

BLOSSOMS MALIGNED

By

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FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

While viewing an entire closed classroom door from the interior of the class, slight shuffles and whimpering are accompanied by intermittent gunshots and anguished screams coming from outside the classroom. There is only natural light in the room as the lights are off.

EXT. OLD FARMHOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "9 YEARS EARLIER"

On the outskirts of a small town, sporadic houses are set back from a country road.

SARAH NICHOLSON, 8 years old with long brown, wild hair, springs out of her front screen door like a racehorse. There's no stopping her. She leaps off the porch, grabs the long stick perched up against it, and begins parrying blows from her imaginary attackers.

She dashes through her large yard with abandon, but then stops dead in her tracks: a moving truck sits in the driveway at the old farmhouse next door. The multitude of grasshoppers fill the silence as a couple of MOVERS hoist a bureau up the front porch steps and work their way inside the front door.

It's then that Sarah notices TOM MITCHELL, also about 8 years old, waving an airplane around as he sits on a porch swing. A barely audible woman's voice calls out from within the house -

WOMAN (O.S.)

Tommy! Help me get these dishes put away, please!

TOM

Coming!

Tom gets up, and continues flying his plane straight in through the front door.

After a few moments, Sarah scopes the area: the coast is clear. She drops the stick and searches the ground. She finds what she's looking for: the perfect stone. She weighs it thoughtfully in her hand, then launches it in the direction of Tom's house; it's an impressive effort. Not a bad arm at all. She takes up her stick and returns to the battle at hand.

EXT. GRADE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Through the schoolyard, Sarah runs after JACK, a boy in her third grade class, who has made the mistake of taking her baseball glove.

SARAH  
Give it back!

JACK  
Girls can't play baseball, Sarah.

SARAH  
Well, I do. Now give it back, Jack,  
or I'm gonna pound you.

Jack runs backwards as he teases Sarah by waving the glove just out of reach. Jack missteps just long enough for Sarah to retrieve her glove. Seeing as he technically didn't give it back to her, she proceeds to hammer Jack over the head with it.

Getting that out of her system, she jogs over to some boys playing baseball in a corner of the schoolyard. Tom is at bat. Sarah puts her glove on like battle armor.

SARAH  
Can I play?

PITCHER  
No girls allowed.

Jack walks back over to the group. He rubs his head while retrieving his own glove.

JACK  
(scornfully)  
Told you.

SARAH  
(to pitcher)  
Why not?

PITCHER  
Because girls stink at sports.

SARAH  
I don't stink.

The pitcher ignores Sarah and pitches to Tom. He hits a foul ball - which Sarah snatches instinctively. She throws the ball back to the pitcher.

SARAH

See.

The pitcher ignores her and gets ready for another pitch. She might not know the word quite yet, but she's pissed. She crosses her arms in annoyance.

Another pitch is delivered - a CRACK - and an infield grounder is in play. It passes beneath the glove of a nervous BOY manning shortstop. Tom drops the bat and starts off toward first base. Players yell out instructions to an equally nervous LEFT FIELDER.

Halfway down the base line Tom catches Sarah's eyes, filled with envy. He slows down and then turns off the field just before making it safely to first.

PITCHER

Hey! Tom! Where're you going?

Tom picks his glove up and starts walking toward Sarah.

TOM

I quit.

PITCHER (O.S.)

But you have to get on base.

Tom ignores the pitcher. He pulls out a baseball nestled in the web of his glove.

TOM

(to Sarah)

I'll play catch with you if you want.

Of course Sarah finds herself in complete shock, but quickly recovers. She beams like she just given the only key to the Hershey chocolate factory.

SARAH

Yeah. Thanks.

Tom returns the smile, tossing the ball over to Sarah. They both walk off to the side of the school to play catch.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

In a simple, country living room, sits an older television with a screen of about 25" playing a Tom and Jerry cartoon.

Sarah and Tom sit on a couch together holding hands. Sarah looks down at their hands: she grins ear to ear, while Tom is - well - terrified as he stares at the TV screen.

TOM

I thought you hated playing house.

She shrugs her shoulders, still a bit entranced, then replies -

SARAH

It's okay - sometimes.

After a few moments, Tom slips his hand from Sarah's and stands up.

TOM

I have to go.

Sarah quickly moves to salvage the situation -

SARAH

Don't you wanna to watch cartoons?

TOM

I think I heard my mom calling.

SARAH

(stands)

I didn't hear her. We don't have to play house anymore, I promise.

TOM

It's not that. I really think I heard my mom. I'll see you tomorrow.

Tom makes his escape from the living room while calling out to Sarah's mom -

TOM (O.S.)

Bye, Mrs. Nicholson!

MRS. NICHOLSON (O.S.)

Bye, Tommy! Say 'hi' to your mom for me!

TOM (O.S.)

I will!

The screen door squeals open then slams shut. An obviously disappointed Sarah plops back on the couch and stares absently at the television.

EXT. JEFFERSON REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

SUPER: "9 YEARS LATER"

A three story building sits surrounded on each side by a track, football field and parking lots. Only a few cars are in the lot; school won't be starting for a while yet.

INT. JEFFERSON REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A long hallway donned with classrooms on one side and multi-colored lockers, which have long lost their luster, lined up on the other side. The school is tired and in need of long awaited maintenance.

A girl standing at an open locker gathering her books. It's Sarah, now about 17. Her hair is still long and brown, but it has a regular relationship with a brush now: it's beautiful. Maturity has made it's way into her features.

A hand taps Sarah on her left shoulder, startling her. While she swings left, Tom swings over to her right, out of view. She swings back to find Tom smiling. She pushes him.

SARAH

You're hilarious.

TOM

I know.

While shouldering his backpack, Tom cranes a look in Sarah's locker, which is haphazardly packed with papers and books.

TOM

How do you find anything in there?

SARAH

You've asked me that question before. I told you - I have a system. So long as I know what it is, I don't care how it looks.

Sarah lifts the latch and slams the door shut. The metal against metal reverberates through the empty hallway. She slips the padlock through the hole and clicks it shut before turning back to Tom.

They walk down the empty hallway. They were always at school early: owning it while it's devoid of teenage angst and drama.

TOM

Going to my dad's over the break.

SARAH

You'll be back a couple days after Christmas though, right?

TOM

Should be. That's the plan - from what I've been told.

Tom gently takes hold of Sarah's elbow; she stops. He swings his backpack off of his shoulder and unzips it.

TOM

Anyway, I wanted to give this to you before I left.

Tom pulls out a slim box wrapped in metallic red wrapping paper enclosed with gold ribbon. With an anxious smile he hands the gift to her.

TOM

Merry Christmas, Sarah.

Guilt rushes to Sarah's face. She looks down at the gift and then up at Tom.

SARAH

I left your gift at home. I thought we were supposed to do this after school today.

TOM

Don't worry about it.  
(zips up his bag and throws it  
over his shoulder)  
Go ahead. Open it.

She pulls the ribbon carefully, but when too much time passes, and she doesn't get anywhere, in true Sarah style she pulls it hard until it snaps. She removes the crinkling wrapping paper to reveal a slender jewelry box with the jeweler's inscription on the top. She meets Tom's eyes with a pained, and somewhat suspicious look.

SARAH

What did you do?

TOM

What? You haven't even opened it yet. Maybe it's just a stick of gum in there.

She laughs, then lifts the top, revealing not a piece of gum, but a slender, gleaming gold necklace with links that look like waves. She picks it up and holds it across the palm of her hand. As she runs her fingers across the links she says -

SARAH

They look just like waves.

Her observation thrills him.

TOM

(rambling)

That's why I picked it - because I know how much you love going to the ocean. It's real gold, too, so you don't have to worry about it turning your neck green or anything.

He chuckles, but with more nerves than actual laughter.

SARAH

My gift for you isn't nearly this nice.

TOM

Will you stop worrying about my gift, please? Come on -  
(holds out his hand)  
- let's see how it looks.

He drops his backpack between his legs, takes the chain and box from her hand, and balances the box on top of his bag.

TOM

Turn around.

Sarah obeys. His hands reach over her head as he holds each end of the necklace. She moves her long hair off to the side. His hands brush against the back of her neck as he latches the chain. She was never nervous around Tom, but her expression shows she's suddenly too aware of her heartbeat.

TOM

So, let's see.

Sarah turns, sweeping her hair onto her back again. She feels the chain with her fingers and drops her arms.

SARAH

(looking down at the chain)  
How's it look?



TOM  
(softly)  
Beautiful.

But it's clear to Sarah that he's not referring to the necklace as looks up and notices him staring at her eyes. Embarrassed, she looks back down at the necklace.

SARAH  
Thank you so much, Tom. I really  
don't know what to say.

He picks up the jewelry box and the bag.

TOM  
Say you'll go to the movies with me  
tonight.

SARAH  
Of course.

She smiles, relieved: they always went to the movies together. No big deal, right?

TOM  
But as a date.

She raises her eyebrows and lets out a nervous laugh.

SARAH  
A date?

A bit insulted at her inflection, Tom folds his arms across his chest.

TOM  
Yeah, a date.

With no intention of insulting him, she thinks quickly on how to recover. She takes his hand in hers, like all those years before, just before he ran terrified out of her living room.

SARAH  
We've known each other since we  
were eight. Do you really think  
dating is necessary?

Before Tom has time to process any kind of response, and before he can take notice of Sarah's reddening face, she pulls him by the sleeve and leans in for a kiss.

Her actions obviously unexpected, Tom leans uneasily into the kiss at first. But their nervousness slips into a lambent, tender kiss. Neither take notice of other students now trickling into the hallway or of MRS. JOHNSON (40s), their homeroom teacher, as she stands in the doorway to their classroom. Conservatively dressed, it's not a surprise when she pipes up -

MRS. JOHNSON

Okay, you two. That's enough.

As ordered, they snap out of their dream state. Mrs. Johnson walks into the classroom, and they look at each other for a long moment before giddiness overtakes them.

Rash red, Tom takes Sarah by the hand. They walk into the class where Mrs. Johnson grades papers.

MRS. JOHNSON

Wondered when you two were finally going to make it official.

Tom and Sarah glance at each other with surprised looks: did teachers really have opinions on student relationships?

Two columns of five long tables each fill the room. Each table houses three chairs. Tom and Sarah toss their bags beneath one of the tables before Tom perches himself atop the table.

TOM

I'll call you from my dad's over break.

Sarah takes up a spot on the table across from Tom, a daily ritual, but Tom reaches over, takes her hand, and guides her to sit next to him.

SARAH

(smiling awkwardly)

Okay.

Sarah swings her legs back and forth under the table, unable to conceal what can only be coined as elation.

TOM

I wish I didn't have to go. It's always depressing spending Christmas with him, but he really freaked last year when I told him I wanted to spend Christmas with my mom.

SARAH

He's just lonely. I think he really needs you over the holidays.

TOM

I guess.

Sarah smiles as she looks down at their clasped hands, but this time it was Tom's idea, making it all the sweeter.

INT. JEFFERSON REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Throngs of students jockey for space at the lockers and rush to homeroom classes.

A few remain when the electronic BOOOOOP comes over the intercom indicating the start of teenage drudgery.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Chatter fills the air as students take their seats. Mrs. Johnson raises her voice over them -

MRS. JOHNSON

Okay, ladies and gentlemen, let's settle down.

Chairs SCRAPE on the linoleum floor, while bags and backpacks RUSTLE making their way by their owners' feet. Mrs. Johnson calls the roll with an air of boredom as die-hard conversationalists whisper to their friends. She checks off the names as she goes.

MRS. JOHNSON

ALLEN.

ALLEN (MALE)

Here.

MRS. JOHNSON

ARNOLD.

ARNOLD (FEMALE)

Yup.

MRS. JOHNSON

DAVIDSON.

DAVIDSON (FEMALE)

Here.

MRS. JOHNSON  
ERNEST.

ERNEST (MALE)  
The one and only.

MRS. JOHNSON  
(looking up from her sheet)  
A simple "here" will suffice, Nate.

NATE ERNEST  
(in the back of the room,  
smiling)  
Yes, ma'am.

MRS. JOHNSON  
HARRINGTON.

HARRINGTON (MALE)  
Here.

It's then that the first couple of gun shots RING OUT from somewhere far down the hall. The room snaps into taut silence as everyone looks in confusion at the open door, including Mrs. Johnson. After a few seconds, Nate breaks the peace.

NATE ERNEST  
(slowly)  
What the hell was that?

A couple more seconds pass when another round of shots BURST OUT, this time accompanied by piercing screams. This sends every students' face from confusion to wide-eyed panic. Mrs. Johnson darts from her desk.

MRS. JOHNSON  
Everyone, quickly, get under your desks!

All twenty-three students obey a command after a single utterance for the first time ever. Chairs grate and bang as a mad rush of bodies scramble for cover, paying no mind to the stalactites of gum peppered beneath the tables. More shooting and anguished cries are heard from down the hall.

MRS. JOHNSON  
(urgent whisper)  
Put your bags around you - hurry!

Mrs. Johnson strides over to the door. Carefully she peers around the corner when MALE STUDENT #1 smacks into her, sending up gasps from a few of the students.

MALE STUDENT #1  
 (panic-stricken)  
 It's Tim Bolan and Jeff Nash!  
 They're just shooting - at  
 everyone!

A continuous battery of shots ring out. Sarah looks to Tom in horror. Crouched on their knees, they clamber further under the desk.

SARAH  
 (hushed)  
 This can't be happening.

Tom puts his arm across Sarah's back.

TOM  
 Everything will be okay.

MRS. JOHNSON  
 (to Male Student #1)  
 Get under my desk.

The blasts amplify, louder now. Mrs. Johnson hits the light switch and slowly closes the door, not wanting to draw attention to it. This muffles the sounds, but there's no doubt the danger that's approaching. Then, with urgency, she walks over to her desk and crouches on the far side of it.

Tom arranges his and Sarah's bags between them and the door. Sarah looks at the large windows framing the pale gray winter sky.

SARAH  
 (urgent whisper)  
 What about the windows.

TOM  
 We're too far up. And they're a bitch to open. We're better off here. They're too close now. If they come in while we're wrestling with the windows, we'll just be larger targets.

This news is all Sarah can take. Her eyes begin to water as she tries to keep herself from crying. And she's not the only one. She looks around the room under the other desks to find the look of impending doom on her classmates' faces. A room that belonged no longer to a high school but to bedlam.

Whimpering ensues, while a boy's barely audible voice can be heard reciting the Lord's Prayer.

TOM  
Everything will be okay.

Tom places his upper body over Sarah's back to protect her.

TOM  
(more to himself)  
Everything will be okay.

His words ring sincere, but his runaway heartbeat on Sarah's back betrays his words. The gunshots and the outcries are practically on top of them. Tom pushes closer against Sarah and wraps his arm around her stomach. Though Sarah was never one to cry, there was no stopping her now.

TOM  
(whispers in Sarah's ear)  
I love you, Sarah.

Sarah musters a weak smile and she opens her mouth to say something back, but the air abandons her lungs. She closes her mouth and reaches her hand up to the side of Tom's face. She then takes his hand and squeezes it tightly. Tom lays his head on top of hers...then the door to the classroom CRASHES OPEN to COMPLETE DARKNESS.

Twenty seconds pass in a silent void...

SUPER: "Dedicated to the victims and their loved ones affected by school violence."

FADE OUT.