

SHORT CHANGE HERO

By
Mark Skinner

Email: three3points@hotmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. BOSTON - MAIN STREET - DAY

SUPER: BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 1902

Snow on the ground. Grey skies.

A plethora of activity as shops are decorated for Christmas.

The flower shop on the corner particularly stands out, largely because of the array of floral specimens on display, and the myriad of striking hues that offer a contrast to winter's guise.

A MAN and his DAUGHTER enter the shop.

INT. FLORIST - DAY

Lights are on and colour abounds.

The florist, VIRGIL COTTER(50s), can be seen preparing an arrangement of flowers at his work-top.

CU - A SMALL CHILD'S HAND HOLDING A LILAC NEW YORK ASTER FLOWER

SARAH (O.S.)

Do you like this one daddy?

She twiddles the flower between her fingers.

SARAH(10) is dressed for the cold, though her coat is unbuttoned. She wears a hat and scarf. Her gloves can be seen in her pockets.

SARAH's father, ELIJAH GUNNWOOD(30s), a well-dressed and elegant man, reaches down and picks another of the same flower. He also twiddles it between his fingers.

ELIJAH

These were the first flowers I ever bought her.

SARAH looks up at her father adoringly.

ELIJAH smiles to himself.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

They make her sneeze. They make her eyes water. They used to make us smile.

INT. GUNNWOOD HOME - WORKSHOP - SAME

A gunsmith's workshop. The mainstay of the room consists of a work surface; a couple of display cabinets; shelving - some of which is home to neatly kept precision tools, as well as examples of various firearms; and a wood burning stove. There's a single window that faces out onto the street.

EMILY GUNNWOOD(30s) glides around the room. Dressed in a white dress, wrapped in a shawl and wearing a somewhat solemn expression, she appears beautifully ethereal.

She moves along the edge of the work surface, touching, sometimes picking up, tools and gun parts. She looks at them with an intriguing disinterest.

Just as she picks up the stock of a handgun, her eyes are taken by a photograph of her, ELIJAH and SARAH.

A tear rolls down her cheek.

INT. FLORIST - CONTINUOUS

VIRGIL, now more visible, is a mountain of a man. He stands with ELIJAH and SARAH, who is perched on the fourth rung of a step ladder to improve her position.

VIRGIL hands SARAH a burgundy rose.

SARAH
(taking the flower)
It's beautiful.

VIRGIL
That's what it means. Unconscious
beauty. Pure and genuine.

INT. GUNNWOOD HOME - WORKSHOP - SAME

EMILY has the picture of her, ELIJAH and SARAH in one hand whilst she works her way along a shelf strewn with handguns. She caresses each gun as she passes. Occasionally she pauses, examining some more than others.

At the end of the shelf is a cabinet. EMILY stops at the cabinet and stares at the polished Colt .45 Peacemaker revolver displayed within.

She slowly opens the door and lifts out the gun.

After a few moments she places the picture in the cabinet, where the gun was, and carefully closes the door.

She gently fingers the glass of the cabinet door, just in front of the picture, as if reaching for her family.

INT. FLORIST - CONTINUOUS

VIRGIL finishes wrapping a bouquet of burgundy and white spray roses. He makes his way round the edge of his work-top and, crouching down, hands the bouquet to SARAH.

SARAH

Thank you.

VIRGIL stands back up as ELIJAH offers him his hand.

ELIJAH

Thank you Virgil.

VIRGIL

(shaking hands)

Give my love to Emily.

ELIJAH nods.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

(still clasping ELIJAH's
hand)

You've got to believe Elijah...
that she will be OK.

ELIJAH acknowledges the advice.

SARAH and ELIJAH turn to leave.

SARAH

(shouting out)

Merry Christmas, Mr. Cotter.

VIRGIL

And a very Merry Christmas to you
too, Miss. Gunnwood.

INT. GUNNWOOD HOME - WORKSHOP - SAME

EMILY stands at the work-top, the Colt .45 in her hand. She peers out of the window at the falling snow.

Tears stream down her face. She cocks the hammer on the gun and the cylinder revolves to align the next chamber and round with the hammer and barrel.

She raises the gun and puts the barrel under her chin.

EXT. STREET - FLORIST - CONTINUOUS

Daylight fades. Street lamps are on.

ELIJAH helps SARAH button up her coat and put on her gloves as the snowfall becomes more intense.

The beat of a drum, somewhat resembling a gunshot, is heard. Both ELIJAH and SARAH are startled and turn to look out across the street as...

A CHOIR begins to sing the carol 'It Came Upon A Midnight Clear'. A DRUMMER BOY is part of the instrumental accompaniment.

ELIJAH puts his arm around SARAH as they both merrily gaze at the choir for a few moments.

As the light fades further, the warm, seemingly flickering amber glow of the street lamps, along with the light emanating from the windows of the buildings that line the streets, embraces this corner of Boston.

EXT. GUNNWOOD HOME - WORKSHOP - SAME

A free standing trade shop with a three bedroom family home adjoining.

No lights are on. Nearby buildings and homes seem to offer equally little life.

A light comes on a few houses down, followed by the street lamps.

INT. GUNNWOOD HOME - DAY

Early evening. It's dark. The front door opens.

ELIJAH steps in.

ELIJAH
(calling out)
Hello? Emily? We're home.

No answer.

SARAH squeezes past him with the flowers.

SARAH
Mummy, mummy. We've got you something.

She scurries towards the stairs.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Mummy.

ELIJAH closes the door and moves to turn on a gaslight.

ELIJAH
Wait for me Sarah. And be careful you don't fall.

INT. GUNNWOOD HOME - MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ELIJAH stands in the doorway as SARAH brushes past him and crosses the landing to another room.

ELIJAH stares at the empty cradle at the bottom of the bed.

ELIJAH
(shouting)
Stop Sarah. Stop.

He walks to the cradle and stands over it as SARAH reappears in the doorway.

SARAH
Mummy never goes out.

ELIJAH picks up a blanket from the cradle.

SARAH (CONT'D)
You could have another baby?

ELIJAH replaces the blanket. He moves round and sits on the edge of the bed, facing the door.

He motions for SARAH to sit beside him. SARAH trudges over and plops herself down next to ELIJAH. She still grips the bouquet of flowers.

Beat.

ELIJAH hesitates. He turns to SARAH.

ELIJAH
Promise me you'll stay here until I
call you.

SARAH
I can look with you.

ELIJAH
Promise me Sarah, please.

She fiddles with the rose petals.

SARAH
I won't run.

ELIJAH
Please, Sarah.

SARAH
I promise.

ELIJAH kisses her on the forehead before getting up and leaving the room.

INT. GUNNWOOD HOME - WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

ELIJAH steps into the doorway with a lantern in his hand. He places it on the side, beside the door, thus illuminating the room somewhat.

As he turns, amidst the shadows, he sees EMILY lying on the ground, a pool of blood around her head and shoulders. The Colt .45 is held loosely in her hand.

ELIJAH drops to his knees.

SARAH comes round the corner and enters the workshop before ELIJAH can stop her.

SARAH
I was scared Daddy.

She instantly sees her mother and instinctively rushes to her, dropping the flowers.

She kneels in the blood, screaming as she realises what it is.

ELIJAH scrambles to her and clutches her in his arms.

As ELIJAH moves to brush SARAH's hair from her eyes he inadvertently smears her mother's blood across her forehead.

SARAH is sobbing profusely, her head resting on ELIJAH's shoulder. Tears stream down his cheeks.

EXT. BOSTON - STREETS - NIGHT

Snow falls heavily.

EXT. BOSTON - CEMETERY - DAY

ELIJAH and SARAH stand, surrounded by gravestones. They look down at one. On it is engraved: EMILY ANN GUNNWOOD, 1871 - 1902, Beautiful and loving mother and wife.

SARAH carefully places a single burgundy rose on the grave.

INT. GUNNWOOD HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Strong winds can be heard outside.

ELIJAH and VIRGIL sit at the dining room table, each with a shot of whiskey. The bottle is positioned between them.

VIRGIL
If you go out west, you're going to
need to carry a gun, Elijah.
(MORE)

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

There are all sorts of folk out there, and plenty of them won't hesitate to draw on you for little less than spilling their whisky.

ELIJAH

Maybe so.

Beat.

VIRGIL

It's not your fault.

ELIJAH doesn't flinch.

He raises his glass, knocks back the shot, and quickly refills it.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

You'll see her again.

ELIJAH smiles, somewhat halfheartedly.

ELIJAH

I see her every time I try to work, Virgil. Every time I pick up a gun, I see her, my wife, on the floor in a pool of her own blood, with a bullet in her head, that she put there herself, because she blamed herself for our baby...Our son... For him being born already dead.

Beat.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Me, my work...Not only did I not understand, I didn't listen, I didn't give her the time...but I put the gun in her hand.

VIRGIL

If it wasn't a gun, it would have been something else, Elijah.

ELIJAH knocks back another shot, refills the glass once more, and knocks back the second shot.

ELIJAH

(closes his eyes)

I just want to close my eyes and see her smiling, remember her...

As he refills the glass SARAH comes trundling round the corner and into the room. She is dressed in her night gown and clutches a teddy bear.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)
I thought you were supposed to be
asleep?

SARAH
The wind is too loud.

She sits herself down beside her father.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(to VIRGIL)
Are we going away?

ELIJAH and VIRGIL exchange looks.

VIRGIL
Was the wind so loud that you could
hear what me and your father were
saying?

She fiddles with a loose eye on her teddy.

SARAH
I don't like this house without
mummy.

ELIJAH puts his arm around SARAH. She snuggles into him.

VIRGIL leans back in his chair.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. MONTANA - DAY

SUPER: BITTERROOT VALLEY, MONTANA, 5 YEARS LATER

A bright, crisp early morning toward late fall.

The perennially snow-capped mountains dominate the western horizon.

Below the tree line coniferous forest carpets the area. Patches of agricultural grazing land, rivers and streams do somewhat break up the wooded consistency.

EXT. FOREST - CLEARING - DAY

Several deer feeding on the lush grass, lift their heads and listen intently for a few moments. Making up their minds that it is nothing to concern them, they resume their grazing.

EXT. GUNNWOOD HOMESTEAD - DAY

A small wooden bungalow with a barn and a coral, with two horses in it.

The entire property is surrounded by a wooden fence, and faces north, up the valley.

The bend of a river can be seen away to the west.

The track leading to the property arcs round the east side, obscured by woodland for much of its length.

ELIJAH stands on the porch with a cup of coffee, looking towards the mountains. Unshaven and dressed for the outdoors, he's a man apart from the person he was in Boston.

A young man, NATE STANTON(18), approaches, driving a flatbed horse drawn wagon.

ELIJAH steps down from the porch as NATE reaches the property.

NATE brings the wagon to a halt and jumps down.

He removes a provisions parcel from the back and hands it to ELIJAH. ELIJAH takes it in one hand, still sipping his coffee with the other.

NATE

Ma thought you might like some fresh bread, baked this morning. Some coffee too, from Europe.

ELIJAH

From Europe, eh? What would we do without her.

NATE

She asked if you and Sarah would like to come over for dinner on Sunday.

NATE's becomes distracted, his gaze taken by SARAH(15) who has just stepped onto the porch, also with a cup of coffee in her hand.

ELIJAH glances back over his shoulder before looking back at NATE, who seems to have become somewhat nervous.

SARAH

(calling over)
Would you like a coffee, Nate?

NATE switches his look from ELIJAH to SARAH and back to ELIJAH.

NATE

I, I guess...

ELIJAH turns to go back to the house, grinning to himself. SARAH sits down on the porch.

ELIJAH
(looking back at NATE)
We'd love to come for dinner. You
can tell your mother when you get
back. But for now, we've got a lot
to do this morning.

ELIJAH tips out the dregs of his coffee as he walks.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)
And go drink your coffee before it
gets cold.

NATE catches up with ELIJAH.

As they reach the porch, SARAH offers NATE the coffee. He
takes it and pauses.

ELIJAH continues on into the house.

NATE sits down on the porch beside SARAH, a little more
relaxed.

SARAH nudges NATE.

SARAH
You don't need to be scared of my
dad.

NATE brushes off the remark.

SARAH (CONT'D)
He likes you.

NATE
Yeah, right.

ELIJAH steps back out.

ELIJAH
Who likes who?

NATE jumps up.

NATE
I, I said I like coffee too. That
Sarah, your daughter, she makes a
good pot of coffee.

ELIJAH smiles.

ELIJAH
(looking at SARAH)
Come on, Nate.