

BRANCHING OFF

By

Maddie Chavez

FADE UP

EXT. GARDEN - GREECE - MORNING

A TOURIST, 20s, walks through the garden. They stop to spit out their gum. They decide to stick it onto a nearby TREE.

TITLE CARD:

"BRANCHING OFF"

TITLE DISAPPEARS.

On the other side of the tree lay LAUREL, 20s, a true spirit of nature, barefoot in a sundress. As she makes a crown of flowers her know-it-all brother WILLOW, 20s, lounges in the grass next to her.

WILLOW

Laurel, you know what happens when you bring a weed into a garden.

LAUREL

Don't get your roots twisted in a knot, Willow. Seth is different. He's smart, kind... he has one of the biggest hearts I've ever met...

Willow mockingly gags in annoyance at his sister's naïvety.

WILLOW

You're such a sapling! He's completely clouding your judgment. I'm sure he has you convinced you're in love. Next, he'll try to force you off the island.

LAUREL

You know I could never leave you. We're family.

WILLOW

Do you though?

Laurel pushes Willow's arm in a playful shove.

LAUREL

You do a great job of reminding.

WILLOW

What's wrong with a nice, friendly-fleeting local? That's the way to do it, sis. Precise encounters really do beat the downers.

Laurel rolls her eyes and completes her flower crown. She places it on Willow's head.

LAUREL

You know I'm a long-term kind of girl. I just have to tell Seth how I'm really feeling-

She looks down at her leg, a piece of gum stuck to it. She pulls the gum now stuck to her fingers and shakes it off.

WILLOW

Stuck?

LAUREL

-ugh! Really?!
(sigh)
Humans...

SETH, 20s, a charismatic American student, enters the garden.

Laurel lights up at his presence, forgetting completely about the gum. Willow sees Seth approach and shakes his head.

WILLOW

Ugh, speak of Hades and he shall appear.

Seth and Laurel continue to lock eyes. Willow rolls his eyes and walks off.

Seth sits next to Laurel. He leans back onto her tree.

SETH

I knew I'd find you at our spot.

They kiss.

LAUREL

Well, you kept me waiting long enough.

SETH

I'm sorry my last class ran late.

Seth glances up at the branches of the tree, takes a deep breath in and then looks to Laurel with a smile.

He then stands and offers her a hand.

 SETH
 Shall we?

EXT. BEACH - GREECE - DAY

Laurel and Seth walk along the beach together hand in hand.

He chases her from the sea and onto the sand. They lie down next to each other and smile.

 SETH
 My flight isn't until 8 tomorrow.

 LAUREL
 Way to kill the mood.

Laurel sighs and rolls away from him.

 LAUREL
 And soon I'll just be a piece of
 some European summer scrapbook in
 your bottom drawer.

 SETH
 You know that's not true. If I could
 stay here... I would.

She turns back to face him.

 LAUREL
 Then stay. Please.

Seth sits up and looks away nervously.

 SETH
 Easy for you to say, you're from
 here. If you come to American-

 LAUREL
 You may be the only American I've
 met that actually wants foreigners
 to move into the country.

She stands up and walks closer to the water and sighs.

 LAUREL
 The real reason I can't leave...
 it's complicated Seth. If I told
 you, I doubt you'd even believe me-

As Laurel spins back around, she sees Seth on one knee with an open box. A cheap looking glass ring inside.

SETH

I know it's not much. I got it in Italy at some small shop...but after I pay off my student loans and we're all settled back home I promise I'll get you-

LAUREL

(slowly)
Back home?

Seth continues to babble about plans for the future as he is muffled in Laurel's world. She looks from him to the ring.

After a moment she closes the box.

LAUREL

Seth, how many times do I have to tell you, I can't go with you?

The smile fades from his face as he slowly stands up.

SETH

What about us? These past months?

LAUREL

(flustered)
No, it's not that! You know I love you, I do! You're trying to force me into this...and I...

A beat.

LAUREL

I'm sorry. I- I have to go.

SETH

Wait, Laurel-

She rushes off the beach and into the streets.

EXT. GARDEN - GREECE - CONTINUOUS

Willow looks around to check his surroundings and admires his new boho-flower crown look in a hand-held, pocket mirror.

Laurel rushes up to him, out of breath from running.

LAUREL

You were right! You were so, so right. He proposed.

WILLOW

Well, of course I was right. Humans are just so predictable.

LAUREL

Will, help me! What do I do?

WILLOW

Well obviously, we have to kill him.

LAUREL

Be serious for one moment. We're talking about uprooting my life here!

WILLOW

YEAH, LITERALLY! What did you expect, Laurel? To fall in love with some guy from the 'free world' and expect him to let you make your own choices? Now that's a real myth.

LAUREL

I don't know what I expected! All I know is that I really do love him... and I don't want to lose him.

WILLOW

Then convince him to stay! Start with, oh I don't know.. how about the truth? If you really love him and he loves you, he'll understand...

EXT. GARDEN - GREECE - THE NEXT MORNING

Laurel wakes up with a start. She grabs her arm to see a thumbtack stuck. She winces and pulls it out. A small trail of blood trickles down her arm.

Willow is sound asleep next to her. Laurel slowly gets up.

She walks across the garden to her own tree. A note is tacked onto the trunk. She rips it off and reads:

Laurel, I'm so sorry about yesterday. Meet me by the beach. I have to see you. -S

Laurel half-smiles to herself and rushes off.

A moment later, Willow sheepishly wakes up and rubs his eyes to look for his sister. Seth hurries into the garden.

WILLOW
(hostile)
Seth.

SETH
Willow.

WILLOW
Laurel isn't here.

SETH
Did she get my note?

WILLOW
Note? How should I know?
(a beat)
But, if you're gonna propose again
at least bring flowers or something
this time. Typical man.

He retreats back to another tree.

Seth looks around the garden. He smiles at his special spot shared with Laurel, a tree flourishing with flowers.

He starts picking them from the branches, making a bouquet.

EXT. BEACH - GREECE - INTERCUT

Laurel carries a basket and unfolds a blanket on the sand.

She waits for Seth, looking out eagerly for his arrival.

Suddenly, she gets a sharp pain in her chest.

EXT. GARDEN - GREECE

Seth continues to pick flowers.

EXT. BEACH - GREECE

Laurel lay gasping for breath.

EXT. BEACH - GREECE - LATER

Seth strolls up to the beach with a giddy stride. He carries a bouquet of flowers. From a distance, he sees Laurel laying down. As he gets closer he pauses.

SETH

Laurel?

Seth rushes to her side and tries to shake her awake. It's no use. He clutches her dead body and sobs.

FADE OUT.