

THE SHOEMAKER EXPERIMENT

Written by

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EXT. SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS - DAY

Fire rages through the trees of the Angeles National Forest. FIREFIGHTERS battle flames with hoses and trenches during --

INT. MORTON'S STEAKHOUSE - DAY

Lunchtime at an upscale downtown restaurant. JAMES CLAY (35) sits quietly at a table. He avoids eye contact with LAURA CLAY (35), who plays with the salt shaker across from him.

Dressed in suits, it's the first time both professionals are out of their element.

BACK TO MOUNTAINS --

Flames overtake trees and chaparral. Firefighters struggle for a foothold. Boots slip in the dirt.

STEAKHOUSE --

BUSINESSMEN broker deals as SOCIALITES chat about nonsense.

James scans the room, noting the only quiet table belongs to Laura and him.

MOUNTAINS --

An AIRTANKER 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. A tentative peace.

LAURA

Me, too.

EXT. FIGUEROA BLVD - DAY

Ash drifts over the congested street, onto James' upturned hand.

He brushes off the debris as Laura exits the restaurant. They make their way through the crowd, shoulder to shoulder, eyes front.

PASSERSBY bump the couple into each other.

James and Laura's fingers reach to find one another. Their hands melt together for the first time in recent memory. The feeling lingers until --

James sees something.

JAMES

Wait here.

He jogs into traffic. Swerves around cars.

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

A FLOWER CART

James searches for the right flowers. Yes. He grabs a bouquet of lilies. Pays the VENDOR.

INTERCUT 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.

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

SCREECHING TIRES.

HORNS.

He 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. Head flings back. Her body hits the ground as the truck skids to a stop.

James is frozen.

He drops the lilies as adrenaline pumps his legs forward. He runs through traffic. Barely dodges cars.

Before James can reach her, he hears GEARS GRIND.

The truck reverses, forcing witnesses to jump back to the sidewalk. The tires speed around Laura.

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. JAGGED SCAR cut into his cheek like saw teeth.

The truck runs another red and escapes.

James pushes on. Slides to a stop beside his wife.

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 forms. Some hold up traffic. Others press phones to their ears, mumbling something about a woman needing an emergency assistance. It's all a blur.

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

Panicked, James looks over her. 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 when the AMBULANCE arrives. A MALE and FEMALE EMT pull James aside.

MALE EMT

Sir, I need you take a step back.

James forces himself to watch the EMTs check her breathing. Check her pulse.

INT. AMBULANCE - LATER

Laura -- now on a stretcher -- the EMTs, and James jump in the ambulance before the doors close. The Female EMT pounds the roof.

FEMALE EMT

Let's go.

SIRENS blare, and they're off.

LAURA

James?

Her first word brings the smallest relief.

JAMES

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

The Female EMT's eyes shift their attention from 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 lean around a turn.

EXT. STREET - SAME

FROM ABOVE, the ambulance weaves down the center lane. AS WE RISE over Los Angeles, a COLUMN OF SMOKE is visible in the distant mountains.

EXT. GOOD SAMARITAN EMERGENCY BAY - DAY

The ambulance doors burst open. EMTs pull out Laura's stretcher.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - SAME

The doors slide open. The EMTs speed Laura down the hall, James close behind.

FEMALE EMT

Trauma coming in.

A DOCTOR slides up beside them.

DOCTOR

Status?

FEMALE EMT

Thirty-five-year-old female -- hit
by a car -- at least two broken
ribs -- abdominal bruising from
internal bleeding -- no apparent
head injury.

DOCTOR

Take her to bed seven.

A NURSE pursues James. He pays her no attention, his eyes
fixed on Laura.

NURSE

Sir... Sir...

The stretcher's wheels click down the linoleum hallway,
around the corner, and into --

TRAUMA UNIT

The EMTs park Laura beside a bed, grab the sheet beneath her.

MALE EMT

Three. Two. One.

They lift Laura to the bed, then fly out the stretcher.

The room buzzes with NURSES on well-defined paths. The scene
overwhelms James.

THROUGH THE DOOR

DR. JOHN HENRY (40s) passes down the hallway. He stops when
he sees the commotion. He jumps in and takes over.

HENRY

What do we have?

NURSE (O.S.)

Sir.

James feels someone tugging on his sleeve. The nurse avoids
the blood on his clothes.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Sir, do you know this woman?

JAMES

Laura. Laura Clay. She's my wife.

NURSE

Does she have any pre-existing
conditions we need to know about?

JAMES

What? No.

NURSE

Does she take any medications? Any blood thinners?

JAMES

Medications... No. No. Is she going to be okay?

NURSE

Sir, we need you to wait outside.

The nurse grips his elbow. James pulls away his arm.

JAMES

Get your hands off me. Who do you think you are?

His outburst is everything to him. He needs to throw his anger somewhere. Yet the nurse maintains her composure: just another day in the unit.

NURSE

Please. You can't be here right now. I need-- Your wife, needs you to fill out some forms.

James watches Dr. Henry and the nurses cut Laura's suit to better assess her injuries. The blood stains betray her pristine professionalism from earlier.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Sir. Please.

INT. EMERGENCY WAITING ROOM - DAY

James stands in front of the desk, trying to reason with a CHARGE NURSE who won't budge.

CHARGE NURSE

The doctors are still with her. I don't have any new information.

JAMES

Is there anyone you can call?

CHARGE NURSE

As soon as I know something, so will you. Please. Take a seat.

She turns away. James is about to retort when --

His phone RINGS. He sees the screen. *Shit*. He checks his watch.

JAMES
(into phone)
Yes.

A woman (MRS. EILEEN PATTERSON, 60) responds.

MRS. PATTERSON (V.O.)
Mr. Clay?

JAMES
Yes.

MRS. PATTERSON (V.O.)
This is Eileen Patterson from
Edison Elementary.

JAMES
Mrs. Patterson. Thank you for
calling.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OFFICE - SAME

Mrs. Patterson, a nurturer crossed with a checkpoint guard,
sits at the front desk.

MRS. PATTERSON
Mr. Clay, it's 3:35, and your
daughter is keeping me company in
the office.

ZOE CLAY (5), pink shoes dangling from the adult-sized chair,
is not sure why she's still at school.

MRS. PATTERSON (CONT'D)
(mouthing to Zoe)
It's your dad.

INTERCUT JAMES/MRS. PATTERSON

JAMES
I'm so sorry. We had an emergency.

MRS. PATTERSON
Oh. I hope everything's okay.

JAMES
Don't tell Zoe.
(beat)
Tell her... Tell her that her Uncle
Parker will pick her up.

Mrs. Paterson refers to Zoe's computer profile.

MRS. PATTERSON

Is he authorized to bring her home?

James is not in the mood for another front desk bureaucrat.

JAMES

He's authorized. He's family.

More computer clicks.

MRS. PATTERSON

Parker Ward?

JAMES

That's him.

MRS. PATTERSON

Okay. In the meantime, I'll have to send Zoe to the after-school program.

JAMES

That's fine. I'll call Parker right now.

MRS. PATTERSON

Just so you know, it will cost --

Mrs. Paterson looks at the phone. James hung up.

She looks to Zoe, the caregiver smile returning.

MRS. PATTERSON (CONT'D)

Your uncle will be here shortly, sweetie.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Outside a quiet warehouse. Ghostly. No one in or out.

Watching from a distance --

A BLACK SEDAN

PARKER WARD (40), quietly intense, stakes out the building. He's difficult to read, but there's no mistaking he is in control.

His new partner, SANBORN (27), fidgets in the shotgun seat.

SANBORN
When will they show?

PARKER
If I could predict that, I'd put
that skill to more profitable use.

Sanborn fidgets some more. Parker's phone BUZZES -- the screen reads JAMES -- he sends it to voice mail.

SANBORN
Detective Ward?

PARKER
No need to be so formal.

SANBORN
Right. So, detective, why did you
get stuck with this assignment? I
mean--

PARKER
I prefer it.

The phone BUZZES. James. Parker clicks him off again.

SANBORN
You *prefer* it?

PARKER
And yes, they are always this
boring until you learn to be alert
and relaxed at the same time.

The rookie tries to process this contradiction. Nothing. He opens his mouth when Parker's phone BUZZES again.

Parker holds up his hand to silence him.

PARKER (CONT'D)
(into phone)
I can't talk now.

JAMES (V.O.)
This can't wait. I need you to pick
up Zoe from school.

PARKER
Aren't you the one with the cozy
job and martini lunches?

JAMES (V.O.)
No. It's Laura.

Parker tenses.

PARKER
What happened? Is she okay?

JAMES (V.O.)
There's been an accident.

PARKER
I'll be right there. Call you back.

Parker hangs up.

PARKER (CONT'D)
I gotta go.

SANBORN
Where are we going?

PARKER
Not you.

SANBORN
Wait. What? Our relief isn't due
for another hour.

PARKER
I'll call them early. You know what
to do until then.

Parker exits the car, leaving an unsure Sanborn.

SANBORN
Okay. You got this. You got this.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Parker drives his F-150 truck, consumed in thought.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Parker walks until he reaches a classroom. He looks --

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Zoe colors at a table.

Parker's happy to see her, but the situation weights on him.

Zoe turns -- catches his eye -- returns the same look.

INT. EMERGENCY WAITING ROOM - DAY

James assesses the blood on his knees where the gravel chewed through his slacks. He sits up when --

ZOE

Daddy!

Zoe runs across the lobby. James scoops her up -- pulls her to his chest -- exhales the past few hours over her shoulder.

He sees Parker move toward him in a measured gait. Hard to tell whether Parker is angry or concerned.

PARKER

How is she?

JAMES

I've been trying to get updates.

ZOE

Why are we at the hospital? Where's Mommy?

James lowers Zoe to her feet. He meets her at her level.

JAMES

Mommy's been in an accident. That's why we're at the hospital.

ZOE

Is she sick?

JAMES

Yes, darling. But the doctors are looking after her right now so she can get better.

Zoe seems satisfied with the answer. Parker is not. He aims himself at the nurses station and heads over.

James watches from his seat but can't hear the exchange.

The nurse appears to give the usual speech about zero updates. Parker leans in close. In complete control. When the nurse leaves her station, Parker returns.

PARKER

She's going to get an update.

James thanks him with a nod. Parker sits across from him without a response.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DUSK

As Dr. Henry emerges from the trauma center, James and Parker rise.

HENRY
Mr. Clay?

JAMES
I'm James Clay.

HENRY
I'm Dr. Henry.

JAMES
How is she?

HENRY
We were able to clamp her femoral artery, but she had a good deal of internal bleeding.

JAMES
What does that mean?

HENRY
We don't know yet.

PARKER
When will we know?

HENRY
We need to keep her under observation.

JAMES
Can I see her?

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Dr. Henry leads down the hall. James follows -- tense -- unsteady. Dr. Henry stops outside a room as --

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - SAME

James slows at the door. Stops. After a moment, he enters.

Laura lies in the corner bed below dim lights.

Bandages wrap her neck -- arms -- stomach. The gauze gently pulse with each breath. An IV drips morphine.

James steps to the chair next to his sleeping wife. Slides onto the edge of the seat. He wants to touch her hand but can't get there.

Dr. Henry lingers in the doorway. He appears to mull over some difficult decision.

INT. STAIRWELL - MINUTES LATER

Dr. Henry dials his cell. Makes sure no one's around.

HENRY

It's John.

(beat)

I think I have someone for you.

A MAN'S HAND HANGS UP A ROTARY TELEPHONE.

The phone sits on a mahogany desk in --

INT. SHOEMAKER'S OFFICE - DUSK

An old world office filled with antiques, books, artwork: the plunder of generations.

Standing from the desk --

DR. EMIL SHOEMAKER (60s) -- calm -- powerful -- energy at rest -- reaches for a cane to support his left leg.

He looks out a towering window. He listens to CRASH of the ocean, even if he cannot fully see it. The hidden mysteries of knowledge, waiting to be discovered, or forever elusive.

He grins and SPIKES the floor with his cane.