

Chrysanthemum

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(Printed with the demonstration version of Fade In)

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Everything is a shade of BLUE on this WINTER day. We see the back of a MAN, just turned 40, looking out a bare window. His hair is dirty blonde, thinning, some gray is spread throughout.

A smattering of pictures frame this scene. Many of a LITTLE BOY from birth to mid 30s.

A GREEN TINTED VASE sits on the window sill, holding a single CHRYSANTHEMUM. The petals are droopy and WILTING.

The WINDOW is dusty, smeared, COBWEBS in between the panes.

We can make out a CAR parked below, bits of RED PAINT peak through the snow piled on top. The TIRES are surrounded as well. The side facing us bares a LARGE DENT.

The GROUND IS UNTOUCHED.

Nothing but uninterrupted WHITE.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Ben?

MAN, now 25 with a full head of dirty blonde hair, turns to face the warm voice, belonging to...

BEN

(smiles)

Hey, Mom--

MOM

I didn't see you come in!

SUSANA (SUE for short) 45, hurries toward Ben for a hug. She wears mom jeans and a loose floral-print blouse, the sleeves flow along with her long brown hair as she moves.

SUE

How long have you been here?

BEN

I just got in.

Ben hunches down when she wraps her arms around him. He squeezes her tight, rests his head against the side of hers. Lingers for a moment.

SUE

(laughing)

Well, my God. This is ridiculous! I don't remember you being this tall.

Sue pulls away from the hug.

BEN  
(chuckles)  
You say that every--

SUE  
I knooooow, I know. You must be  
hungry! I think dinner is ready...

Sue turns and begins to walk out of the room. Ben follows behind, close, guiding her as they walk along a floral carpet runner printed with PINK CARNATIONS.

The walls are covered in FOREST GREEN, FLOWERY WALLPAPER.

Sue notices Ben's hand behind her.

SUE (cont'd)  
Stop that! I told you, I'm fine.

Ben hesitates before putting his hand back to his side, but is still alert.

SUE (O.S.)  
I made that... ohhh... that pasta you  
like-- what's that--

BEN  
The vodka sauce.

SUE  
(trailing off)  
That's the one. Vodka. Vodka, vodka--

As they walk downstairs the wallpaper gets more PEELED and DISTRESSED. Sue KEEPS REPEATING 'VODKA' under her breath. Flakes and strips of wallpaper collect on the stairs.

BEN  
I am pretty hungry, that was a long  
dri--

SUE  
I'm sure you must be *starving* after  
that drive. Lucky for youuuu, I made  
that pasta you like!

CUT TO:

#### DINNER TABLE

Warm toned light casts down from the chandelier above.

There is NO FOOD on the table.

None.

Except for a BOWL OF MOLDY, ROTTING FRUIT sitting at the center of the table runner.

FIVE SETS of bowls and silverware have been placed around the table. All EMPTY.

Ben looks down at the bowl with a tired expression.

Sue, 55, MORE WRINKLES on her face and patches of GRAY HAIR along her scalp, FRIZZY and UNKEPT, wears a KNITTED SWEATER and SWEATPANTS. She stares at her bowl for a moment.

Ben, now 35, looks up at his Mom.

A beat.

Sue snaps her attention towards Ben.

SUE

So, what are you doing now? Are you still at the grocery store down the road?

She grabs her spoon and goes toward the bowl, stopping as she realizes there's nothing inside.

BEN

(downcast)

I quit working there a long time ago, Mom, remember? When I graduated--

SUE

(chuckles)

Well that wasn't too long ago, I remember, you'd ride your bike there on the weekends and every time you came home you'd have brought back some pastry or, or---

BEN

That was ten years ago, Mom.

He hesitates, pondering what he'll say next. He goes with...

BEN (cont'd)

I've been over at the fire department for a while now.

SUE

Fire huh? You did always want to be a fireman when you were little, wearing your cute red hat--

Ben changes his mind.

BEN

No, no, FILM. I'm a filmmaker. I always wanted to work on films.

SUE

Yes, yes that's right, you always loved going to the movies. Oh, that's wonderful, Ben! What have you-- have you made anything so far?

Ben pauses, figuring out what to say next. Then...

BEN

I'm... not sure what you mean. I'm not a filmmaker, I'll never be one. Lately, it seems... I just don't have the time.

Sue pauses, her smile falling into a look of confusion and frustration.

Ben looks into his bowl, absent minded. He fiddles with his spoon. The room is silent except for the metallic clinking of the ceramic bowl.

SUE (O.S.)

(weak)

I'm sorry, Ben.

We pan from Ben to the living room.

Sue, 60, lays in a hospital bed. Her head is sunken into the pillow below it, hair dark gray, brushed and laying neat on her shoulders. She's tucked in under bland covers, wearing a yellow gown with BABY BLUE FORGET-ME-NOTS on the fabric.

Ben, 40, meets her side with a HAIR BRUSH in his hand. Delicate, he runs it through her hair as he says...

BEN

(shakes his head)

It's not your fault.

Sue's eyes wander in increments. Her mouth stays agape, jaw slack with white, dry saliva at the drooped corner of her lips.

The petals on Sue's gown are now eaten away with MOLD.

Her lips quiver as she says...

SUE  
(hanging on)  
You didn't deserve this.

BEN  
Neither did you. You didn't ask for  
any of this.

Ben sets the hairbrush down on a table beside the bed.

SUE (O.S.)  
You were just a boy. You were... you  
were *my* boy...

Sue's frail hands now hold onto a PHOTOGRAPH of herself,  
early 20s, holding a NEWBORN Ben close to her chest. There's  
NO ONE ELSE in the picture.

Sue's mouth trembles, she struggles to smile.

Ben looks at his Mom with wistful sorrow.

BEN  
It wasn't-- it *isn't* your fault, Mom.

SUE  
(shattered)  
And you had to watch me... Dying...  
every day.

Sue's arms begin to WITHER and ROT.

They drop down to her sides, the photograph held loose  
between her fingers as her skin grows thin and blue.

Tears stream down Ben's reddening face. His hands  
desperately grab onto hers.

He squeezes them.

They try to squeeze back.

BEN  
(desperate)  
Hey, hey, hey. It's going to be  
okay... okay? I'm not going anywhere,  
okay? I'm going to take care of you.  
I--I'll always take care of you--

SUE  
You never should've had to.

BEN  
But I did! I did, and--and we're here  
now and you're not... you CAN'T do  
this, PLEASE. Please, please,  
please...

Ben, incoherent, pleads and begs for her to stay.

There's no response.

The bed is GONE.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Cold.

We return to Ben, 40, standing in front of an OPEN WINDOW  
four stories up.

The WIND RAGES outside.

Ben looks on. Forlorn.

Silent, his shaky HANDS GRASP THE LEDGE.

A RUSH OF WIND WHIPS THE CURTAINS.

The CHRYSANTHEMUM is whisked away, joining the desolate  
storm.

