

The Days Ahead

By

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Characters

Blake Mitchell	16, Daughter
Logan Mitchell	18, Son
Willow Mitchell	36, Mother
Captain John F. Mitchell	36, Father, deceased
Nathaniel Ferguson	17, Friend
Major Tom J. Black	42, The Casualty Assistance Officer

Time

2007. The height of the surge in Iraq. The week of prom.

Place

Fort Worth, Texas.

NOTES

No blackouts unless indicated.

“I think we dream so we don't have to be apart so long. If we're in each other's dreams, we can be together all the time.”

~ Bill Watterson

Scene 1

Lights up on Logan and Blake sitting on the Mitchell family porch.

They are dressed in funeral attire.

Logan pulls out a pack of Marlboro Reds.

He offers one to Blake.

She doesn't look at him.

He lights it with a match.

Long, slow drags.

Silence.

Logan You know what I don't understand?

Blake What?

Logan Why people smoke fuckin' light cigarettes.

Blake I think it makes sense.

Logan You do?

Blake Yeah.

Logan Why?

Blake I don't know. I just think it makes sense okay?

Logan Yeah but *how* does it make sense?

Blake It just does.

Logan That's not good enough of a reason.

Blake Okay.

Pause.

Logan I mean smoking is already gonna kill you in the long run. And all that low-tar light bullshit is just marketing from the tobacco companies to get more people to buy cigarettes. It's been common knowledge for years, and yet some people still prefer 'em.

Blake So?

Logan They're bitch cigarettes.

Blake What?

Logan Pussy cigarettes. Girl cigarettes.

Blake So all girls are bitches and pussies?

Logan All girls who smoke lights are.

Blake What about girls who don't smoke?

Logan That's a whole 'nuther ballgame.

Blake And what ballgame is that?

Logan The point is, if you're gonna smoke, smoke. If you're not gonna smoke, don't. But don't go half way and smoke bullshit light cigarettes when you know you smoke for the buzz.

Blake The buzz?

Logan The buzz! You know, the hazy feeling the nicotine and other harmful shit gives you. You light that cigarette—make sure to light it with a match, lighters are for bitches—you light it and you inhale and the sweet sweet nicotine enters your body. And in that moment it's just you and that cigarette. Nothing else matters. You sure you don't want one?

Blake Mom would go insane.

Logan She's already insane.

Blake You're the one who's insane.

Logan. How am *I* insane?

Blake Because our father just died and all you can talk about is how bitches and pussies smoke light cigarettes.

Logan They *are* the only ones who smoke light cigarettes.

Blake Can we talk about something else? ANYTHING ELSE?

Logan pulls out a flask.

Logan Want some?

Blake Are you drunk right now?

Logan What? NO! Just buzzed.

Blake It's eleven in the morning.

Logan On a Sunday.

Blake Where do you even get alcohol?

Logan Places.

Blake You know what? I'm done.

Logan With what?

Blake You.

Logan You can't be done with me. I'm your fuckin' kin.

Blake People are done with their kin all the time.

Logan But you love me.

Blake What makes you say that?

Logan Because you have no choice. I'm the only male figure in your life now.

Pause.

Logan Sorry. I didn't mean that.

Logan lights another cigarette.

Blake All right gimme one.

He smiles.

He hands one to Blake.

He lights it for her.

She coughs immensely.

Logan Fuckin' great huh?

Willow emerges from the house.

Willow Are you going to offer me a cigarette?

Logan Hell yeah!

Blake Since when do you smoke?

Willow It's happened before. It'll happen again.

Logan hands Willow a cigarette and lights it for her.

Logan Are you enjoying your cigarette Willow?

Willow When're you gonna start calling me mom again?

Logan Why can't I call you Willow? It's your fuckin' name.

Willow Language.

Logan It's how I talk. You gotta problem?

Willow One of these days Logan.

Logan What?

Willow You're going to have to start listening to me.

Logan Those days are behind me. I'm eighteen remember? I'm an adult.

Willow An adult who's not going to graduate high school.

Logan Who needs high school?

Willow The higher the education the better the job.

Logan I'll just join the army.

Willow Don't make me laugh.

Logan What? I could do it. Dad did.

Willow And where did that get him?

Beat.

Willow Thanks for the cigarette.

She leaves.

Blake What the hell is wrong with you!?

Logan What?

Blake Join the army?

Logan No one can stop me. I'm eighteen bitches!

Blake That doesn't mean much.

Logan You sayin' I can't do it?

Blake I'm saying you shouldn't.

Logan Cuz I could do it.

Blake But you won't.

Logan How can you be so sure?

Blake Because I know you.

Logan What am I gonna do then?

Blake When?

Logan After high school.

Blake If you graduate.

Logan Fuck you if I graduate.

Blake All right you wanna know what I see?

Logan That's why I asked.

Blake Okay fine. I see you dropping out of high school with no money and no job. Mom will disown you because you'll get into a fight you can't take back. Then you'll buy a handle of Jack, actually probably not Jack, you wouldn't be able to afford it. You'd buy the shitty plastic bottle stuff.

Logan I'd buy Jack anyway.

Blake Fine. You'd buy Jack anyway. And you'd take that Jack and drink it all. Then you'll take your death trap—

Logan Motorcycle.

Blake Death trap. You'll take your death trap and ride off into the sunset like that one guy in that movie? But then as your curving down a road, you'll swerve and crash into the railing, fall off the cliff, hit a tree, and then you'll die.

Pause.

Logan I could see that.

Blake You would go out in a blaze of glory.

Logan I'd be remembered.

Blake For a month. Maybe.

Logan Not if I flew off the cliff and was never found.

Blake Why wouldn't they find you?

Logan Because. I wouldn't crash into a tree like a pussy. I'd fly into the sky, never to be seen again.

Blake Like a motorcycle version of Amelia Earhart?

Logan Who's that?

Blake Never mind.

Logan I'm tired as shit. I think it's time for a nap.

Blake Are you gonna eat dinner with us?

Logan What do you think?

Blake You should.

Logan Just cuz I live here doesn't mean I have to eat here.

Blake Fine.

Logan Later.

He leaves.

Blake sits on the porch smoking her cigarette.

She breaks down crying.

Scene 2

*The Mitchell family porch.
Tom walks into the space.
He carries a briefcase.
He walks up to the door.
He knocks.
Willow opens the door.*

Willow Tom?

Tom Yes.

Willow Hi.

Tom I'm glad we're finally meeting in person.

Willow I guess you had to come in here eventually.

Tom You know, normally it's protocol to do all the meetings in person.

Willow Do you know the person who notified me of John's death?

Tom Not off the top of my head no.

Willow Do you know he read from a card?

Tom I am aware.

Willow He told me my husband died. While reading a cue card.

Tom I know.

Willow He didn't have the balls to look me in the eye.

Tom I'm sorry.

Willow I wanted to punch him in the face.

Tom I'm glad you didn't.

Willow So you can see why I'm apprehensive of you people.

Tom Of course.

Blake appears in the space.

She carries her computer.

Blake Who's this?

Willow Tom. He's our casualty assistance officer, remember?

Tom Hello. You must be Blake.

Blake Right.

Tom Nice to meet you.

Blake You too.

Tom How're you today?

Blake Fine.

Willow I guess we should get to business right?

Tom Right.

Tom and Willow go inside.

Blake sits typing on the porch.

She clicks something.

Her father, John, appears in the space.

He wears off-duty army fatigues.

John Hey kiddo! It's day eighty-three, and you know what that means? Only two hundred and seventy-seven days until I'm home. Unless I get extended like last time...but I don't think it'll happen again. At least I hope not. Last night I was looking at the picture of us at the park near Fort Irwin. Remember that park? There was that giant pink unicorn on a spring that used to bob back and forth? Remember? You would ride on it for hours. You didn't want to do anything else. Not the swing, not the teeter-totter, not the giant tic-tac-toe—which was my personal favorite. You would just be on that unicorn for hours. Bobbing back and forth and back and forth. I was looking at that picture and I almost cried I was so happy.

Nate enters the space.

Nate Hey Blake.

She quickly pauses the video.

Blake Jesus Nate you scared me.

Nate Were you watchin' something?

Blake Yeah.

Nate Mind if I ask what?

Blake Yeah.

Nate Oh okay. Sorry. It was a nice service yesterday.

Blake Yeah.

Nate I've never been to a military funeral before.

Blake Neither have I.

Nate I heard there are people that go to every military funeral in their area. Every single one. Isn't that crazy?

Blake Yeah.

Nate How are you? I mean, given the circumstances.

Blake Fine.

Nate You wouldn't make eye contact with me at the funeral. You haven't been in school for a week. People are talking. They're really sorry.

Blake Everybody's sorry

Lights cross fade to Willow and Tom in the kitchen.

Tom As you know on top of the one hundred thousand dollar lump sum you received after the death you'll also receive your husband's life insurance which amounts to four hundred thousand dollars. Plus two thousand, four hundred and ninety-one dollars a month for spousal benefits with an additional two hundred and seventy-one dollars per kid under the age of eighteen or twenty-two if they're full time students. So for this month you will receive a total of three thousand and thirty-three dollars. Each month you will receive an additional three thousand and thirty three dollars. Now in order for this to happen you're going to need your marriage certificate, birth certificates of your kids, last year's

Tom tax return form, divorce decrees, last year's W-2 form, and proof of death. Now...we dealt with receiving of personal effects early as you requested. They should be coming tomorrow. I'll drop them off personally.

Pause.

Tom Ma'am?

Willow Huh?

Tom Did you hear me?

Willow That's a lot of money.

Tom The army takes care of its fallen soldiers.

Willow It's really a lot of money.

Tom Like I said the army—

Willow What am I going to do with that much money?

Tom Are your kids going to college?

Willow Blake yes. Logan...Logan'll be lucky if he graduates high school.

Tom You should use the money to pay for Blake's college.

Willow Okay.

Tom Or you could move. Use the money to live in a place you've always wanted. Maybe you want to move back home. The army will stop paying for you to live off post in a year anyway, so you might as well.

Willow Right. I can move now because my husband died. That's a great consolation prize.

Tom That's not what I said.

Willow That's exactly what you said.

Tom I'm sorry ma'am, but it wasn't.

Willow Everybody's sorry.