

A TRIP TO THE ZOO

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Eight year old Elise loves her mother, loves school but, what she loves most of all is that she gets to go to the zoo for the first time on a field trip. Her day gets even better when her favorite older cousin, Maria, shows up on Elise's school blacktop to see her. When Maria tells Elise that her father is waiting outside of the schoolyard gate to see her, Elise's decision to go out to say hi to him changes her whole life.

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

MOMMY, a petite beautifully freckled-faced, woman in her thirties and her little girl of eight years, ELISE, half-walk, half-run down a city street. Pulling Mommy along, Elise hurries to the gate of the schoolyard, she lets go of Mommy's hand and hits a dead sprint.

MOMMY

Elise, your lunch!

Elise doubles back and grabs the brown paper bag lunch.

ELISE

Yes, 8:30 exactly!

Mommy pulls Elise in for an lingering embrace. Elise pecks Mommy on the cheek, squirms out of the bear hug and runs through the gate.

MOMMY

I'll see you at 2 o'clock.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - CONTINUOUS

Elise lines up on the blacktop with more excited THIRD GRADERS. Other STUDENTS run around the blacktop in all directions. She checks the contents of her lunch bag.

ELISE

Ham and cheese sandwich, check.  
Juice box, check. Corn chips, check  
and taffy, check!

The LITTLE GIRL directly in front of her turns around and looks into Elise's open bag.

LITTLE GIRL

My mom gave me a banana. The monkey  
is going to try to take it. That's  
what happened last time I went to  
the zoo.

ELISE

I've never been. Dang it, I shoulda  
brought a banana. I hope he likes  
corn chips!

Little Girl cranes her neck to get a good look.

LITTLE GIRL

I'll trade you my chocolate bar for  
your taffy.

Elise thinks a moment.

ELISE

Trade!

The two girls rummage through each other's lunch bags  
swapping food.

ELISE (CONT'D)

I was scared my Mommy was going to  
make me late today. I told her our  
teacher said we had to be here at  
exactly 8:30 to get on the bus so I  
got up super early!

LITTLE GIRL

Me too. My favorite animals are the  
monkeys but, you're not supposed to  
feed them.

ELISE

You said you gave them your banana  
last time.

LITTLE GIRL

Nope, they tried to take it but,  
the zoo keeper told me not to feed  
'em. So I didn't.

ELISE

Guess I shouldn't give them my corn  
chips then.

MARIA, Elise's pretty teen cousin, walks up to Elise while  
she is talking.

MARIA

Hey, Lysie!

ELISE

Maria, what are you doing here?  
High schools take trips to the zoo  
too? I don't know they'll let big  
kids on the bus. I'll have to  
ask...

Maria shakes her head.

MARIA

I'm not going to the zoo. I came to tell you your daddy is here. What if I told you he'll take you someplace better than the zoo?

Elise shakes her head.

ELISE

The only place more fun than the zoo is Disneyland.

Maria nods and Elise's face lights up. Little Girl jumps up and down.

LITTLE GIRL

Oooh, can I go too?

We hear a WHISTLE BLAST and see students getting into lines behind various TEACHERS.

ELISE

Wait, he lives in Washington, DC.

MARIA

Yeah, but he's right outside the gate right now.

LITTLE GIRL

Are we going to Disneyland or not?

Another WHISTLE BLOWS and Little Girl starts moving forward with the rest of the line.

ELISE

Can you tell him I have to go to the zoo today but I can go to Disneyland with him tomorrow after I ask Mommy?

MARIA

You can tell him yourself. It'll only take a minute.

Elise hesitates and looks nervously as the lines move forward.

ELISE

Ok, but just a minute because I have to...

Maria holds up her hand.

MARIA

I know, go to the zoo. It'll take just a minute though. He'll be so happy.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Elise and Maria exit the schoolyard and walk toward a black sedan where DADDY stands dressed in a navy blue business suit. Elise breaks out into a full-out run and jumps into Daddy's arms.

ELISE

Daddy!!!! Guess what, I'm going to the zoo today with my class!

Daddy reigns kisses on Elise's face as she giggles. Elise squeezes Daddy's neck tightly. Elise rubs her face.

ELISE (CONT'D)

Your beard is prickly. It seems like forever since you were here last time. I miss you, Daddy!

DADDY

Missed you too, Baby. You're going to the zoo, huh? What if I told you that I had some place even better to take you?

Daddy puts Elise down. In the distance a WHISTLE BLOWS. Elise anxiously looks back at the school yard and sees hardly any kids on the blacktop. She looks back at Daddy.

ELISE

Disneyland?

Daddy looks at Maria who nods at him.

DADDY

Yep, Disneyland. Let's go!

ELISE

Wait, I haven't asked Mommy yet. Plus, I really wanna go to the zoo!

Daddy opens the door to the sedan. Elise looks conflicted.

Elise hesitates.

DADDY

I want to spend time with you. How about I'll take you to Disneyland and then to the zoo.

ELISE

You promise?

DADDY

I promise I'll take you to the zoo.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Elise climbs into the back seat of the car followed by Maria. When Elise gets in she sees her GRANDMA sitting in the front seat. Daddy climbs into the driver's seat and starts the engine.

ELISE

Grandma! You're going to Disneyland with us too? The whole family is going!

Grandma turns around and smiles at Elise. Maria puts Elise's seatbelt on.

GRANDMA

How about I ride along with you?

Elise nods and looks out of the window as the car pulls off down the street and onto the freeway. Some miles later she suddenly sits up.

ELISE

Hey Daddy, you missed the turnoff for Disneyland. We just passed the sign.

DADDY

We're not going to Disneyland, Baby. At least not right now.

Elise sits back and starts clapping.

ELISE

Oh, we're going to the zoo first! Now, maybe we'll meet my friends there.

Daddy, looks at Grandma who looks back at him. Soon we hear the sound of AIRPLANE ENGINES all around. Elise looks out the window again. The car comes to a stop.

ELISE (CONT'D)

Daddy, I told you, you took the wrong exit! We're at the airport!

Daddy pulls the car into a parking space and puts the car in park then turns around to face Elise.

DADDY

I know where we are, Baby.

Elise bounces up and down in her seat. She looks out of the window anxiously. Elise leans forward.

ELISE

But, Daddy now we won't have enough time to go to Disneyland and the zoo.

Elise looks at Grandma.

ELISE (CONT'D)

Oh, I know! Grandma are you going on a trip or something? You always go on trips and stuff.

Elise takes her seatbelt off, leans forward and gives Grandma a kiss on the cheek. Elise turns and looks at Maria.

ELISE (CONT'D)

You know she always goes on trips and stuff.

Daddy takes his seatbelt off and walks around to the back of the car. He opens the trunk and takes out a suitcase.

DADDY

Hey, Maria, you wanna give me a hand.

Maria jumps out of the car and runs to where Daddy is standing. Elise continues to talk to Grandma.

ELISE

Where you going this time, Grandma? Hawaii or Oklahoma or Kansas or...

GRANDMA

How do you know so much? You're too smart for me!

Elise leans back proudly.

ELISE

I know a lot, Grandma. Like today my class is going to the zoo so I read some books about zoo animals and stuff.

GRANDMA

You're just like your mother was at your age.

Elise frowns.

ELISE

Grandma, Mommy's going to be worried if I'm not back at school at two o'clock when she comes to get me.

GRANDMA

It's ok, Sweetheart. We'll let her know.

ELISE

But, you're going away now. You sure Daddy is gonna remember to tell her?

GRANDMA

I promise she'll know.

Elise sits back. Maria gets into the drivers seat.

ELISE

You're in Daddy's seat silly!

Maria looks back at Elise and smiles.

DADDY

Hey Baby, why don't you hop out and join me real quick.

EXT. AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Elise jumps out of the car.

ELISE

Sure, I'll help you with Grandma's suitcase.



Elise runs to the back of the car.

DADDY  
You know where Daddy lives?

ELISE  
In Washington, D.C.

DADDY  
Right as usual!

Elise tries to lift the suitcase but can't.

ELISE  
Hey Daddy. You think we're still going to have time to get to the zoo today?

DADDY  
How'd you like to see Washington, DC?

ELISE  
Daddy, I was born there. I already saw it!

Daddy wheels the suitcase onto the sidewalk and keeps walking. Elise walks beside him. Behind them a CAR DOOR SLAMS. Elise turns in time to see the sedan pull off. She points at the car.

ELISE (CONT'D)  
Maria took Grandma! Now she's gonna miss her airplane!

DADDY  
Grandma will be fine, Baby. She'll be just fine. Are you ok?

Elise doesn't take her eyes off of the retreating car. Tears begin to well up in her eyes.

ELISE  
Grandma's not going on a trip is she?

Daddy shakes his head. She looks down at her feet.

ELISE (CONT'D)  
Am I going on a trip, Daddy?

Daddy nods.

ELISE (CONT'D)  
To Washington, D.C., with you?

Daddy nods.

ELISE (CONT'D)  
But, Mommy will be looking for me.  
And you said you would take me...

DADDY  
I know. But, your Momma is going to  
be ok. I promise.

Tears spring to her eyes.

ELISE  
I know you two don't talk without  
fussing and stuff. But...

Elise looks up at Daddy.

DADDY  
I promise, no more fussing. That's  
why Daddy lives in Washington, DC  
and you all live here.

Tears are freely streaming down Elise's cheeks. Daddy tilts  
her chin up at him.

DADDY (CONT'D)  
I know the divorce was very hard on  
you. I'm so sorry. I don't want to  
hurt you any more than it already  
has.

Elise sniffs loudly.

ELISE  
And I don't want to hurt your  
feelings but I still love Mommy.

Elise wipes tears away.

DADDY  
I'll never be hurt by that. You're  
supposed to love your Mommy, Baby.

Elise looks at Daddy.

ELISE  
But you don't?

Daddy kneels down in front of Elise.

DADDY

We used to love each other very much. But now it's better for all of us that we are apart. The judge at the court told us that you should live with me now. It was just hard for Mommy to let go because she loves you so much. So, Grandma and Maria...helped me...

Elise sobs. Elise gasps trying to catch her breath.

ELISE

Won't Mommy be sad? I'll really miss...

Elise looks up at Daddy and sees the sad look on his face.

ELISE (CONT'D)

The zoo.

She hangs her head. Daddy hugs her.

INT. AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

They make their way to the boarding line and follow it to the entrance of the plane.

INT. AIRPLANE - CONTINUOUS

Elise and Daddy are ushered onto the plane where a kindly FLIGHT ATTENDANT checks their seat numbers. She directs them to their seats and offers Elise a pillow and blanket when she notices Elise crying.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Hey, I'll bet this is your first flight.

Daddy looks down at Elise while speaking to the Flight Attendant.

DADDY

Well, she flew a lot when she was much younger but, she's probably forgotten. Huh, Elise?

Elise dries her eyes with her sleeve. Between sobs she answers.

ELISE  
No, I remember.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
Good, then you probably remember  
that we give our favorite  
passengers coloring books and  
crayons!

She reaches into the pocket of the seat she pulls out a coloring book and crayons and hands them to Elise. Elise takes them from her.

DADDY  
What do you say, Elise?

Tears keep streaming while Elise wipes her eyes.

ELISE  
Thank you.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
You are so very welcome and if you  
need anything else just push that  
button.

Flight attendant points to the button right above Elise's head.

ELISE  
Thank you.

ELISE (CONT'D)  
Daddy, do you pinky promise you'll  
tell Mommy why I wasn't there when  
she came to pick me up? I don't  
want her to be sad.

DADDY  
I pinky promise.

They lock pinkies.

ELISE  
Daddy, do they have a zoo in D.C.?

DADDY  
They sure do, Baby.

FADE OUT

