

As Long as the Peony Season Lasts

BY

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FADE IN:

EXT : DAY - A FIELD OF PEONIES, FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

It is a hot July day, the end of the flowering season.

MONTAGE:

- A) Close Up. Nick, 30, deadheads a peony bush with a knife. Sound of bees.
- B) Clare, 25, looks out of a window at Nick. Silence.
- C) Long shot of the field of peony bushes in which Nick works. A house and customer reception is at one end of the field, and a sign says "Paeonia Peony Nursery". Silence.
- D) Long shot. Clare leaves the house and walks through the field towards Nick. Silence.
- E) The long shot slowly closes in on Clare. As it does so, the sound of the bees builds up. The camera eventually focuses on Clare's hands. She carries a drink.
- F) Clare reaches Nick. He does not notice her. Sound of bees.

CLARE

Nick?

She startles Nick. Nick and Clare carefully avoid looking at each other during this dialogue. They both look very tired and depressed.

NICK

Oh! Sorry. I was just ...

CLARE

Thinking ?

NICK

Yeah.

CLARE

Drink?

NICK

Thanks.

Clare walks back to the house. Nick turns back to the peony bush. She turns, looks back at him and pauses. He works and does not notice. She continues walking to the house. He looks over his shoulder at her but she continues walking away. He continues working.

INT : DAY - KITCHEN, A FEW MINUTES LATER

Clare is back at the window. She looks out at Nick.

CLARE (V.O.)

There was nothing to say to each other in those first few days. What could we say? There was nothing to say.

(pause)

I wasn't to blame. Nick wasn't to blame. But we needed to blame somebody. Even now, years later, things are unsaid. What can we say?

(pause)

When it happened, it was at the end of the peony season. I couldn't be bothered, but Nick worked harder than ever that July.

INT : EVENING - KITCHEN, LATER THE SAME DAY

Nick and Clare are sit at the table. Nick eats methodically. Clare picks at her food. They do not look at each other.

NICK

You need to eat.

CLARE

Not hungry.

NICK

I should finish cutting tomorrow.

CLARE

Then take a break?

NICK

Can't - not until all the dead material is removed from around the plants. You know that.

(pause)

Need a shower.

Clare watches as Nick leaves the kitchen.

CLARE (V.O.)
 Nick would work, eat, shower and
 sleep. We didn't talk. What was
 there to say? I envied him his
 sleep.

INT : BEDROOM - NIGHT, FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

Clare and Nick are in bed. Nick lies on his side with his
 back to Clare. He is asleep. Clare lies on her back. She is
 awake.

CLARE (V.O.)
 I used to lie there listening to
 him sleep and remembering how we
 used to talk ...

INT : BEDROOM - NIGHT(FLASHBACK)FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

In contrast to their body language in previous scenes, Nick
 and Clare look well, maintain eye contact and show
 affection and emotional closeness. Nick lies on his back;
 Clare snuggles up to him, her head on his shoulder.

NICK
 So what do you think then?

CLARE
 Of what?

NICK
 Clem's plan for Sam's stag night?

CLARE
 I think that you and Clem'll enjoy
 it more than Sam.

NICK
 Sure we will ... and you and Sal
 have to organise something for the
 "bride to be". Nothing naughty
 though!

CLARE
 Oh no? Nothing naughty huh?

NICK
 No!

He turns towards her.

CLARE
 But what if we want ... ?

NICK

No!

She giggles and tickles him under the sheet.

CLARE

But you boys are going to ...

NICK

Be naughty - yes!

CLARE

Be naughty.

NICK

Yes! please!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT : BEDROOM - NIGHT, PRESENT DAY

Nick sleeps, faced away from Clare's side of the bed. Clare is looking out of the window. She turns to look at the bed where Nick is asleep. She is now 40 years old.

CLARE (V.O.)

I couldn't sleep in those early months. Even now, I sometimes wake up, hear myself screaming.

Clare talks over visuals of the drama - remembering it as she talks about it.

CLARE (V.O.)

I can still see Nick's face as it dawned on him why I was screaming.

FLASHBACK - 15 YEARS EARLIER INT : UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Nick is in bed alone. A piercing scream from wakes him. He gets out of bed and runs into another bedroom. Clare holds a baby in her arms. She turns as Nick enters and holds the baby out to him.

CLARE (V.O.)

We blamed each other at first. We found reasons to blame each other.

FLASHBACK - 15 YEARS EARLIER INT : UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Clare sits on the floor in the baby's bedroom. She holds her baby. She weeps. Nick rushes into the room followed by people in uniform.

CLARE (V.O.)

Paramedics came, our doctor. Then the police - they wouldn't let us bathe her, or even change her nappy. We blamed each other for that. They put her teddy bear and the clothes that she had been wearing into a black rubbish bag. We blamed each other for that.

FLASHBACK - 15 YEARS EARLIER INT : DOWNSTAIRS - NIGHT

Clare and Nick watch the ambulance leave. A policewoman talks to Clare. Nick puts a coat around Clare, grabs the car keys and walks her to the car.

CLARE (V.O.)

They asked us what she had eaten and if she had had a cold. Well, Nick had a cold and I had given her a tiny piece of banana. So many reasons to blame each other.

(pause)

They took her away.

(pause)

When we got back from the hospital, there was orange tape across her bedroom door. Like it was a crime scene.

FLASHBACK - 15 YEARS EARLIER INT : UPSTAIRS - MORNING

Nick looks into the baby's room. The door is open but has orange 'scene of crime' tape across it to prevent entry. He walks into his and Clare's bedroom. Clare is sitting up in bed. A doctor is talking to her. A police officer is present.

CLARE (V.O.)

Our doctor and a police officer came home with us. There had to be an autopsy. They cut her.

INT : KITCHEN PRESENT DAY

Clare looks at a photograph of an infant.

CLARE (V.O.)

She was born in May and died in July. She lasted as long as the peony season lasts. And she was called Peony.

EXT : DAY - EDGE OF PEONY FIELD, PRESENT DAY

Clare, aged 40 watches Nick, aged 45 and two children walking towards her.

CLARE (V.O.)

Nick developed a hybrid - "Peony's Peony". All proceeds go to cot death research.

(pause)

We've raised a lot of money over 15 years.

(pause)

We've raised two children.

Nick reaches her, they smile at each other.

FADE OUT.

THE END