS (CONT.)
 (looks at her,
 softens)
 Now remember, even if your
 Nana looks different to how
 you remember her, she's just
 the same person. You give her
 a big hug when we go in there.

Chris stands and opens the door to a flood of light.

INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Chris guides Josie into the room. Emma is very pale and tired. Her husband, Jack (early/late 60s), sits next to the bed, haggard and grim; there is no pleasure in his silent acknowledgement of the new arrivals. When Emma sees Josie, her eyes sparkle with an energy that belies her appearance.

EMMA
 Here she is. My, haven't you
 grown up since I last saw you.

Josie feels terribly alone in this adult world of grief, chemicals, and death. She holds the kite tightly against her.

JOSIE
 (very muted)
 Hullo Nana.

CHRIS
 Give your Nana a hug.

Josie puts down the kite and gingerly leans over to give Emma the most circumspect of embraces.

EMMA
 I can see the gannets fairly
 whizzing about. Must be a
 good day for kite flying.

JOSIE
 (mechanically, not
 meeting her eyes)
 Yes thanks.

Josie winds and unwinds the kite string around her fingers.

EMMA

I used to fly kites when I was a girl, too. Can I see yours?

Josie tentatively hands the kite to Emma.

EMMA

Its a fine kite. Does it fly well?

JOSIE

(nods)

Mmm hmm.

Chris is becoming annoyed and impatient with his daughter, but Emma understands what this must be like for Josie. She knows that nothing good can come from this situation.

EMMA

(handing back the kite)

Well I certainly wouldn't want to be stuck inside on a perfect kite flying day. How about you come and see me later and we'll have a talk then?

Josie smiles shyly but gratefully and accepts the kite.

EMMA

Off you go then. I can watch your kite racing my gannets.

The idea catches Josie's imagination.

JOSIE

My kite can go pretty fast.

EMMA

I'm sure it does. Those gannets are in for big surprise.

Josie looks to her father for approval. Disappointed, he nods almost imperceptibly, and Josie exits. Emma sinks back into the pillow and closes her eyes, exhausted from her efforts with Josie.

Josie bursts free of the house, running down the dunes to the beach.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

The expressions and body language of the Chris and Jack indicate underlying tension and unease with each other. Josie is acutely aware of this. She picks at her unappetising food.

JOSIE
(mechanically)
Thank you for a lovely dinner.
Can I get down, please?

CHRIS
Alright, but don't say you're
hungry later on.

Josie slips from her seat and makes her escape.

EXT. THE VERANDA - EARLY EVENING

Free of the tensions of the adult world, Josie is caught in the spell of this magical place as she looks out over the sea towards the island. Oystercatchers call nearby and, as she glances towards the sound, Josie sees her grandmother in a swirl of curtains in the doorway leading from her bedroom to the deck. Josie freezes; her grandmother turns to her and smiles. A gust of wind swirls out the curtains in a screen of flowing white; when they retreat again, Emma is no longer there. For a moment Josie stares then walks uncertainly to the door. Inside, in her bed, Emma is motionless, her eyes closed.

Slowly, edgily, Josie enters. The room rustles about her. Her eyes search Emma's sleeping face, then she sees a photograph of a much younger Chris on the sideboard. She is drawn to it, fascinated. Above it is a framed painting of her own. She moves on examining the many beautiful objects - lastly, a vase crowded with roses. She runs her fingertips over the delicate petals.

EMMA
Aren't they the most perfect
things?

Josie turns sharply, caught in the act. Emma smiles.

JOSIE
(awkwardly)
I was just seeing if you were
alright.

EMMA

I was dreaming the most wonderful dream. I was outside with the wind on my face and the stars above me. Outside. What a magical word.

(pause)

You mustn't be afraid of me, Josie. Its only my body that's giving up on me. The part of me that makes me what I am, the part of me that's talking to you now, that's something very different.

Josie doesn't meet her eyes. Emma looks at her for a moment. She can see that she is not reaching Josie.

EMMA

You see that carved wooden box just there, dear. Could you pass it to me, please?

Josie picks up the box and hands it to Emma.

EMMA

(opening the box)

There's something I want you to have. My grandmother gave it to me. I must have been about your age.

Josie's eyes light up at this treasure trove of jewellery. Emma pulls out an intricate, jewelled, golden butterfly brooch. She passes it to an enthralled Josie who holds it up to the light so that its ruby eyes flash red in the darkness.

JOSIE

Its beautiful, Nana.

EMMA

I used to watch the butterflies in our garden and imagine what it would be like to be able to fly from flower to flower, drinking nectar. This brooch is especially for girls who dream of being butterflies.

JOSIE

Like me.

EMMA

Like you and me. Come here
and I'll pin it on you.

Josie moves closer. Emma tries to pin it on her, but her fingers fail at the task. Josie helps her. She stands back, admiring the effect, and beams at her grandmother. They do not notice Chris enter the room. There is none of the spark of his mother and daughter in his set, weary face.

CHRIS

Josie, bath time.

JOSIE

(excited)
Dad, look what Nana gave me.

CHRIS

(to Emma)
You sure that's a good idea?

Josie is dismayed. Emma glares at her son.

EMMA

(very firmly)
Yes I am.

CHRIS

Come on, Josie. I've still
got things to do.

EMMA

The brooch looks wonderful on
you, Josie. I'm glad its gone
to such a good home.

Josie beams at her and exits, still admiring the brooch.

Outside, she hovers in the shadows at the doorway, listening to the voices.

CHRIS

She'll lose it.

EMMA

(crossly)
That's my concern, not yours.
You should hear yourself. You
sound so hard with her. You
never used to be like this.

CHRIS
(wearily)
Things aren't good at the
moment.

EMMA
All the reasons in the world
won't matter later, Chris.
You of all people should know
that.

Josie holds up the butterfly brooch and turns it in a shaft
of light, watching it with glittering eyes.

EXT. THE BACK GARDEN - DAY

A butterfly flits across the flowers to reveal Josie is
picking a rose. At the end of the roses, she looks up to
see a path lined with flowers disappearing in the green wall
of rain forest. Curious, she moves to the entrance and looks
into the forest. The forest is cool and green and lush.

The path beckons and she follows it, eyes wide and
glittering, into this enchanted place of bird song, the
sound of surf filtered by the trees.

She turns a bend in the path and enters a clearing. In the
centre, in an old wooden chair surrounded by a crescent of
flower garden falling into disrepair, sits Young Emma.

JOSIE
(startled)
Oh. Hullo.

Young Emma smiles.

CHRIS
(off screen,
sharply)
Josie, we're going. Now. Do
you want to come or not?

Josie turns back and shouts back towards the house.

JOSIE
(with affected
weariness)
Yes. I'm coming.

She turns back, but to her surprise the chair is empty and
there is no sign of Young Emma.

INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Josie is carrying a bag of shopping along the veranda to the front door. She stops - the curtains and the windows of Emma's room are closed. Something is wrong.

She pushes through the folds of curtain into the unfamiliar, tomb-like stillness of room. Emma opens her eyes; she is very weak.

EMMA

Hullo Josie.

JOSIE

Why are the curtains closed,
Nana?

EMMA

The light's hurting my eyes.
(making an effort)
Been shopping?

Josie nods.

EMMA

Supermarkets. Who would ever
imagine missing supermarkets?
See that brown bottle of pills
next to me, Josie? Could you
take two out and pass them to
me with the glass of water?

Josie shakes out the tablets and passes them and the glass to Emma, who fails in her attempt to sit up higher. Josie helps her and they succeed together.

EMMA

Thank you, dear.

But Emma's strength gives way and the glass falls onto the bed, water spilling everywhere.

EMMA

(in despair)
Damn it. Can't I even do this?

Jack appears by the bed, brushing Josie out of the way. Josie, frightened and unsure of her own responsibility for what is happening, backs towards the door. Jack picks up a towel and starts drying the bed.

JACK
 (to Emma)
 Its alright, honey.

Josie watches from just beyond the doorway. Jack rocks Emma like a child in his arms, crooning soft words of consolation to her. On Josie's shirt, the fine gold tracery of the butterfly's wings glitters in the shadows.

EXT. THE BEACH - DAY

The gannets wheel and dive into the clear, green water of the shallows off the beach. A line of foam rolls hissing over the sand next to where Josie kneels fastening the butterfly brooch to her kite. She finishes and begins to run along the beach, pulling the kite into the air behind her. Suddenly, Young Emma is there with her.

YOUNG EMMA
 Can I have a turn?

Josie is startled by this request for her precious kite.

JOSIE
 Do you know how to fly it?

YOUNG EMMA
 Of course I do.

Josie's desire to make friends overcomes her reluctance. She hands the string to her companion, who handles the kite with aplomb. In spite of herself, Josie is impressed.

JOSIE
 I saw you in the bush
 yesterday.

YOUNG EMMA
 That's my secret place.

The kite soars suddenly out over the water.

JOSIE
 (panicking)
 Don't let it go out there.

She grabs the string, but causes the kite to crash into the sea.

JOSIE
 The butterfly brooch!

She runs to kite and lifts it from the surf, but to her dismay the butterfly brooch is no longer there.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - DAY

Hard faced and angry, Chris sits at the dining room table, strewn with work-related pieces of paper, a lap-top computer is in front of him. Josie stands uncomfortably at the other end of the table, facing him, her face closed. She has retreated behind her shield.

CHRIS

You can't be trusted to look
after anything, can you?
Why'd you do it?

JOSIE

I wanted to make it fly.

CHRIS

(derisively)
You wanted to make it fly.
What a stupid...

Josie's shield breaks utterly. She bursts into tears and runs out of the house. The break startles Chris, who is instantly and genuinely remorseful.

CHRIS

(calls, awkwardly)
Josie...

The door bangs shut offscreen. Chris exits to follow Josie.

Josie runs into the trees, very upset.

Chris appears in the door.

CHRIS

(calls out)
Josie.

Josie is nowhere to be seen. He gives up and goes back inside.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Josie sits in Emma's chair with tears on her face, though she is no longer crying. Although Josie has not seen her yet, Young Emma is there with her.

YOUNG EMMA
He doesn't really mean it.

JOSIE
Leave me alone.

YOUNG EMMA
He doesn't.

JOSIE
He's always cross with me. I
can't do anything right, ever.

YOUNG GIRL
Come on, let's play a game.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

The two girls chase each other, laughing, helter skelter
through the trees.

Where the bush fringes the clearing near the house, Josie's
companion disappears through a missing wall section of an
old lean-to. Josie pauses for a couple of seconds, puzzled,
then follows.

Josie enters the shed. A thick layer of dust and cobwebs
cover boxes of old magazines and other detritus. Propped
up in the corner is a dusty old surfboard.

JOSIE
Hey, look at that.

YOUNG EMMA
That used to be your Dad's.

JOSIE
(incredulous)
My Dad's? Dad? A surfie?

YOUNG EMMA
Yep. He had hair down to
there.

She reaches around and down her back. Josie is incredulous.

JOSIE
Yeah? How do you know all
this stuff about him?

YOUNG EMMA

Oh I know all sorts of things.

JOSIE

Wait till he sees this.

EXT. THE BACK GARDEN - DAY

Josie is full of the exhilaration of her game and her discovery of the surfboard. She clears the corner of the house to be confronted by the solitary figure of her father. Tears line his face. She stops in her tracks, astonished.

JOSIE

(hesitantly)

What's the matter, Dad?

CHRIS

The doctor's just been, Josie.
Your Nana's not going to wake
up again.

Josie watches him, not knowing what to do, the surfboard forgotten. She could never have imagined her father crying.

INT. JOSIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Josie lies in bed, wide awake, looking out at the stars. She quietly gets out of bed.

INT. EMMA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Josie appears in the doorway. Emma is alone in the room. A single bedside light is on; the curtains are drawn, the windows closed. She pauses by her grandmother's bed for a moment and switches off the light, then moves around the room, opening all the curtains and windows. The wind and stars flood into the room, bringing it to life again.

JOSIE

(looking out to the
dark sea)

Sorry about the butterfly.

EMMA

Don't worry about the
butterfly. It'll turn up.

Josie turns sharply, astonished.

JOSIE

They said you wouldn't...

EMMA

You're not afraid anymore, are you Josie?

Josie shakes her head.

EMMA

Listen, you mustn't give up on your father. You think he doesn't love you, but he does. He was just like you once. You have to help him remember, like you've helped me. Promise me, now.

A silence.

JOSIE

I promise.

Emma closes her eyes again.

EMMA

We're like butterflies. When I'm gone, remember that what's left is just the chrysalis. You wouldn't want a butterfly to stay in its chrysalis, would you?

JOSIE

(in a small voice)

No.

Emma remains still and silent now.

JOSIE

Nana?

But there is no reply.

EXT. THE BEACH - DAY

Chris stands facing out to sea, grim-faced. Further along the beach, Josie, in her bathers, stands watching him, holding the old surfboard. She seems to lose heart, and turns away, but finds Young Emma in front of her. The girl smiles and kneels, gliding a hand over the wet sand. A wave washes and sweeps the sand away from the butterfly brooch.

Astonished, Josie reaches down and picks it up, cradling it in her hands.

YOUNG EMMA

Remember, you promised.

Josie looks up, understanding growing. Another, larger wave sweeps in, surging up around Young Emma's knees. She smiles radiantly at Josie, then turns her face up to the sun and - in an abstracted sequence in which the image of her face seems to fuse with the sun, the sky, the waves, and the face of Emma the grandmother - she is gone.

In wide shot, we look down on the beach as Josie turns and runs towards her father holding out the brooch in one hand, her other arm wrapped around the old surfboard.