

# The Bloom at Ridgeway High

The first thing everyone noticed was the smell. Not the usual locker-room funk or cafeteria grease. It was faint, sweet, and rotting, like flowers left too long in water.

Everything started in the biology lab after Miss Peters came back from one medical conference in Geneva. She was so excited that week, covering the lab walls with new posters about “Antimicrobial Stewardship” and “Superbugs.”

“Antibiotics are like weapons against bacteria,” she told us, her eyes shining behind her goggles. “But when people overuse them, the bacteria learn how to fight back. That’s why we must use them wisely.”

Her excitement caught all of us, especially me, Alex. I had always been the curious type. My dad had gotten sick last year from what doctors called a “simple infection,” but the usual drugs didn’t work. That experience changed how I saw science.

Miss Peters had this “special experiment” for the science fair called Project Bloom. “It’s just a harmless *E. coli* sample,” she said. “We’ll watch how it adapts to antibiotics, just like real-life resistance.”

We didn’t know that “adapts” could also mean “survives,” or even worse, “thrives.”

The next week, Ridgeway High was full of project talk, but strange things started happening in the biology block.

Mia, our germophobe friend who never went anywhere without sanitizer, said the incubator lights were flickering at night when she stayed late for debate club. Jamal, the tech guy in our group, claimed he heard a low buzzing sound from inside the locked lab, like bees trapped in a box.

Then one morning, the lab rats disappeared. Their tags were still there, sticky with something clear and slimy.

Miss Peters laughed it off. “They probably chewed their way out,” she said, but her face looked pale. She kept glancing at the incubator like something inside worried her.

After class, I asked her what was going on. “Miss P, something’s not right,” I said.

She hesitated for a while, then sighed. “Alex, sometimes science pushes limits. This strain is safe. It’s been edited with CRISPR so we can study mutation faster. If this works, it might help save lives like your father’s.”

Her words were meant to calm me, but deep down, I wasn't sure if it was passion or pride driving her.

I forgot about it until I saw Liam's hand. He was my lab partner, the funny guy who always joked his way through class. That morning, a red patch appeared on his palm while he was working on the agar plates.

"Probably an allergy," he said, but by lunch time, it had turned dark purple, with green lines spreading under his skin like roots.

We begged him to go to the nurse. By the next day, he was gone. The principal said his family had moved suddenly. But that night, I passed his house and saw an ambulance parked there for hours.

That was when I decided to find out what was happening.

Later that evening, I sneaked into the lab. Miss Peters was still there, typing fast on her laptop. On her screen I saw words like mutation rate accelerated, colistin resistance confirmed, and spontaneous plasmid exchange.

Then her computer beeped. She went straight to the incubator and opened it. A wave of hot, damp air hit my face. That same sweet, rotten smell filled the room.

Inside the petri dishes, the bacteria were glowing faintly. They weren't small dots anymore. They looked like living veins, spreading in patterns that seemed to pulse with light.

I didn't wait to see more. I ran.

The next morning, the whole school was coughing. Some students had fevers, and others had strange glowing marks under their skin that looked like bruises.

Mia was panicking. "This isn't normal," she whispered. "It's like the bacteria escaped."

Jamal nodded. "I checked the CCTV last night. Those petri dishes were moving."

The principal told everyone it was the flu, but I overheard a doctor saying the tests showed something else. "No known bacteria," he said. "Resistant to everything."

By the third day, the smell was everywhere. The power started going off and on. They said the school was being fumigated, but everyone knew it was worse than that.

Mia, Jamal, and I hid inside the library. Mia was shaking, rubbing sanitizer on her hands nonstop. Jamal was trying to make an air filter with lab parts. I searched Miss Peters' notebook for answers.

We found her last notes:

*“Strain now survives without a host. It glows under light. Spreads through air and touch. Resistant to all antibiotics. The CRISPR plasmid created new mutations. **Containment impossible.**”*

“This is not an infection,” Jamal said, his voice shaking. “It’s evolution. The bacteria are learning faster than we can stop them.”

Mia was scrolling on her phone. “Look,” she said. “There are reports of the same thing in Geneva. Miss Peters must have brought it back.”

Outside, we heard movement. The hallways were covered in slimy strands, crawling up the walls like roots. Every time we got close, they pulsed and released mist that burned our throats.

Then the loudspeaker came on.

“Students,” Miss Peters’ voice said, calm and strange. “Come to the gymnasium. You’re part of something extraordinary. Don’t be afraid.”

We didn’t move.

Footsteps echoed in the hallway. Jamal peeked out and froze. “They’re here,” he whispered.

It was students and teachers, walking slowly in groups. Their eyes were pale, and their skin glowed faintly. Green mist came out of their mouths when they breathed.

I took a deep breath. “We’re leaving now,” I said.

We ran for the back door, but the floor was already covered with the glowing slime. Mia’s shoe got stuck, and when I tried to help her, the thing wrapped around my wrist. My skin burned like fire.

Jamal grabbed a fire extinguisher and sprayed it at us. The cold froze the slime for a few seconds, long enough for us to break free.

Behind us, the school pulsed like a living creature. The windows glowed green in the dark.

Two weeks later, officials called it an “environmental contamination event.” The whole town was quarantined. People said Miss Peters ran away, maybe to continue her experiment somewhere else.

They took me to a hospital for “observation.” The doctors wore thick suits and masks. They said my infection was mild, but they kept taking my blood like I was a lab rat.

Last night, I looked at my reflection in the window. My skin looked fine, but when the lights flickered, I saw green lines glowing faintly under the surface.

They think I'm cured.

But when I breathe on the glass, the fog glows back at me.

Sometimes I think the bacteria are still inside.

Maybe waiting.

Maybe learning.