

Treading Water

written by

Zach Jansen

1066 4th St. E
Saint Paul, MN 55106
zachary.jansen@ymail.com
(651) 793-4055

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FADE IN:

INT. OWENS HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Bright and alive. Sunshine pours in. Baby toys clutter the floor -- stuffed animals, blocks, that ring-stacking thing all kids seem to have...

ED OWENS, early 30s, affable and direct, kneels at one end of the room. His arms outstretched.

AUDREY OWENS, late 20s, down-to-earth and glowing, squats on the other side of the room.

She holds hands with MATT OWENS, 11 months old, adorable and happy. He faces Ed. He wobbles and BABBLES and LAUGHS.

Audrey extends her arms. Matt steps. Steps again -- still clasping his mother's hands.

AUDREY

Good job! One step at a time.

Another step. His arms bend back as he grasps tight to Audrey's fingertips. He lets go -- his tiny hands come together in front of him.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Go to Daddy.

ED

Over here, Matt. You can do it.

Matt CLAPS. He takes another step... then another...

He falls face-first into the floor -- his chin shakes as he starts to WHIMPER.

Audrey leaps to him.

AUDREY

Oh, Matty...

ED

Let him do it.

AUDREY

He doesn't know how.

ED

Let him try.

Audrey hovers over Matt, ready to lift him up.

ED (CONT'D)

Get up, Matt. You can do it.

Tears trickle down the child's face. But he brings his knees to his chest. He plants his feet -- gains his balance...

ED (CONT'D)

Good job, buddy.

Audrey steps back, but stays close behind Matt.

AUDREY

Just a few more steps.

Matt turns to Audrey -- beams at her. He faces Ed. Ed grins, beckons for Matt.

ED

Come on, Matt. You can do it.

Matt takes a step... one more...

Ed's smile grows. He reaches out to his son. Matt smiles and LAUGHS. He's about to fall into Ed's open arms--

INT. OWENS HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY [SIX WEEKS LATER]

An eerie SILENCE fills the now gray, lifeless room. The floor wiped clear of toys -- no sign a child has ever been here.

Ed lies on the couch. Pillows bunch under his head, blankets clump around him. He stares vacantly at the ceiling, dark circles embedded under his eyes.

MASTER BEDROOM

Audrey sprawls on the bed, buried under blankets. Pale and worn, she stares at a BABY MONITOR on the night stand.

Its ON LIGHT glows green. It SHUSHES SILENCE at her.

She slumps out of bed -- already in her robe and slippers -- and grabs the monitor. She slips it into a pocket.

HALLWAY

She shuffles past a door -- decorative wooden letters attached to it spell out "M A T T H E W."

The monitor HISSES QUICK FEEDBACK.

BATHROOM

Audrey gapes at herself in the mirror -- she's beyond exhausted. She splashes water on her face, returns to the mirror -- no better...

Two regular-sized and a small toothbrush stand in a holder on the sink. She grabs her toothbrush, but her eyes lock on the small toothbrush. Her chin quivers...

She lunges for the toilet, lifts the seat. She vomits.

Ed appears in the doorway, dressed for work. He goes to her, rubs her back. She forcibly shrugs him off.

AUDREY

Don't.

ED

You've been throwing up a lot.

AUDREY

It's my process.

Audrey buries her head in the toilet, vomits again. She drags a sleeve across her face.

Ed opens the medicine cabinet. He searches -- bottles CLINK and CLATTER.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

(annoyed)

Just find it.

He snags a PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE hidden in the back. He conceals it from Audrey, drops it in his pocket.

ED

Out of aspirin.

AUDREY

Get some mouthwash. One of those little bottles.

KITCHEN

Water fills a glass.

Ed opens the pill bottle. Three tablets fall into his hand. He pops the pills, takes a swallow of water. He caps the bottle and pockets it.

He whips out his cell phone and dials -- an OUTGOING MESSAGE.
He hangs up as Audrey staggers in.

AUDREY
Who was that?

ED
No one. Breakfast?

AUDREY
What is there?

ED
Eggs.

She scrunches her nose, shakes her head.

ED (CONT'D)
What do you want then?

Audrey shrugs and lurches out.

INT. DRUG STORE -- PHARMACY STOCK ROOM -- DAY

Pills RATTLE onto a counting tray. A separating knife
portions the capsules.

Ed towers over the tray wearing a pharmacist jacket. He caps
a bottle, labels it. He glances around -- he's alone.

He brushes the remaining pills from the tray into his hand
and shoves them in his pocket.

INT. DRUG STORE -- SHOPPING AISLE -- NIGHT

Ed shops, still in his pharmacist jacket. Mouthwash and
other small items in his basket. He tosses in some aspirin.

He passes a section of infant medicines. He grabs a box of
BABY TYLENOL. He studies it.

INT. OWENS HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Audrey lolls on the couch. She stares at the baby monitor as
it spits HUSHED STATIC.

Ed slinks in with a brown grocery bag.

ED
Got the mouthwash.

No answer.

HALLWAY

Ed's fingers run over the block letters on Matt's door.

MATTHEW'S ROOM

Light slices the darkness. Ed enters and surveys the room, unsure if he should be here.

He steps to a bookcase -- Dr. Seuss and Sesame Street books on one shelf. A tiny football and baseball mitt on another.

He wanders to the crib -- of course, it's empty. He reaches in, smooths a crease.

The room goes dark.

AUDREY (O.S.)
I still change the sheets.

ED
It wasn't the sheets.

Audrey trudges in.

AUDREY
You don't know.

Audrey crumbles in the rocking chair. Ed nods at the base monitor.

ED
And that?

AUDREY
Part of my process.

Ed shakes his head.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
At least I'm feeling something.

ED
That group was help--

AUDREY
--I'm not going back there.

ED
We can find another one.

Audrey barely shakes her head, her eyes locked on the crib.

BATHROOM

Ed drops the shopping bag on the toilet. He takes a prescription bottle from the bag, opens it, and swallows a few pills.

He turns on the faucet and drinks straight from the spigot.

He removes two more pill bottles and the mouthwash from the bag and shoves them to the back of the medicine cabinet.

He pulls out his cell and dials -- OUTGOING MESSAGE -- BEEEEP!

ED

Hey... uh... give me a call.

INT. DRUG STORE -- PHARMACY COUNTER -- DAY

A prescription bag is snatched from the pick-up rack.

Ed hands the bag to an ELDERLY WOMAN. She gives him a contrite smile and shuffles away.

ED

Next.

RENEE, early 30s, attractive, caring, steps to the counter. Her shopping cart holds a baby carrier.

RENEE

Hi Ed.

He fails to mask his surprise.

ED

Renee... What are you doing here?

RENEE

Shopping with Danny.

ED

Can I get you something?

RENEE

You called... How's Audrey?

ED

Getting better. I think.

RENEE
Good... That's good.

Ed waits for her to say more...

ED
I'm fine, by the way.

RENEE
Sure, yeah...
(beat)
So, you wanna get something to eat?

INT. OWENS HOUSE -- MATTHEW'S ROOM -- DAY

A sheet stretches over the last corner of the crib mattress.

Audrey pats the sheet smooth, then squeezes the mattress in between the bars.

She staggers to the dresser and opens a drawer. She takes out a shirt and pair of pants -- the outfit Matthew was learning to walk in.

She holds the clothes to her face, inhales deeply.

INT. RENEE'S APARTMENT -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY

The main room in a small apartment. Baby toys cover the floor, Ed's jacket hangs on a chair.

KITCHENETTE

Dishes teeter in a pile in the sink. A Mother's Day card on display on the counter.

RENEE'S BEDROOM

Ed and Renee lie in bed, post coital. Renee runs her fingers over his body. Ed is elsewhere, staring at

A BABY MONITOR on the night stand emits QUIET STATIC. A tiny COUGH bursts from it.

RENEE
He's getting over a cold.

ED
Poor little guy.

RENEE
I've missed you.

ED
Call ahead next time.

RENEE
Thanks for the card. You know Rick
hasn't seen Danny since he left?

Ed listens to the monitor.

RENEE (CONT'D)
I always thought he'd be like you.
With Matt.

ED
He never liked kids. Even as kids.

RENEE
I thought naming Danny after your
guys' dad would change him.

ED
Some guys aren't meant to be dads.

A FULL-ON CRY erupts from the monitor. Renee climbs out of
bed. Throws on her robe...

RENEE
Sorry.

...but Ed is already out the door.

His SOOTHING VOICE joins Danny's CRIES on the monitor.

ED
(through monitor)
Hey, little buddy. It's okay, it's
okay. Shh... It's okay...

Renee wistfully watches the monitor. Danny's CRIES subside.

ED (CONT'D)
(through monitor)
It's all right, Mat--

Renee frowns and a look of concern crawls across her face.

ED (CONT'D)
(through monitor)
--Danny. It's all right...
Everything's going to be okay...

INT. OWENS HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Batteries pop out of a baby monitor.

Ed wanders in, carrying an envelope. Audrey tosses the batteries aside, keeping her eyes on the monitor.

ED

Hey...

He offers her the envelope.

She reaches out and grabs... new batteries from the coffee table. She SNAPS them in place -- the monitor SPITS SILENCE.

ED (CONT'D)

Here.

Audrey glances at the envelope.

AUDREY

Where were you?

ED

Work.

AUDREY

What time is it?

ED

This is for you.

Audrey takes the envelope and opens it -- a card with a floral design and intricate lettering.

ED (CONT'D)

Happy Mother's Day.

AUDREY

Is this a joke?

ED

It's a card.

AUDREY

What are you doing?

ED

You're still a mother. Kind of...

AUDREY

Kind of?

ED
You are. A mother.

AUDREY
What is wrong with you?

ED
I'm just trying to help.

AUDREY
How is this helping?!

ED
I don't... What do you want from me?
Okay? Just tell me what you want.

Audrey slams the card on the table, bursts into tears.

AUDREY
I want to stop hurting!

ED
Then stop!

AUDREY
I can't!

ED
Try! Dammit, Audrey, he's gone!

AUDREY
He? He had a name!

ED
He had a life! And now...

He collects himself.

ED (CONT'D)
And now we need to move on.

AUDREY
I don't want to forget Matthew!

ED
Goddamnit!

Ed punches the wall.

MATTHEW'S ROOM

Ed rages in. He SCREAMS -- raw and guttural.

He rips a drawer out of the dresser and dumps its contents. He yanks another drawer and empties it as well.

He lunges at the bookcase -- with a broad sweep of his arm books and toys CRASH to the floor.

He pounces for the crib. He shoves it into the wall. He struggles to lift it -- then SMASHES it on the floor. A few bars break free.

He THUDS it into the wall again... and again...

AUDREY (O.S.)

STOP IT!

Audrey flies in. She fights her tears as she SLAPS at Ed.

He pushes her away.

She hits the wall and melts to the floor.

Ed lumbers to the base monitor. He heaves it into the wall above Audrey's head.

It EXPLODES, raining plastic and electronic shrapnel onto her.

Ed catches his breath. He assesses the scene he's created -- and hurries out of the room.

Audrey gathers the broken pieces of the monitor -- but collapses in a tearful heap.

INT. RENEE'S APARTMENT -- LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Ed reclines on the couch, nursing a beer. Renee sits on the floor across from him. She plays with the hem of her shirt.

The HUSHED WHISPER OF STATIC streams from the baby monitor.

RENEE

Are you going to...

ED

I don't know.

RENEE

It's just your way.

ED

I don't even know what that means.

RENEE
I know... When Rick left I didn't
know what I was supposed to do.

ED
My son didn't leave me.

RENEE
You go through the same emotions--

A QUICK CRY eeks from the monitor. Then SILENCE.

RENEE (CONT'D)
--but eventually everything goes
back to normal. Or a new normal...

A SOFT, CONTINUOUS CRY seeps from the monitor. Ed slams his
beer, clangs the empty bottle on the coffee table.

ED
I can get him.

Renee springs to her feet.

RENEE
Let me.

ED
Really, it's okay.

RENEE
I don't want him to get confused.

ED
About what?

RENEE
I have to think about what's best
for him.

ED
What's that suppo--

An EAR-PIERCING WAIL explodes from the monitor -- keeps going
at a HIGH VOLUME. Renee heads out of the room.

RENEE
I can take care of my son.

ED
What?

She stops, looks to Ed.

RENEE
I didn't mean anything.

ED
You meant something.

Danny's SCREAMING continues.

RENEE
I know--

ED
--Matt died. Nothing could have
stopped it.

She hesitates -- steals a glance towards Danny's room. She goes to Ed.

He pushes her away.

RENEE
Ed, I'm sorry.

Ed marches to the front door.

RENEE (CONT'D)
You know, sometimes you're just
like your brother.

Ed SLAMS the door. Danny's CRIES continue.

INT. OWENS HOUSE -- MATTHEW'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Everything looks in place -- other than the broken crib.

Audrey places some folded clothes in the dresser. She covers her mouth and retches dryly.

BATHROOM

Audrey stands up from kneeling at the toilet. She flushes.

She steps to the sink and grabs the mouthwash from the medicine cabinet. She takes a swig. Gargles. Spits.

She puts the mouthwash back in the medicine cabinet. She rifles through the other bottles...

...and finds Ed's pill bottles.

INT. OWENS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Ed flings open the fridge. He slides containers around.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Where were you?

Ed jumps, SLAMMING the fridge door. Audrey glares at him.
He heads into the

LIVING ROOM

Audrey follows.

AUDREY
Don't walk away from me.

ED
(explosive)
WHY?! Why the hell does it matter?!

AUDREY
Because I care!

ED
How can you? There's nothing! We
have nothing!

AUDREY
There's us.

ED
(calming)
Us?

They regard each other.

ED (CONT'D)
Every time I look at you I see him.

AUDREY
It wasn't my--

ED
--I see him in me.

Audrey reveals a prescription bottle.

ED (CONT'D)
We heal in different ways.

AUDREY
We don't have to.

They stare at each other -- who's going to make the first move...

AUDREY (CONT'D)
We can... I'll try the group grief
thing again. If you want.

Ed goes to her and they embrace. It's been a while since they've really touched each other.

ED
I'm sleeping with Renee.

Audrey pulls away. A quizzical look on her face.

ED (CONT'D)
Since Matt died...

AUDREY
Renee?

He nods quickly, repeatedly.

ED
I needed... You weren't--

AUDREY
--Me? You're blaming me?

ED
I'm not blaming anyone, I'm just
trying to--

She SMACKS him -- hard.

AUDREY
I'm grieving for our son and
you're out banging your brother's
girlfriend?

Ed starts to speak -- then shrugs.

Audrey shoves him, takes another swat at him. He takes it.

She pushes him onto the couch. A few more SMACKS.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I can't believe...

She blinks -- her head wobbles on her neck. She stumbles backward and

THUD

INT. HOSPITAL -- WAITING ROOM -- NIGHT

BUZZING fluorescent lights illuminate the sterility. The TV plays ESPN -- highlights from an early season baseball game.

Ed sits in a worn, sun-faded chair, talking with a DOCTOR.

PATIENT'S ROOM

Dim, ominous. Audrey sleeps, an I.V. in her arm. Various monitoring machines BEEP and BOOP.

Ed slumps in a chair next to Audrey's bed, watching her sleep. He sifts through a handful of papers.

Audrey MOANS. Ed looks to her. She's awake, but groggy.

AUDREY

What happened...

ED

Exhaustion, malnourishment. They want to keep you a couple of days.

Audrey closes her eyes. She swallows and licks her lips. She fights her tears.

AUDREY

I can't take care of anything...

ED

Don't do that...

AUDREY

You can't stand me. And my baby...

The tears flow -- it's too hard to resist them.

ED

We'll be okay. We'll... We can get through this.

AUDREY

Come on, Eddie... Is it really worth it?

ED

Matt wasn't our only connection.

She shakes her head.

AUDREY

I'm feel like I'm drowning...

ED
We'll make it work.

He grasps her hand. Tight.

ED (CONT'D)
We have to.

He shows her one of the papers:

A sonogram revealing the distinct outline of a twelve-week-developed fetus.

FADE OUT.