

False Hope

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. SCHOOL BUILDING - DAY

Establishing shot of an INNER-CITY SCHOOL while somber acoustic MUSIC plays. The focus is a WINDOW.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Children playing, coloring, reading. ALI, a slender blonde 8-year-old girl, cradles a gerbil and talks to it.

ALI

Aren't you a good boy, Doozer?
Aren't you? Yes, you are.

MRS. WHITE

Ali, honey, let's share Doozer with
the other children too.

Ali glares at Mrs. White then notices MARK, an average looking albeit small boy, coloring at his desk. She looks sadly at Doozer, then KISSES him and hands him over to an eager and energetic boy.

ALI

Good bye, Doozer.

She walks over to Mark and stands next to him, watching him color two figures. She points to the smaller of the figures.

ALI

Who's that?

Mark WRITES his name above the figure. She points to the other.

ALI

Who's that one?

Mark WRITES her name above the other figure and Ali smiles. Mark continues to color in the figures as Ali watches.

The boy holding Doozer in the background looks around as Ali watches Mark color.

Mrs. White is breaking up a fight.

The boy grits his teeth and tightens his grip on the gerbil until it stops struggling. With a nervous look on his face he puts Doozer back into his cage and runs off.

ALI
 (to Mark)
 Do you want a turn with Doozer?
 He's back in his cage.

Mark exits view as Ali sits down to look at the picture.

MARK (O.S.)
 Ali!

BEHIND A BOOKSHELF, MOMENTS LATER

Mark and Ali kneel on the floor. Doozer is on the floor between them, motionless.

ALI
 I told you he would die. My mom
 says that you give people your
 germs when you kiss them.

MARK
 Doozer isn't a person.

ALI
 Maybe animals can get germs too.
 We better sneak him back into his
 cage.

Mark picks up Doozer and he and Ali peer around the corner of the bookshelf.

The teacher is helping a girl with her back to the pair.

Mark quickly puts Doozer back in his cage and returns to Ali.

ALI
 Did anyone see you?

MARK
 No.

ALI
 Good. Your dad would get mad at you
 again if he found out we killed a
 gerbil.

MARK
 I know.

ALI
 Does your neck still hurt?

He rubs the back of his neck.

MARK
Not really.

ALI
(trying to cheer him up)
Wanna walk home after school today?
It's Thursday, your dad doesn't get
home until dinner.

MARK
Okay.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - AFTERNOON

The BELL rings and children of all ages spill out of the building. Mark and Ali exit the building and walk together across the grass.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - AFTERNOON

Mark and Ali walk slowly together.

MARK
What do you have?

ALI
Have what?

MARK
The germs you gave to Doozer.

ALI
I don't know. My mom hasn't said
anything and I haven't been to the
doctor's. Wait!

They are at a street crossing.

MARK
What?

ALI
We should hold hands.

Mark takes Ali's outstretched hand.

ALI
My mom says to always hold hands so
you can look out for each other.

They cross the street and continue to walk holding hands.

ALI
My sister holds her boyfriend's
hand on our steps. They kiss too.

MARK
My mom and dad don't hold hands or
kiss.

ALI
Do you think they love each other?

MARK
I don't know. I love my mom, but
not my dad.

ALI
You could come live at my house if
you want.

MARK
I would miss my mom.

They arrive at Ali's front steps. Ali turns to face Mark,
who looks down at his feet.

ALI
Do you love me, Mark?

Mark looks up.

MARK
How do I know?

ALI
If we kiss, you'll know. My sister
says that you know if you're in
love when you kiss someone.

MARK
Won't I get sick?

ALI
You'll take my germs and I won't
die.

MARK
Didn't Doozer take your germs?

ALI
He's too small. I can still feel
them in me.

Mark considers for a moment.

MARK
What if I die?

ALI
You just have to give them to
someone else.

MARK
I don't want anyone to die.

ALI
I'm going to die if you don't do
something.

After another moment of consideration, Mark leans in and
kisses Ali.

As they pull away, Ali's mom pokes her head out the door.

ALI'S MOM
Ali, come inside now, sweetie.

ALI
(to Mark)
Bye.

Mark watches Ali walk up her steps and disappear into her
house.

With head hung, he shuffles home.

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

MARK'S MOTHER slices vegetables at the kitchen counter. She
wears a waitress dress and has darkness around her eyes from
tiredness or bruising- or both. Though she works quickly,
her mind is elsewhere.

Off camera we hear the door open and close.

Mark drops his backpack just inside the door and walks past
the kitchen.

MOM
Oh, honey, don't leave your
backpack there. Daddy might trip on
it.

Mark looks at her as though he might say something, then
just picks up his pack and takes it up the stairs. The
bedroom door SHUTS.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM

In a very plain bedroom Mark sits at a small desk looking at the picture he drew at school. A quiet KNOCK at the door.

MOM

Honey, it's time for dinner. Let's not keep Daddy waiting.

MARK

I think I'm sick, Mom.

MOM

What? Let me feel your head.

She puts her hand on his forehead.

MOM

You don't feel warm-

The front door OPENS downstairs. She speaks quickly as she exits the room.

MOM

If you still feel sick tomorrow maybe we can go see the doctor. Right now it's time for dinner.

Mark watches her leave and then puts the picture into the desk and leaves the room.

INT. DINING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

MARK'S DAD removes his jacket, revealing a mechanic's jumpsuit, and sits at the small table.

Mark climbs into his chair looking defeated.

His Mom brings dinner to the table and sets it near the center of the table but nearer to Mark's father than to her and Mark.

DAD

I had to skip lunch today so I hope today's is better than yesterday's.

MOM

(attempted cheerfulness)
Well, let's not wait then.

She serves her husband first, then Mark and herself.

As they are about to eat, Mark beams up and blurts out-

MARK
Can we say grace?

Mom glances to see her husband's reaction and looks at Mark.

MOM
Mark...

Dad looks disapprovingly at his wife.

DAD
Where did he get that idea?

MOM
I don't know where he heard that,
maybe on TV...

DAD
Fine. You two say grace and I'll
get myself a beer.

Mark's mom reaches out, again feigning cheerfulness, and takes his hand.

MARK
Will you say it?

MOM
Sure, honey.

She begins to pray but we do not hear the words. We see Mark looking at his mom's hand and thinking hard.

Voices from Mark and Ali's previous conversations.

ALI (V.O.)
Hold hands so you can look out for
each other.

MARK (V.O.)
I love my mom, but not my dad.

ALI (V.O.)
You give people your germs when you
kiss them.

MARK (V.O.)
What if I die?

ALI (V.O.)
You just have to give them to
someone else.

Mark looks up at his mom who continues to pray. Instead of the words we hear music build. Mark looks toward the kitchen.

MOM

Amen.

Dad returns to the table and sits down. Mark gets up and puts his arms around his Mom, who pats his arm and looks nervously at her husband.

Mark moves to his Dad and quickly puts his arms around him and KISSES him.

DAD

What the hell?

Dad pushes Mark back against the wall and spills his beer. He looks wild-eyed at Mark.

DAD

What the hell are you doing?!

He slams down his beer and Mom quickly gets up and moves between them. She knows that to avoid incident she must be stern with her son.

MOM

Mark, you need to be more careful.

She turns to face her husband, who is livid.

DAD

I just want to eat in peace! Can't you two at least give me that?

MOM

It was an accident.

DAD

Grow up, Mark. Men don't go around kissin' each other.

MOM

He just misses you, that's all.

Mom ushers Mark up the stairs. She speaks quietly.

MOM

Honey, you can't do that to your father.

MARK

Don't worry, mom. He won't hurt us
anymore.

She looks at him, confused.

MOM

Your father would never-

MARK

It's okay, mom. It's over.

She hugs Mark and urges him up the stairs.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM

Mark sits at his desk. The sounds of fighting off screen.
Mark smiles.

FADE OUT