

BEFORE DUST RETURNS

by

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FADE IN:

Quote appears:

'Here's ivy! - take them, as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not pine
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,
And tell thy soul, their roots are left in mine.'

'Elizabeth Barrett Browning'

1 INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM. DAYTIME.

A distant side view of a woman sitting, waiting in a seating area. Isolated.

We see EVE (aged mid twenties) up close from the front, seated with a plant in a golden pot, carefully placed in her lap. She looks nervous but focused. She glances to her left as she hears somebody screaming in pain down the corridor. She looks a bit surprised but composes herself, though visibly worried.

She looks at her watch. She then looks reflectively at her plant, caringly brushing the leaves with her hand. She taps her foot impatiently.

2 INT. HOSPITAL STAIRCASE. DAYTIME.

We see an old lady in her 70's coming up the stairs, smiling.

3 INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM. DAYTIME.

A wider shot of the seats now reveals a girl aged 8 sitting next to Eve on her right, and the old woman takes a seat on Eve's left. The young girl turns her head and body towards Eve, focussing on the plant, looking at it with curiosity. Eve glances to her left where the old woman has started reading a book, and then catches a glimpse of the page that the old woman is reading.

GIRL

How long do these live?

EVE

Well...(hesitates) it depends on how well you treat them.

GIRL

I thought that plants just needed water and sunlight. Do you give them special vitamins or something like that?

Eve smiles politely, and looks at the plant attentively before and while responding.

EVE

Umm, no, but they need us to pay attention to their needs. And if you listen, (almost whispers) listen really carefully, you will know what it wants... and when.

GIRL

Why did you bring it here?

EVE

Because my car broke down on the way, and it doesn't like to be in there alone.

The girl thinks for a while.

GIRL

I don't think that it likes being in the hospital around sick people either. It seems sad.

EVE

It's OK to be sad, as long as you're with somebody who cares about you.

Eve checks her phone which vibrates just once, we see a close up of a missed call by Aaron.

GIRL

So, what happens if you forget to pay attention to it?

Eve swipes the notification away. Eve looks back up to the girl who has started caressing the plant.

EVE

Then... it will protest, and it will also stop paying attention to you.

The girl looks at Eve with some reflection, and then looks at the plant carefully, studying it.

Eve looks back at the girl, thinking profoundly as if deciding something.

OLD LADY

Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!

After uttering these words while looking directly ahead, the old lady looks back down at her book. Eve and the young girl both turn their heads towards the old lady in surprise at this sudden outburst.

The girl smiles and gets up from her chair, doing a little chicken dance, passing Eve and the old lady who look at her in surprise.

GIRL

Bawk bawk bawk bagawk! Meaningless! Meaningless!

The nurse comes into the waiting room.

NURSE

Miss Bloom? Hiya. Come on through. Sorry to keep you waiting.

Eve looks up towards the nurse.

4 INT. HOSPITAL TREATMENT ROOM. DAYTIME.

Eve is lying on the hospital bed. She opens her eyes dramatically as if waking from a nightmare. She hears somebody approaching, and she sees a skeleton coming into focus. She turns her head back and sees the ceiling. Then proceeds to raise her head to see the doctor.

DOCTOR

Ah! Wakey wakey! Wakey wakey! Oh, you ARE awake!

Eve tries to get up.

DOCTOR

Easy! Easy! Don't get up too quickly! How do you feel? Hmm?

EVE

Not great.

Eve gets up into a seated position while grunting.

DOCTOR

Take your time. Do you have someone coming to collect you?

EVE

Yeah.

The nurse comes over to the doctor, asking him something, and they exchange some comments while Eve collects herself. We don't hear what they say.

Eve drinks some water from a bottle. Then checks her phone, which says missed call from Aaron. She swipes the notification.

5 INT. HOSPITAL STAIRWAY. DAYTIME.

Eve walks down the stairs with a book in her hand. Halfway through, she stops and hesitates, looks back. Then takes a deep breath and carries on walking down all the way.

6 EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL. DAYTIME.

Eve is walking away from the hospital entrance/exit as she picks up her vibrating phone. Eve answers the call with a forced enthusiasm, still looking sad but trying to hide it. We hear an ambulance pass by. Eve is slightly distracted and worried as she answers the call, but tries to focus.

EVE

Hi mom. Just got out.

MOTHER (V.O.)

Just now?

EVE

Yeah, sorry, the signal is really rubbish in there.

MOTHER (V.O.)

That explains why I couldn't get through. What did they say, Eve? Is it anything serious?

Eve looks to the right, then to the left, and then back, looking lost. She carries on walking while talking. We follow Eve walking.

EVE

Umm..no, nothing serious as of yet. They said that they need to conduct more tests to rule anything else out...so let's see...

MOTHER (V.O.)

I see. What did today's tests say?

EVE

The tests don't say anything per se, mom. Doctors do. And what they say is not what they mean (chuckles).

MOTHER (V.O.)

What do you mean? You need to take your health more seriously, you know. Prioritise yourself for a change! Are you taking all your supplements?

EVE

I am, mom. Maybe it's something else I need... Anyway, how are YOU doing, mom? You sound a bit tired. Have you eaten yet?

MOTHER (V.O.)

Yes, just a little tired from yesterday, but I've just eaten, so will rest for a while now.

We hear Eve's phone vibrating.

EVE

Mom, my colleague is calling. It may be something serious. I'll call you back later.

Eve answers the call politely with warmth, still being distracted and worried. We hear an ambulance once again.

7 EXT. STREET. DAYTIME.

EVE

Hey, Rebecca thanks for covering for me. Any complications?

REBECCA (V.O.)

Hi Eve. Everything is fine here. How did it go? Is it anything serious?

EVE

Umm, no, the tests so far are inconclusive, and the doctors are scratching their heads. We will know after the next set of tests. I'm not worried. It will be fine. Did you manage to schedule a lunch break in?

REBECCA (V.O.)

Yes, I just finished eating. I'm surprised that the doctors are still unsure. You know, Nick's therapist's wife is a specialist. She wouldn't mind providing some secondary professional advice. Do you want me to ask her?

EVE

Emm, the last thing I need is more advice. I'll manage. Listen, you haven't spoken to Aaron recently, have you?

REBECCA (V.O.)

Yeah, he came to see you yesterday after you left the clinic. He said that he wanted to return your plant. But he didn't leave anything here.

EVE

Did you tell him anything?

REBECCA (V.O.)

What do you mean? About your appointment today? He seemed to already know. Wasn't he supposed to?

EVE

Don't worry. It's fine. I'll see you in the evening.

Eve takes a deep breath, and has a worried look on her face as she carries on walking. We hear the phone vibrating again.

8 EXT. CEMETERY. DAYTIME.

A close up of the phone shows Aaron calling. She holds the phone in hesitation, and thinks for a while, then clears her throat and answers with a stern look and a sarcastic tone. However, her face has an expression of anticipation, and the sadness is still visible. We hear church bells in the distance.

EVE

What's with all the calls? Did you get an allergic reaction or something?

She reaches another crossroads and continues straight ahead. This time without any hesitation.

AARON (V.O.)

God forbid. If it takes my favourite immunologist three calls to answer, what hope is there for my survival (chuckles)? How are you doing?

EVE (in a sarcastic tone)

I'm doing just... (a sad chuckle) splendidly, thank you!

AARON (V.O.)

That's good to hear...umm, peace lily here is not in a good state. I wanted to drop it off to be reunited. Seven weeks of separation is way too long. How's the other one doing?

EVE

It got tired. It got tired of waiting.

AARON (V.O.)

So did this one, but it's incredible how patient they both have been! We should have kept them together all along.

An awkward silence.

EVE

Ummm... (clears her throat) why are you calling?

AARON (V.O.)

To see how you're doing. I'm back in the country, and have cut down on work. My priorities are different now, after a lot of soul searching.

EVE

Your priorities (laughs)?! Hmmm, so, you finally realised that working 12 hours a day is not good for your sanity?

AARON (V.O.)

I realised the value of time. How are you doing?

EVE

There's no point returning the other peace lily now that mine is gone. If only you had better timing.

GIRL (V.O. in Aaron's call)

Thank you so much, sir!

AARON (V.O.)

...You know, when they were first separated, this one preferred a darker spot for a while. And when it started accepting the light again I felt that hope had returned to it. Hope can return anytime, you know...

EVE

Yeah, yeah.. it sure can... a few times at least. What good did hope do the poor thing in this case? Hmmm? (A brief pause) Listen, I should ummm (deep sigh) I should ...get going. I'm already sort of lost out here.

AARON (V.O.)

Look, you need time. I get it... Your grievances are completely justified. I now realise how neglectful I have been.

Eve sighs but remains silent as she continues to walk.

AARON (V.O.)

I wanted to be there with you for the appointment today, but didn't know where in the hospital you were. I wanted to ask you in person, but I see that you aren't ready for that yet. How did it go?

EVE

I don't feel the need to share anything with you anymore. That need.....that need... is gone. Today, I just had to part with the little shred of hope that somehow miraculously survived.

Aaron takes a deep breath. A pause ensues.

EVE

Are you listening?

AARON (V.O.)

Yes, for a change, I am. And I don't blame you for losing hope in us. (Pause. He sighs). There is something important that I need to share with you. Especially seeing as I may not get another chance. It's about a dream that I had the night before last.

EVE

A dream?

AARON (V.O.)

Yes. A mayfly whispered something to my peace lily which started to wither. I rushed over to your place where you were sleeping

under a giant clock. Your peace lily was covered in mayflies but it kept flourishing. I looked back at you, and all your hair was now grey. You looked...umm...so serene. Peaceful like I've never seen you.

Eve stops walking, reflecting on what Aaron has just said, then takes a seat on a bench.

AARON (V.O.)

Can you hear me? ...Eve? Hello!

She takes out her headphones and starts to cry, and then has a look of deep reflection as she puzzles over something. We hear birds sing, and the wind blow.

We see her seated from the back of the bench. She is in a cemetery with tombstones on either side of her, and a crossroads. She continues to puzzle over something. She looks at her watch. A close up reveals that it is 12:07.

We flash back to when the old lady was sitting next to her reading the Bible. We now see the page that she was reading. Ecclesiastes 12:7: '\..and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.' We see Eve puzzling over something. We then flash back to when she was sitting in the waiting room looking at the plant. Eve seems to make a realisation.

SLOW MOTION START: Eve gets up and starts to run. SLOW MOTION END.

9 INT. HOSPITAL STAIRCASE. DAYTIME.

We see a man walking down the same staircase crying. He stops half-way, hesitates, looks back, checks his phone, and then proceeds to walk all the way down.

10 EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE. DAYTIME.

SLOW MOTION START: Eve reaches the hospital entrance. She suddenly stops, surprised. SLOW MOTION END. She sees the girl walking towards her with two plants in identical golden pots, holding them close to each other, touching, while she looks at them adoringly. The girl looks up and notices Eve and freezes with a worried look on her face. Eve looks around both sides with searching eyes.

11 INT. CHURCH. DAYTIME.

Eve walks in the church aisle with the bible in her right hand, and takes a seat on the church bench, putting the bible in front of her on the stand. She opens the bible at the beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes. She looks towards the young girl who is playing the piano at the back of the church, smiling and cheerful. We end the shot over the right shoulder of the girl, seeing the two plants sitting at the top of the piano, touching each other. Eve can be seen in the background.

12 INT. CHURCH. DAYTIME.

We fade to another time. The same piano is being played. We see a foot pedalling. We reveal that there is now just one plant, and Eve is playing the piano with a melancholic look on her face, crying. We see the old lady sitting a bit further back, looking sad. She strikes a singing bowl three times.

FADE OUT.