

Guilt
by
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FADE IN:

EXT. HENDERSON PARK - DAY

A large, grassy field with mounds and trenches. A gentle, rocky creek encapsulates the park like a tiny trench.

In the center of the park, perfectly positioned on the only flat surface, is a red-and-white checkerboard blanket. A middle-aged couple prepares lunch.

WILL POWELL (35), a rail-thin man with pale skin and tired eyes, looks up at the afternoon sun as if seeing it for the first time. He squints and rubs his forehead.

Will's wife, MICHELLE (33), watches him carefully. She's cute, but even with her silky black hair and green eyes, this is a woman who is trying too hard to look happier than she is.

MICHELLE

I saw some new flowers by the entrance. Daisies, I think.

Michelle grabs a grape from a bowl. She slowly pushes it into her mouth.

WILL

I didn't notice.

He speaks slowly and with little interest, never looking Michelle in the eye. He takes a bite of his sandwich.

Michelle wipes her fingers on her jeans.

MICHELLE

They put up some new signs, too.

Will stops chewing, eyes wide and curious.

MICHELLE

They're all around the creek. You probably didn't see those, either.

WILL

What kind of signs?

A pause. She doesn't answer. Will chews again.

The couple eats in silence. A bird CHIRPS overhead. Will looks up, follows the bird as it swoops down and lands on the edge of the distant sidewalk, where a FATHER and his LITTLE BOY walk hand-in-hand.

EXT. HENDERSON PARK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Two similar hands, breaking apart, as the tiny hand flails through the air, reaching for something to grab.

EXT. HENDERSON PARK - DAY (PRESENT)

Will blinks and wipes his brow. The father and the little boy have disappeared on the other side of the hill.

MICHELLE

I was talking with your mom earlier.

Will takes another bite.

MICHELLE

She said she would really like it if we came over for Easter.

Will carries the same lack of interest.

MICHELLE

They finished the guest room. They added double doors. I think she said they went with an olive color. I bet it's really pretty.

Will picks up his drink, just as the blanket catches in the wind, lifting up, spilling Michelle's drink and other dishes of food.

Michelle grabs a large rock, smooths out the blanket, and sets the rock down on the corner of the cloth.

Will stares at the rock, remembering.

EXT. HENDERSON PARK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A similar rock, with splashing water running past it.

A small THOMAS & FRIENDS sneaker steps onto the rock's wet surface. No grip. It slides right off.

There's a little boy's GASP. Then a man's horrified SCREAM.

EXT. HENDERSON PARK - DAY (PRESENT)

The rock, still on the corner of the blanket. The same SCREAM reaches its crescendo before dying off in a trailing wail. Will sits motionless, mesmerized by the rock.

MICHELLE

Will?

He doesn't flinch. Michelle scoots forward.

MICHELLE

William? Are you okay?

Will finally snaps out of it, blinking uncontrollably.

WILL

I gotta get out of here, Michelle.

Will pushes everything to the inside of the blanket.

MICHELLE

Will, wait!

WILL

I can't be here.

Will grabs the corners of the blanket, holding them together. He pulls it up, using the blanket like a makeshift sack.

Michelle snatches at Will's hands in an attempt to stop him.

MICHELLE

William, please.

WILL

It's this place...the guilt...

MICHELLE

I know, William!

WILL

I could've held him tighter...

MICHELLE

What happened to Jake is not your fault!

WILL

I let him in the creek...

(CONTINUED)

MICHELLE
I don't blame you!

WILL
I'm sorry...

Michelle suddenly grabs Will's face, looking him dead in the eyes. Her lips quiver as she speaks.

MICHELLE
You don't have to be sorry anymore!

A pause. Will drops the blanket and wraps his arms around her.

WILL
This was supposed to help. Coming here.

MICHELLE
I know.

WILL
I can't forgive myself, Michelle.

Michelle leans closer, her lips practically touching his ear.

MICHELLE
You're not the only one living with guilt.

A single tear rolls down Michelle's cheek as she closes her eyes. It's now or never.

MICHELLE
(cracking)
You're not his father.

Will slowly pulls back. Michelle keeps her eyes closed, cupping her hands over her mouth and nose. Tears stream down her cheeks.

WILL
No.

MICHELLE
I'm sorry.

WILL
No.

MICHELLE
I meant to tell you before.

WILL
No.

MICHELLE
It was one night. We were on a
break.

WILL
(stern)
No.

There's a lasting silence, almost unending.

Will stumbles back and locks his fingers behind his head.

MICHELLE
Please talk to me.

WILL
You want me to leave.

MICHELLE
I wanted you to have a choice.

WILL
I don't.

MICHELLE
I love you.

Will looks into her eyes for the first time by his own
accord. Michelle looks back. An intense moment of silence.

WOMAN (O.S.)
We're back!

MRS. POWELL (65), short white hair and a round center,
pushes a wheelchair down the hill.

Sitting in the chair, wearing a blue THOMAS & FRIENDS hat,
is JAKE POWELL (5). He's paralyzed from the neck down.

MRS. POWELL
Jake, tell your mom what we saw by
the playground.

JAKE
(lisp)
A big lizard!

(CONTINUED)

Michelle clears her throat and wipes her eyes, quickly changing her miserable expression to a happy one.

MICHELLE

A big lizard, huh? I wish I could have seen that!

JAKE

It was green and huge! Bigger than me!

Mrs. Powell looks at the blanket covered in spilled food and drinks. She CLICKS her tongue in disappointment.

MRS. POWELL

(to Jake)

Looks like the wind blew away our lunch. How about Mom unlocks the van so we can get some extra snacks?

JAKE

Yeah!

Mrs. Powell wheels Jake away. Michelle looks at Will, a final glance, and follows the two up the hill.

JAKE (O.S.)

You coming, Daddy?

The word paralyzes Will. He holds his breath, his eyes contemplating.

Finally, Will picks up the picnic blanket, pulls it over his shoulder, and runs to catch up.

WILL

Right behind you, champ!

END.