

Beene
by
Jamie Nicholas

Based on Dave Eggers's short story "You Know How To Spell Elijah"

flyawayfaye22@yahoo.com
Los Angeles, CA
WGA #1587415

INT. CAB - DAY

LEONARD, 37 with a spring in his step and a child-like curiosity toward his surroundings, sits in the backseat of a dingy cab drumming his fingers on his briefcase.

The windows, like the driver, need a good scrub, and the worn rosary hanging over the rearview mirror looks like it'll fall apart at any moment.

LEONARD
What a beautiful day.

The driver, RUFUS, a 51 year old chain smoker who has seen better days, continues watching the road and GRUNTS.

Leonard sticks his head out the window, stares up at the building he passes, then reads the driver's ID.]

LEONARD (CONT'D)
So, Rufus, how long have you been
in the transportation business?

RUFUS
Too long.

LEONARD
Do you like it?

RUFUS
Depends.

LEONARD
On what?

RUFUS
Big tips.

Leonard laughs. Rufus says nothing as he pulls over to the unloading zone at the airport. Both men exit.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

Rufus tosses the luggage out of the trunk. Leonard grabs his bags.

LEONARD
Thanks for the ride and good luck
with the big tips.

He smiles and hands Rufus the fare.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Keep the change.

Leonard leaves and Rufus GRUNTS.

RUFUS
Chump.

INT. AIRPORT, BAGGAGE CHECK - DAY

Though full of light, the atmosphere is tense with sounds of WHINING CHILDREN, PARENTS telling them to QUIET DOWN, and aggravated TRAVELERS standing in long lines.

Leonard looks around the airport as he waits in one of those lines.

A young GIRL cries as her MOM wipes chocolate from the little girl's face.

She and Leonard make eye contact, and he makes a silly face. The girl stops for a moment... then starts wailing even louder.

Cringing, Leonard looks in another direction.

In a gruff voice, GLADYS, a middle-aged baggage checker with no eyelashes or patience, calls for the next customer.

GLADYS
Next in line step down.

Leonard bustles over, his teeth gleaming in the light.

LEONARD
Hi there--

He leans toward her name-tag.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Gladys.

GLADYS
Name please.

LEONARD
Leonard Beene.

GLADYS
(monotone)
As in coffee?

Leonard's smile drops instantly.

LEONARD
As in B-E-E-N-E.

GLADYS
I need to see your ticket.

Leonard digs through his pockets.

LEONARD
It's around here somewhere.

GLADYS peers at him through her purple framed glasses.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
I must've packed it in my
briefcase. I'm really sorry.

He puts his briefcase on the counter and begins undoing the lock.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
I could do the combination in my
sleep.

GLADYS taps her purple pumps as Leonard fumbles the lock.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
I'm usually overly prepared...
practically a Boy Scout.

She raises one penciled eyebrow.

Leonard gets the case open and pulls out the ticket. He
shuts the case and spins the locks.

GLADYS
I need to see an ID as well.

Leonard looks at her, then begins reopening the lock.

INT. AIRPORT, COFFEE STAND - DAY

A pimply TRAINEE wearing an apron flashes a plastic smile as
he speaks.

TRAINEE
Can I help you, sir?

Leonard's smile begins to dim and he sighs.

LEONARD
Hi there... yes... I'd like a large
latte... and a blueberry muffin.

The "TRAINEE" as his tag states, searches for the right buttons.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
I'm helpless without coffee.

TRAINEE
The total comes to \$5.84.

Looking through his wallet he pulls out a five. Finding no other bills, he tries his pockets. The MAN behind Leonard lets out an obvious sigh.

LEONARD
Sorry, I don't seem to have enough cash, do you take credit?

The trainee points to a sign that reads "Cash only." The line grows behind him.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Let me see if I've got a dollar in my briefca--

MAN
(interrupts)
Some of us have planes to catch.

LEONARD
All right, uh, just cancel the muffin. Sorry.

He pays then walks to the other side of the counter, avoiding the glares from other customers in line.

INT. AIRPORT, GATE 1B - DAY

Leonard sits and lets out a deep breath. The coffee is no longer scorching and he managed to buy a candy bar for breakfast.

People continuously enter and sit in the crowded gate. Most read books and newspapers, or talk amongst themselves.

A MAN in a dark gray suit with plastic hair and an unnaturally even tan sits next to Leonard and begins reading the business section.

LEONARD
Stock broker?

MAN
Excuse me?

LEONARD
Your suit. The paper. You're a
stock broker, right?

MAN
No, I sell insurance.

Since Leonard has the man's attention, he takes advantage of
the social opportunity.

LEONARD
Sometimes I like to pretend I
invested in a stock and follow it
for a week to see what might've
happened to my money.

The man stares at Leonard then turns back to his paper.

MAN
Interesting.

Leonard holds out his hand.

LEONARD
Leonard Beene.

The man gestures to Leonard's coffee cup.

STEVE
Like the coffee bean.

Leonard's usually cheerful face turns to stone and he drops
his hand.

LEONARD
No. It's B-E-E-N-E.

Just as rapidly, Leonard's face becomes sunny again and he
holds out his hand. The man hesitates then shakes it.

STEVE
Steve.

LEONARD
Do you come with a last name,
Steve?

Steve fakes a laugh.

STEVE
It takes a couple drinks and long
legs in a red dress to get that out
of me.

Leonard's loud guffaw turns a few heads and turns Steve's face a bit red.

LEONARD
Well red isn't exactly my color.

STEVE
Excuse me.

Steve folds his paper and gets out of the chair.

STEVE (CONT'D)
Bathroom break.

LEONARD
Perhaps I can find a dress while you're gone.

Steve walks away with his paper toward the men's bathroom. Leonard begins reading a copy of "Boating Week."

He looks at a FAMILY behind him. The gruff TOM, 55, with more hair on his face than his head, sips coffee while DIANE, 51 and aware of it, reads a grocery store romance novel.

DIANE
Stop slurping.

TOM
Stop criticizing.

DIANE
Stop slurping and I will.

Leonard quietly laughs then turns to see Steve sitting across the gate behind a pillar. His shoulders falling, Leonard goes back to his magazine.

The family's trendy teenage daughter, ALLY, works on a crossword puzzle in "Cosmopolitan." She turns to her mom.

ALLY
Hey Mom, how do you spell Elijah?

Mom puts her dime store romance down, staring at the ceiling for the answer.

DIANE
Hm... I believe it's E-L-I-S-H-A.

Leonard's eyes look up from his magazine.

The father turns to both of them.

TOM
Once again, Diane, you are
completely wrong.

Leonard exhales and goes back to his magazine.

TOM (CONT'D)
It's A-L-I-G-A, Ally.

Leonard drops his head.

DIANE
No Tom, this time I know what I'm
talking about... unlike some
people.

Ally shrugs and goes back to staring at her crossword puzzle.
She moves the pen down the slot for the name while mouthing
the letters.

Leonard closes his magazine, sits up straight and clears his
throat while tipping his ear closer to the conversation.

TOM
Just go back to that deep piece of
literature you got there, Diane,
and leave the big words to the
grown-ups.

LEONARD
(to himself)
Right.

DIANE
Says the man who can't get enough
reality TV.

TOM
Those are REAL people with REAL
problems, Diane!

The announcer speaks on the intercom.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Flight 1218 is now boarding
handicapped guests.

DIANE
That's you, Tom.

Tom slurps LOUDER.

TOM
(to Ally)
It's A-L-I-G-A, sweetheart.

DIANE
E-L-I-S-H-A.

Ally holds up her hands in a halting motion.

ALLY
All right, I got it. Geez.

Leonard watches Ally begin to move her pen toward the first box. He moves his leg quickly up and down.

TOM
Wait, what are you writing?

As Ally's hand stops moving, so does Leonard's leg.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
First class is now boarding.

People begin getting their things together, some moving to the boarding line, others about to spring up when their section is called.

ALLY
I'm going with Mom's cuz it fits.

DIANE
(to Ally but looking at Tom)
Wise choice, sweetheart.

TOM
We need to get ready to board. Put that trashy magazine away.

Ally shoots her dad a mean glance then puts the cap back on her pen.

Leonard turns to speak to them, but keeps hesitating.

Ally closes the magazine and slips it into her large, blue tote. Diane tucks the book in her purse, and Tom stretches as he stands.

Leonard rolls up "Boating Week" in his hands.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Rows one through ten may begin boarding.

TOM

That's us.

They all get up and move into line.

Leonard gets in line behind them then clears his throat.

LEONARD

E-L-I-J-A-H. Elijah.

He smiles. The three of them, as well as a few others in the nearby, look at Leonard quizzically.

TOM

Excuse me?

LEONARD

The name. Elijah. It's E-L-I-J-A-H.
She wanted to know how to spell it
and that's how.

TOM

Stop listening in on other people's
conversations, buddy.

LEONARD

Well, I couldn't exactly help
overhearing-

TOM

Next time help it.

People stare at Leonard as he looks around for help. Tom ushers his family closer to the gate.

Leonard stands alone as they begin walking away. Everyone else goes about their business.

Suddenly he snaps and marches up to Tom.

LEONARD

Now just hold on. I'm sorry if you
thought I was snooping, but
spelling is an important part of
life, and ignorant people like
yourself need to know its power.

A crowd begins to gather as Leonard continues.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Without correct spelling, silent
letters wouldn't exist. The
English language would be limited
to basic and bland words like...

(MORE)

LEONARD (CONT'D)
basic and bland. Meanings would be
confused. Who knows what could
happen to government policies and
laws--

TOM
All right, buddy--

LEONARD
'There' E-R-E

He points to an area off to the side.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Would be 'their" E-I-R.

He gestures toward a group of on-lookers who quickly turn
away.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Are you living in the present or in
the box wrapped-- with a W-- in
shiny paper that someone got you
for your birthday?

TOM
I... uh... what?

LEONARD
K's would be where C-H's belong, no
one would know their own name...

Diane and Ally watch silent and wide-eyed. Tom begins to say
something but Leonard cuts him off. By now, the majority of
the people in the gate are watching the confrontation.

Leonard gestures largely while he rants.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
And I was just trying to be
helpful. Apparently you don't care
about your daughter's education.
You don't care about ever knowing
how to spell 'Elijah.' With a name
like 'Tom' I'm not surprised.

TOM
Hang on--

LEONARD
Well I won't have it. For the sake
of all the Elijahs and Bryans and
Seans out there, it's E-L-I-J-A-H.

The crowd that gathered has now stepped back a few feet, averting their eyes from the breathless Leonard and dumbstruck Tom.

Tom steps defensively in front of his family. Before he can say anything, the Announcer is back on the intercom.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Rows eleven through twenty one are
now boarding.

As if nothing had happened, Leonard gathers his things and shuffles to the gate. With boarding pass in hand, he ignores the strange look MARY, a veteran airline employee, gives him as she collects his pass.

LEONARD
And how's your day so far--

He looks at her badge.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Mary?

Mary reads his pass, looks over on another sheet, then back to his pass.

MARY
Interesting. One moment please.

Mary gets on her computer, typing furiously, while the line grows ever longer and more impatient behind Leonard.

Leonard looks "cool" as Mary gets on the phone, keeping her conversation out of Leonard's ear shot.

She comes back and hands Leonard his boarding pass.

MARY (CONT'D)
I'm afraid I can't let you board,
sir.

Another AIRLINE OFFICIAL begins taking everyone else's tickets and the line moves along. Tom, Diane, and Ally watch as Leonard is taken off to the side.

LEONARD
What? Why?

MARY
You're on the "no fly" list.

Two TSA AGENTS move through the crowd.

LEONARD
Nobody stopped me earlier.

MARY
The list gets updated regularly.
You may have just been added.

The agents are now on both sides of Leonard.

MARY (CONT'D)
Airport Security has a few
questions for you.

LEONARD
This is some kind of mistake. I
haven't flown in years.

MARY
You are Leonard Beene, right?

LEONARD
Yes.

MARY
Let me double check the list.

Mary finds his name on the list.

MARY (CONT'D)
Here you are: Leonard Beane. B-E-A-
N-E.

Leonard's face turns to stone once more.

THE END