

THE SHOEMAKER EXPERIMENT

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EXT. SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS - DAY

A fire rages through the trees of the Angeles National Forrest as FIREFIGHTERS battle the flames.

INT. MORTON'S STEAKHOUSE - DAY

Lunchtime at an upscale downtown restaurant. JAMES CLAY (35) sits quietly at a table. He's not making eye contact with LAURA CLAY (35), who plays with the salt shaker.

Both professionals are impeccably dressed in suits.

*BACK IN THE MOUNTAINS --*

*Flames overtake trees and chaparral. Firefighters struggle to gain a foothold, their boots slipping in the dirt.*

STEAKHOUSE --

BUSINESSMEN in suits broker deals as SOCIALITES chat about nonsense.

James' eyes scan the room, noting the only quiet table belongs to he and Laura.

*BACK IN THE MOUNTAINS --*

*Finally, a PLANE drops a red bath of retardant, the first reprieve of the afternoon.*

STEAKHOUSE --

Finally, James fixes his gaze on Laura.

JAMES

I want to make this work.

She looks up. Gently smiles.

LAURA

Me, too.

A tentative peace.

EXT. FIGUEROA BLVD - DAY

Ash falls over the congested street.

James and Laura exit the restaurant, make their way through the crowd.

They are shoulder to shoulder, eyes front. PASSERSBY on either side force them to bump into each other.

Their awkwardness melts away as their hands find each other for the first time in recent memory. The feeling lingers -- until James sees something.

JAMES

Wait here.

He jogs into traffic -- swerving through cars --

ACROSS THE STREET

Laura raises her hand like a visor to see him approaching --

A FLOWER CART

James grabs a bouquet of lilies. Pays the VENDOR.

INTERCUT -- FLOWER CART/ACROSS THE STREET

Laura sees the flowers. Smiles.

She walks to the crosswalk and pushes the button like the law-abiding citizen she is. Her frown jokingly chastises James for jaywalking.

James shrugs in self-delight.

Laura looks both ways before crossing the street to meet him.

James takes his change from the Vendor when he hears --

SCREECHING TIRES.

HORNS.

James whips his head around.

A PICKUP TRUCK runs the red. CARS swerve to avoid the banged-up vehicle. PEDESTRIANS leap to safety.

Except one.

The truck STRIKES Laura.

Her knees buckle. Her head flings back. Her body hits the ground, limbs bouncing without control. The truck stops.

James is frozen.

He drops the lilies as adrenaline pumps his legs forward. He runs across the street -- barely dodging cars.

Before James can reach her, he hears GEARS GRIND.

The truck reverses -- forcing approaching witnesses to jump back to the sidewalk. It speeds around her body.

A couple pedestrians run after the truck -- pounding on its side to stop the hit-and-run. As the car passes --

James locks eyes with the DRIVER (40s). A low-slung baseball cap. Steel gray eyes. A jagged SCAR etched into his cheek like saw teeth.

The truck runs another red light and escapes.

James slides to a stop besides his wife -- gravel chewing through the knees of his slacks.

Laura's eyes dart around. He grabs her hand.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Everything's going to be okay.  
You're going to be okay.

He's trying to convince himself as well.

A crowd begins to form. Some people hold up traffic. Others press phones to their ears, mumbling something about a woman needing emergency assistance. To James, it's all a blur.

That's when BLOOD seeps through Laura's shirt.

Panicked, James looks over her to assess the damage -- can't find the source -- only a gash through her torn pant leg.

He rips off his necktie -- wraps it around her thigh. Laura cringes as he knots the silk.

James doesn't notice that an AMBULANCE arrives. A MALE and FEMALE EMT pull James aside. They check her breathing. Check her pulse.

MALE EMT  
Sir, I need you back away.

The EMTs load Laura on the stretcher.

INT. AMBULANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Laura, James, and the EMTs seemed to be sucked inside the rear of the ambulance before the doors close. The Female EMT bangs on the roof.

FEMALE EMT

Let's go.

SIRENS blare, and they're off.

LAURA

James?

Her first word brings the smallest sliver of relief.

JAMES

I'm right here. Don't worry. We're going to get through this.

The Female EMT shifts her attention away Laura's vitals to James' face. She doesn't dare say anything.

James slides his fingers over her Laura's wedding band. The light shimmers off the gold as they bounce through traffic.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

FROM ABOVE, the ambulance weaves through traffic. AS WE RISE higher over Los Angeles, a column of SMOKE is visible in the distant mountains.