

The Flowers

By Pete Malicki

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Cast

Sam: Can be played by either gender. Wears a loose tracksuit over the top of army fatigues.

Scene

SAM: I never knew my mum. She died of obstetrical haemorrhage during childbirth; severe bleeding. She lived long enough to hold me in her arms, look me in the eyes and say, "Sam." Dad said the very last moment of her life was the happiest one, so at least she went out on a high.

Dad was a drug addict when I was born so I only spent a few months with him before they shipped me out to foster homes. The first people who had me were arrested for kidnapping a child in the eighties and I was forwarded on to an elderly couple before I turned one. I'm sure they were the best parents I ever had but they didn't last very long. Enid passed away in her sleep when I was eighteen months and Rex died of a "broken heart" soon after.

I was sent to an upper class couple after that and lived with Carlos and Anastarsia for the next eight years. Anastarsia hated me right from the get-go because Spot – her bunny rabbit – died of shock the day I arrived. It's hardly a toddler's fault that rabbits have zero constitution, but all the same, I was scorned by her for half my childhood. She was the least hands-on parent in the universe, and I think I was technically raised by Nintendo. My first words were actually "Donkey Kong." I was home-schooled for those eight years and when I was seven I'm pretty sure I topped the state in *The Legend of Zelda*.

Carlos was an even worse parent than the Gameboy. He'd come into my room about once a week to check if I'd died from malnutrition and just stand there awkwardly in the doorway. After a few moments he'd shake my hand and hurry off like I was some old acquaintance he didn't want to talk to.

Just before I turned ten, my dad convinced the courts he was off drugs and got custody of me. He was over the moon. I was put on a train to Arcadia Station and dad met me there with a Labrador puppy he'd named Lucky. Lucky was so excited to meet his new best friend that he leapt right on top of me as I arrived, except I was still on a moving train and the poor thing got minced. It was a fairly mixed reunion.

A few days after I moved in to dad's pokey flat he started coughing. At first it was just a little "hack, hack," but it quickly grew worse and worse until his entire breathing cycle consisted of a gasp in and a choke out. Cancer got him when I was ten years and ten days.

Off I went to another foster home. After less than six months, my two dads Charles and Charlie were killed in an accident on the motorway. When my next foster mum died of a stroke at twenty-seven, I knew something was wrong with me. I relocated *again* and went to see a priest.

I sat down in one of those booths. "What would you like to confess, my child?"

"Father," I replied. "I think I'm possessed by the Devil. A lot of people around me have gone to Heaven: my mum, my dad, the Charleses, the old couple. Even Lucky and Spot. I don't think it could be chance. I'm not very good at maths but this many deaths seems very improbable. How am I supposed to live if everyone around me goes to Heaven, Father? ...Father? ...Hello?"

I sat on a pew and pretended I didn't know what was going on. I might have got away with it if the ambulance hadn't backed into my new foster parents' car and caused that horrible explosion.

The next guy I lived with is still alive today. He worked at a warehouse and was terribly fond of marijuana, smoking it pretty much on a daily basis when he got home from work at 4am. I don't know how he was legally entitled to adopt but I suspect he hired someone from Gumtree dot com to be his "de facto partner" during interviews.

Dae-mo and I didn't have much to do with each other, but all things considered he was a reasonable parent who got me through school and into my own apartment. I moved in with two nerds I met through World of Warcraft, but I was the only one who survived the fire.

By the time I was living alone and working from home as a programmer I was over it. What the hell was wrong with me? What evil spirit did I piss off to end up as the town death magnet? At nineteen I tried to kill myself. I nailed a sturdy hook into the rafters and slung a rope over it, looked up how to make a noose on the internet, and slipped it over my neck. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and kicked the chair out from beneath me.

There was a god-awful crack and the rafter swung down off the ceiling in an arc, smashing into my goldfish bowl and sending Bowser Junior out the window. Screw this, I said, and I leapt out after him. Fell four storeys and landed on a little old lady. Poor Mrs Bellevue. I staggered out onto the road and the car that swerved to miss me finished the old dear off.

My guilt at being the only one able to stay alive for more than five minutes tripled and I tried everything I could to end myself. Did you know if you put a gun right next to your head and pull the trigger it's still possible to hit the wrong person? I jumped off a cliff but a gust of wind blew me into a tree growing out of the rock face. The helicopter that came to rescue me... (*Sam gestures to show an exploding helicopter*) I tried to drown myself but ended up with a box jellyfish in my mouth and the guy who did CPR got stung and asphyxiated. I tried explosives and exposure and electrocution but all I succeeded in doing was becoming the first person in the country to be blacklisted by emergency services.

I gave up on offing myself and came up with a mission instead. If I couldn't hold down a meaningful relationship or own a pet, the least I could do was grow some flowers. I converted my unused garage space into a greenhouse and bought a stack of vibrant, healthy plants. I watered them every day and one by one they wilted and died. I bought some more. Only watered them once but they wilted too. I tried a hundred different species but nothing lasted for more than a fortnight, even the damned succulents. Succulents!

I tried everything I could think of but still no flowers. I dug up the neighbour's rose bush and planted it in the front garden. The strata manager knocked on my door and went mental but fortunately he was on life support before he could complain to my real estate agent. I read horticulture magazines and tried everything: water, fertiliser, sunlight, shade. I read one Stephen King. I played one Mozart. They all died. Meanwhile, my mail had stopped coming. They were running out of postmen.

One day I went downstairs and saw something miraculous. There was a bud, a tiny shoot of green sticking its head through one of the hundreds of empty pots. I was overjoyed! I posted on the Pot Plant Forums and told them all about it. Took a photo after a week and sent it to my friend FloraFan8. FloraFan8 told me it was marijuana.

Marijuana?! But... damn teenagers! But wait. *Dae-mo* was a pothead. And my dad was a drug addict. Did this mean...?

I made contact with some stoner kids from high school and started hanging out. They didn't die – ecstasy! (Well, you know what I mean.) Finally my life would be normal. I could have a very slow, perpetually hungry cat. I could fall in love. Someone to say “Honey I'm home” and make me Grain Waves for dinner.

It seemed rather unfair that the only thing capable of surviving around me was quite possibly going to land me in prison. Why couldn't it be sunflowers? No one gets three to six months for growing sunflowers. I thought the best idea was to go somewhere where marijuana wasn't illegal, so I saved my money and bought a one-way ticket to Amsterdam. A great idea but I really should have put more thought into it. No one else survived the crash.

Sam starts taking off a tracksuit to reveal army clothes underneath.

SAM: I caught the interest of someone in national security after that. “Unbreakable Sam,” he called me. “You reckon you've tried to kill yourself a dozen times but couldn't pull it off,” he said. “Have you ever thought of joining the army?” he asked.

And that's the story of how I joined the Special Forces in Afghanistan in the only regiment encouraged to get high while on duty. They call us “The Flowers” because of all the bud. All I do is walk through the desert watching rifles misfiring and bombs randomly detonating in nearby caves. I've been captured four times now but I always get out within a day or two.

Sam smiles, a hint of sadness coming through the humour.

SAM: Not everyone gets dealt a winning hand, you know, but all things considered I can't complain. I may not be destined for happiness in this life, but at least I get to be useful. That's cool. Useful works for me just fine. (*Sam grins*) I'm not dying to be happy.

Sam walks off stage, leaving a dead pot plant in the spotlight.