

STORM BABY

By

Stephen Mitchell

1. INT/EXT BLOSSOM'S CAR - DAY 1.

View through a windscreen of a rather groovy but shabby old Peugeot as it rockets down a grey ribbon of highway arrowing between yellow fields and a beautiful blue sky.

On the radio: the weather report warns of an approaching change.

BLOSSOM (30) grips the steering wheel rigidly, her dyed hair and layers of op-shop clobber an unmistakable badge of 'inner-urban-arty-and-poor'.

Her face a grim mask of determination, she stares fixedly at the road ahead.

RADIO WEATHER ANNOUNCER
...bringing squally showers and the
possibility of isolated thunder-
storms...

Abruptly, Blossom shoves in a tape that is sitting half-ejected in the player. The weather report is replaced by the voice of a woman singing with a grungey band. The recording is rough, with demo-tape written all over it, but the singing is spectacular and the band tight.

Silently, Blossom mouths the words along with the singer. Then the singing falters, the band stumble to a halt...

WOMAN'S VOICE ON TAPE
Okay, sorry, sorry, let's go from the
beginning...

Blossom stabs the eject button.

The Peugeot accelerates down the highway, diving into the autumnal tunnel of an Avenue of Honour. Golden leaves swirl in her wake.

On the horizon behind, a white haze of clouds are gathering.

2. EXT HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY 2.

A white haze of Cosmos flowers gathered in a neat bed. A pair of feet stride up beside them and stop, the bright socks and idiosyncratic shoes a clue to the owner's identity.

With a shoulder bag clutched protectively in front of her, Blossom gazes fiercely at the imposing bulk of a large country hospital.

A gust of wind sweeps through the bed of flowers, bending stalks and scattering petals.

Blossom shivers and steps across the fallen petals towards the hospital entrance.

Behind her, the darkening clouds loom in the distance.

SFX: Footsteps on a hard floor.

SISTER RAYE (VO)
A lot of babies come into the
world on the back of a storm...

3. INT HOSPITAL ROOM/WARD - DAY 3.

SFX: Footsteps continue. Hospital atmos.

IVY (55) lies half-propped in bed, thin-cheeked and pale, her eyes closed, arm connected to a drip. She looks ready to float away if the tightly tucked covers didn't hold her down.

Beside the bed, holding Ivy's slack fingers in a hand unaccustomed to gentleness, sits LOUIS (57), a hale and outdoorsy sort of man.

SISTER RAYE (VO) (CONT'D)
The atmospheric pressure brings on
the labour.

Louis stares blankly towards the window, and its frame of blue sky.

SISTER RAYE (VO) (CONT'D)
They say storm babies don't cry
because the rain has done all their
crying for them.

4. INT WARD - DAY 4.

SISTER RAYE (40) accompanies Blossom from the ward reception area, their footsteps echoing on the hard floor. They come to a halt outside a room door bearing the number L8. The sister, hawk-faced but softly-spoken, stares gently at a visibly tense Blossom whose restless gaze seems to indicate an interest in everything except what is being said to her.

SISTER RAYE

Of course, storms take a lot with them too.

Blossom doesn't respond.

SISTER RAYE

I hope you don't mind me asking...
Has it been some time since you saw your mother

BLOSSOM

Some time.

SISTER RAYE

(Gently)

Well, I should warn you, you'll need to prepare yourself for a change in her appearance. Weight loss...you know.

Blossom finally turns a pair of troubled eyes to meet the sister's gaze.

BLOSSOM

So, she really is ill?

The sister is taken aback.

SISTER RAYE

What...what were you told?

BLOSSOM

Oh, I know what I was told.

She turns and pushes through the door.

5. INT HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

5.

Louis looks up and stares in surprise.

Blossom enters the room and stops at the foot of the bed, clutching her large shoulder-bag in front of her like a shield.

Louis looks nervously at Ivy.

Blossom focuses an implacable stare at her mother.

Slowly Ivy's eyes open and fix on her daughter.

6. EXT HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY

6.

In faster-than-normal motion, clouds boil up into an overcast sky, getting darker by the moment.

7. INT HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

7.

Nobody has moved. Louis stands nervously between Ivy and Blossom who continue to stare at each other. Finally, in a rasping whisper...

IVY

Blossom...Has something happened?

BLOSSOM

No. I...I've just come to see you.

IVY

But it's such a long way.

BLOSSOM

I understood...

She breaks off, catching a nervous look from Louis.

BLOSSOM

How are you feeling, Mum?

IVY

Oh, about what you'd expect. But how are you Bloss? I've been so worried about you.

BLOSSOM

Why? I'm fine.
(Unable to hold it back)
I'm not dying for instance.

LOUIS

I might get a cuppa.

IVY

Oh yes. And one for Blossom. She must be exhausted.

BLOSSOM

I'm alri-

Louis retrieves a coffee cup from a bedside table. Ivy draws him closer, but speaks more than loudly enough for Blossom to hear.

IVY

And Ollie? Can you ask Sister Raye to wait a bit? She'll be in shortly, but I'm too tired. And now Blossom's here...

She struggles upright with a grimace. Louis shifts a pillow.

BLOSSOM

Are you in pain?

IVY

Oh, you know, they give me stuff. Thank you for coming to see me, Blossom.

BLOSSOM

(Awkwardly)

How long? How long are you supposed to have left?

Louis pauses on his way out. Ivy looks to him for help, but he is at a loss to know how to deal with this.

BLOSSOM

I just want to know.

Ivy gives a rueful shake of her head.

BLOSSOM

Weeks? Months?

LOUIS

There isn't a timetable.

BLOSSOM

Years then?

The accusation hangs in the air. Louis shifts uncomfortably.

IVY

Nobody seems to be able to say. Not long. Liver or heart failure, most likely. I don't think the doctor can make up his mind.

Ivy shrugs and smiles weakly. Blossom absorbs the information, staring down at the medical chart at the foot of the bed. For a moment she seems on the point of submitting to tears, but then lifts her head defiantly.

BLOSSOM

Well thanks for letting me know.

IVY

And whose fault...

(Recovering her composure)

Louis. What about that tea?

Louis nods in relief and continues out of the room.

IVY

Well, you're busy, I know. And it's a long way. And things are difficult for you...

BLOSSOM

For crying out loud, Mum. Listen to yourself.

Ivy lapses into a miffed silence.

8. INT WARD - DAY

8.

Sister Raye collides with Louis coming around a corner.

SISTER RAYE

Mr Bowe. I was just going to see your wife.

LOUIS

Oh yes, she says, can she wait a little while? It's just our daughter...

SISTER

Of course.

(Misinterpreting Louis's demeanour)

She's a tough one.

LOUIS

(Sighing)

A little too tough. Wouldn't hurt her to take a backward step once in a while.

SISTER

Your wife?

LOUIS

No, my daughter. Although...

Sister Raye gives a sympathetic grin which Louis can't help but return.

9. EXT HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY 9.

Reflected stormclouds boil ominously in a window pane. Blossom stares out through the reflection. Thunder rumbles distantly.

10. INT HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY 10.

Thunder rumbles distantly as Ivy and Blossom inhabit the heart of an uncomfortable silence. At the window, Blossom glances down at an empty vase on the sill. Ivy fiddles with the tape holding her drip in place.

IVY

Are you working?

BLOSSOM

The band's got a gig once a fortnight.

Ivy tries to look like that was the answer she was expecting. Blossom gazes challengingly for a moment, then relents.

BLOSSOM

Apart from that, I'm still at that same café. At least, I was until recently.

IVY

You could run your own café. With your experience...

BLOSSOM

I don't think I ever wanted to
grow up to be a waiter, Mum.

Loaded silence resumes.

BLOSSOM

Listen, there's something
important I need...

Ivy worries at the drip.

IVY

I don't think this thing is
working...

11. INT WARD - DAY

11.

Louis and Sister Raye sit side by side on a vinyl couch, each
with a cup of tea.

On the other side of the reception area, unnoticed by either of
them, the call-light above room L8 blinks repeatedly.

12. INT HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

12.

Ivy stabs at the call button extension hanging by her bed.

BLOSSOM

Are you alright? Would you like
me to get someone?

IVY

Oh no. They always come eventually.

BLOSSOM

It's just...There's something
important...

IVY

It's nothing really.

BLOSSOM

It's not like I didn't want to tell you...

IVY

They're very understaffed...

BLOSSOM

I was going to at Christmas, but then you said you were sick again...

IVY

They do their best. It's not like...

BLOSSOM

But it just seems like every time there's something important you come down with a migraine, or feel faint. Every Christmas, every holiday, every birthday. You've never once come to see me sing. Every...

She breaks off, realising that Ivy is finally listening.

BLOSSOM

So, I didn't want this spoiled too. I wanted to tell you. I just... couldn't.

IVY

Tell me what?

Blossom slowly lowers the shoulder bag to the floor, revealing the telltale beachball of a very, very pregnant belly.

Ivy is frozen with astonishment. Her lips move but nothing comes out. She looks up from the beachball to Blossom's face. Blossom ventures a tentative smile.

The realisation hits. Ivy throws her hands up to her face, covering her eyes. She stays like that for a long time. Eventually, Blossom starts to wonder if she's alright.

BLOSSOM

Mum?

Ivy remains frozen, face in her hands. Blossom advances gingerly, gently takes hold of a wrist and tries to lower Ivy's hand. Ivy resists.

BLOSSOM (CONT'D)

Mum.

She takes hold of both wrists. Ivy allows her hands to be lowered. Her exposed face is wet with tears, eyes clamped shut.

Ivy pulls her hands from Blossom's grasp, dragging the corner of the sheet up to wipe her face.

IVY

I suppose there's a father?

Instantly, Ivy knows she's said the wrong thing and avoids looking at Blossom directly. She fingers the call button anxiously. Hurt, Blossom stares at her mother for a long while, searching for a response.

BLOSSOM

Usually, people say 'congratulations'.

She turns and walks out of the room.

13. INT WARD - DAY

13.

Blossom comes barrelling out of the room.

Louis looks up with 'uh-oh' written all over his face as Blossom strides past, glowering. He looks for somewhere to put his tea. The sister reaches out and relieves him of it. Louis lurches after his daughter.

LOUIS

Blossom!

Blossom stops, turns and plants herself with hands on hips. Louis stumbles to a halt, staring at her protruding belly.

BLOSSOM

What is the matter with her?
I can't bear it. Why can't she
just...?

LOUIS

You're...you're...

BLOSSOM

(Defiantly)
That's right.

Louis takes it in.

LOUIS
Well that's...great!

He envelops her in a hug. Blossom melts.

BLOSSOM
Oh, dad.

14. EXT HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY 14.

The sky is a dense blanket of black clouds. All is eerily silent. A drop of rain plummets into the bed of cosmos. Then another, exploding off the white petals.

15. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY 15.

Sister Raye re-sets the tape on Ivy's drip.

Louis stands in the door, watching. Ivy is lost in thought. The sister hesitates, about to say something, then thinks better of it and leaves the room, giving Louis a little smile as she passes.

Louis sighs and closes the door.

16. INT WARD - DAY 16.

Sister Raye sits by the brooding Blossom on the vinyl couch. Retrieving her cup of tea, the sister nods at Blossom's belly.

SISTER RAYE
You must be close.

BLOSSOM
First one's are always late.

SISTER RAYE
Mmm. When are you due?

BLOSSOM

Two weeks ago.

The sister pauses mid-sip with her tea, then continues to drink as though unconcerned.

SISTER RAYE

Must have been a nervous trip
up here.

BLOSSOM

I didn't think about it.

The sister absorbs this information.

SISTER RAYE

Two weeks is quite late. What does
your doctor say?

BLOSSOM

I don't have a doctor. I have a midwife.

SISTER RAYE

And what does she say?

BLOSSOM

I haven't spoken to her.

SISTER RAYE

(Treading carefully)

You know your body will only support
the pregnancy for so long?

BLOSSOM

She'll come when she's ready.

SISTER RAYE

It's a girl?

BLOSSOM

(Tears bubbling forth)

I don't know.

The sister stretches out a reassuring hand.

BLOSSOM (CONT'D)

I don't want her to die...

17. INT HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY17.

Raindrops speckle the window pane.

Ivy is lying back on her pillows, exhausted. Louis sits beside her.

IVY
(To Louis)
Did you see?

Louis nods.

IVY (CONT'D)
Aren't you surprised?

LOUIS
Yes.

IVY
I can't bear it. Why now? How do I know she'll be alright? What's she going to do? What are either of you going to do?

Louis takes hold of Ivy's hand, fixes her with a firm gaze.

LOUIS
Grieve. And love.

A gentle tap on the door. Sister Raye steps in, a worried frown creasing her face. Louis and Ivy look up.

18. EXT HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY18.

The grounds lie in a gloomy false dusk as thunder rolls heavily overhead. Rain batters the cosmos.

Blossom sits on the neat wall bordering the flower bed, head in her hands, slowly getting soaked.

19. INT HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY19.

Rain blatters against the window behind Blossom, where she sits in a chair like the prisoner in the dock. She is wet through. In her lap, she clutches a few bedraggled stems of the cosmos.

Sister Raye and Louis stand by Ivy.

IVY

You'll have to be induced. Louis,
tell her.

Louis appears extremely reluctant to be dragged into the debate.

BLOSSOM

I won't have to be anything.

She stands up, dropping the flowers in the vase on the sill.

Blossom pauses, wincing.

IVY

What? What is it?

BLOSSOM

(Breathing through something)

Nothing.

Louis looks at her in alarm. Blossom bites her lip, concentrating. Ivy darts a look at Sister Raye. The sister quietly nudges Louis out of the room.

IVY

Come sit with me.

Blossom eases herself onto Ivy's bed.

IVY

You know you were born in this
hospital Blossom?

Blossom looks at her in surprise.

BLOSSOM

No, I didn't.

IVY

(Attention inward)

You never imagine that tiny
being could someday be having
a child of her own. You don't
imagine most things.

She takes Blossom's hands gently.

IVY

You know, I heard you sing many times when you were younger. It strikes me as a terribly hard business...but I always thought you were very good.

She looks up into Blossom's eyes. The two of them face each other openly for the first time.

IVY

There's not much left in me, Blossom. I was only waiting to see you.

She brings their two hands onto the curve of Blossom's belly.

IVY (CONT'D)

I'd like to see her too, before I go.

BLOSSOM

But...I don't want you to go.

Blossom gestures helplessly. They stare at each other mutely.

Thunder crumples the silence. Blossom's breathing deepens.

Outside the window, the rain settles into a downpour.