

= Flight ( Grey 's Anatomy ) =

" Flight " is the twenty @-@ fourth and final episode of the eighth season of the American television medical drama Grey 's Anatomy , and the show 's 172nd episode overall . It was written by series creator Shonda Rhimes , and directed by Rob Corn . The episode was originally broadcast on the American Broadcasting Company ( ABC ) in the United States on May 17 , 2012 . In the episode , six doctors from Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital who are victims of an aviation accident fight to stay alive , but Dr. Lexie Grey ( Chyler Leigh ) ultimately dies . Other storylines occur in Seattle where Dr. Richard Webber ( James Pickens , Jr . ) plans his annual dinner for the departing residents , Dr. Owen Hunt ( Kevin McKidd ) fires Dr. Teddy Altman ( Kim Raver ) , and Dr. Miranda Bailey ( Chandra Wilson ) gets engaged .

The episode marked Leigh 's and Raver 's final appearance to the series . Exterior filming of the accident took place at Big Bear Lake , California . Jason George reprised his role as a guest star , whereas James LeGros made his first appearance . The episode opened to mixed reviews from television critics , with some criticizing the death of Lexie , but praising Leigh 's performance , in addition to Ellen Pompeo ( Dr. Meredith Grey ) ' s and Eric Dane ( Dr. Mark Sloan ) ' s . " Flight " earned Rhimes an NAACP Image Award nomination and it was also nominated under several categories of Entertainment Weekly 's finale awards . Upon its initial airing , the episode was viewed by 11 @.@ 44 million Americans , garnered a 4 @.@ 1 / 11 Nielsen rating / share in the 18 ? 49 demographic , ranking fourth for the night in terms of viewership , and registering as Thursday 's highest @-@ rated drama .

= = Plot = =

After their plane crashes in the woods , Dr. Meredith Grey ( Ellen Pompeo ) , Dr. Lexie Grey ( Chyler Leigh ) , Dr. Cristina Yang ( Sandra Oh ) , Dr. Arizona Robbins ( Jessica Capshaw ) , Dr. Derek Shepherd ( Patrick Dempsey ) , and Dr. Mark Sloan ( Eric Dane ) desperately fight to stay alive . Meredith is relatively unscathed , while the rest have serious injuries : the pilot , Jerry ( James LeGros ) , has a major spine injury , and Yang dislocates her arm . Robbins ' femur is broken and sticking through the skin , Sloan has serious internal injuries ; though initially adrenaline keeps him on his feet . Shepherd is sucked out the side of the plane and awakens alone in the wood ; his mangled hand having been pushed through the door of the plane . However , none are in as bad shape as Lexie , who is crushed under a piece of the plane . While Meredith searches for Shepherd , Yang and Sloan try to move the debris off Lexie . Eventually , the two realize that they cannot save her , so Sloan holds her hand while she dies , telling her that he loves her . As Sloan tells her of the life the two were meant to have together , Lexie dies with a smile on her face just as Meredith and Yang are approaching .

Lexie 's death devastates Meredith , who is still desperately trying to find her husband . Eventually , she and Shepherd reunite and they fix his hand as best as they can . Meanwhile , back at Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital , no one is aware of what has happened to the other doctors . Dr. Richard Webber ( James Pickens , Jr . ) prepares the annual dinner for the departing residents , which Dr. Alex Karev ( Justin Chambers ) , Dr. Jackson Avery ( Jesse Williams ) , and Dr. April Kepner ( Sarah Drew ) are dreading . Avery makes the choice to take a job offer at Tulane Medical Center , and he and Kepner share a moment . Dr. Ben Warren ( Jason George ) and Dr. Miranda Bailey ( Chandra Wilson ) decide to get married , even though Warren is going to start his surgical internship in Los Angeles . After realizing Dr. Teddy Altman ( Kim Raver ) was offered a chief position at United States Army Medical Command ( MEDCOM ) and is refusing to leave Seattle out of loyalty , Dr. Owen Hunt ( Kevin McKidd ) , the chief of surgery , fires her to free her from the hospital where her husband died . As the episode ends , Hunt picks up his messages to discover the surgical team never made it to Boise . The residents , finally excited to celebrate at Webber 's dinner , are left waiting for their stranded friends . The remaining crash survivors are left struggling to stay awake as their last match goes out . In the closing monologue , Meredith repeats the opening to the speech that Webber gave in the pilot episode of the series .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by Shonda Rhimes , and directed by Rob Corn . Featured music included The Paper Kites ' " Featherstone " and Feist 's " Graveyard " . Filming took place in Big Bear Lake , California , a location previously used in the seventh season for Yang and Shepherd 's fishing trip . Commenting on the filming conditions , Leigh said : " It would rain and be sunny and hot . I never died before [ on camera ] . That sounds funny saying that . I think everyone has an emotional wellspring and that happened to be a moment where I was sprung . Everybody was very accommodating ? the crew , cast . And I opted to stay underneath [ the wreckage ] for the most part over two days rather than trying to get in and out . "

In regard to the episode , Rhimes commented before it originally aired that it was difficult to write , largely because of the death of a main character . She compared it to writing the season six finale , by explaining that the former was " more painful " to write . After the episode aired , Rhimes repeated in a tweet that it was hard for her to write the finale , adding : " I did not enjoy it . It made me sick and it made me sad . " Rhimes also explained the departure of Leigh , whose character died after the plane crash , by saying that the two came to an agreement on the decision to kill Lexie , after extensive discussion . Speaking of Raver 's departure whose character left Seattle Grace for MEDCOM , Rhimes elaborated that Raver was offered a contract renewal , but declined .

= = Reception = =

The episode received mixed reviews among television critics , and it outperformed the previous episode in terms of both viewership and ratings . " Flight " was originally broadcast on May 17 , 2012 in the United States on the American Broadcasting Company ( ABC ) . The episode was watched by a total of 11 @. @ 44 million Americans , a 16 @. @ 5 % ( 1 @. @ 62 million ) increase from the previous episode " Migration " , which garnered 9 @. @ 82 million viewers . In terms of viewership , " Flight " ranked fourth for the night , behind the season finales of Fox 's American Idol , and CBS 's Person of Interest and The Mentalist . In terms of Grey 's Anatomy 's other season finales , the episode was the show 's second least @-@ viewed finale , just behind the seventh season 's , which garnered 9 @. @ 89 million viewers . The episode did not rank in the top three for viewership , but its 4 @. @ 1 / 11 Nielsen rating ranked first in its 9 : 00 Eastern time @-@ slot and second for the night , registering the show as Thursday 's No. 1 drama , for both the rating and share percentages of the key 18 ? 49 demographic . Its rating lost to American Idol , but beat out CBS 's The Big Bang Theory , Person of Interest , and The Mentalist . In addition to its rating being in the top rankings for the night , it was an increase from the previous episode , which netted a 3 @. @ 5 / 10 rating / share in the 18 ? 49 demographic . The episode also showed an increase in ratings in comparison to the previous year 's finale , which attained a 3 @. @ 6 / 9 rating / share in the 18 ? 49 demographic .

Poptimal 's Tanya Lane wrote , " Wow ? just wow . Grey 's Anatomy has once again managed to shock with its season finale . " While she appreciated the " realism and authenticity that Grey 's is known for " , she found the episode was " almost too much " as it was " extremely gory and difficult to watch , initially because of the grisly wounds " but later because of the " heavy and emotional things that transpired " . She thought Pompeo gave one of her best performances when her character learned that her sister was dead . Digital Spy 's Ben Lee found Leigh 's and Dane 's performances " phenomenal " and added that he had probably never seen a better performance from Dane . He described the moment the two actors shared as " truly poignant " . To him , Lexie 's death felt like a finale , which was thus too early . As for what was happening in Seattle Grace , he thought it was " a bit pointless " and " uninteresting " except Altman 's departure , which he deemed " the most significant moment at the hospital " . Entertainment Weekly 's Tanner Stransky commented of Lexie 's death : " It was an intense death . I mean , how awful was it to watch one of Grey ? s longest @-@ running characters pass away so quickly -- and rather unceremoniously ? I get that Ms. Rhimes had to do what she had to do -- and every show needs to be shaken up once in a while -- but I don 't love that Lexie was the one to die . Could it have been someone less important

somehow ? I guess it would have been too obvious to do Kepner . And you probably just don 't kill off a hottie like Mark Sloan , right ? " Stransky also complained about Robbins ' screams at the beginning of the episode , but enjoyed Bailey 's story .

In an Entertainment Weekly poll that judged all the television season finales of the year , Lexie 's death was voted the " Top Tissue Moment " , while Robbins ' injured leg and Shepherd 's mangled hand were voted the " Most Disturbing Image " . The ending of the episode was also considered as the " Best Ending to an Otherwise So @-@ So Season " . Lexie 's death was also nominated under the " Best ( Presumed ) Death " category , while the plane crash 's aftermath was nominated as the " Best Non @-@ romantic Cliffhanger " , and the episode in entirety was nominated for the special award for " Biggest Regret That I Didn 't See It , I Just Heard or Read About It " . Entertainment Weekly later named the scene where Meredith is crying one of the best crying scenes of 2012 . In TVLine 's review of 2012 , Lexie 's death was runner @-@ up for " Biggest Tearjerker " . The episode is nominated at the NAACP Image Awards under the Outstanding Writing in a Dramatic Series category for Rhimes .