

MITCH

31.

11-1-14

ACT TWO

CLOSE ON A BLACK BEAR, as it "ROOOOARS"... We WIDEN OUT TO:

EXT. L.A. ZOO - BEAR ENCLOSURE - DAY

MITCH LARKIN (30s, hyper-intelligent, with a moppish awkwardness), emerges from the enclosure, hands dirty. He carries VIALS of a brownish substance...

Jaime stands at the edge of the enclosure, calling out:

START  
#1

JAMIE  
Mitchell Larkin?

MITCH LARKIN  
Yes. Although it's "Mitch". Which isn't much better than "Mitchell". But it's all I had to work with...

JAMIE  
Jamie Paulson. "L.A. Times".

Jamie offers her hand, but:

MITCH LARKIN  
I'm not gonna shake your hand...

He holds up the vials...

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)  
Samples. Put it this way: *the woods* are not the only place a bear, uh, *relieves himself*... Never mind. How can I help you?

He smiles sheepishly, more than a bit taken with her looks.

JAMIE  
You're the animal coroner, right? You ran the autopsy on the two lions who escaped--?

MITCH LARKIN  
Ethologist.

JAMIE  
I'm sorry--?

MITCH LARKIN  
Ethologist. Not coroner. I study the behavior of animals in natural conditions.

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DONNA ROSENSTEIN CASTING

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JAMIE  
(re: the Zoo)  
And unnatural conditions...

MITCH LARKIN  
Yeah. Those, too. But if the story  
you're after is that the lions were  
mistreated, I'm afraid I'm only going  
to disappoint you...

JAMIE  
But they were agitated enough to kill  
the zookeeper and two others?

MITCH LARKIN  
Yes. I have a theory about that.  
And it, too, will most likely  
disappoint you.

JAMIE  
Try me.

**END**

**EXT. RIVERINE FOREST - AFRICA - DAY**

Oz drives the Land Rover down this narrow slash of jungle  
road. Chloe is finally starting to calm down. A tad.

OZ  
Are you okay--?

CHLOE  
No, I have never been less okay.

OZ  
Here, this will help --

And he takes a FLASK from his pocket... Hands it to her...

OZ (CONT'D)  
Kentucky bourbon.

She unscrews the cap. Takes a sip. Then another. Oz allows  
the bourbon to work its magic... Then:

OZ (CONT'D)  
My name's Jackson.

CHLOE  
Chloe.

OZ  
Can you tell me what happened, Chloe?

Oz stares at her, realizing that she's waiting for an answer.

OZ

... I don't know

She nods. Then, of the bourbon:

CHLOE

They do good work in Kentucky.

And as she takes another sip...

**INT. MEDICAL TREATMENT ROOM - ZOO - DAY**

A fully-tricked out ANIMAL TREATMENT ROOM. Which is almost like a surgical theater. Only everything supersized. Larkin leads Jamie to a massive EXAM TABLE.

MITCH LARKIN

Meet Adam and Eve...

MITCHELL pulls back the sheet on the exam table, revealing:  
THE AUTOPSIED BODIES of the two LIONS. Jamie grimaces.

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

They're siblings. Captured in the Serengeti at eight months old. They were living in that enclosure for the past fourteen years... Without incident. Here...

Mitch offers her a BUSINESS CARD.

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

Mitchell Larkin, Associate Professor, UCSD. If you're going to quote me, go with "Mitchell", it'll make my mother happy. She still wishes I hadn't given up my cello lessons. Don't ask.

JAMIE

But funding was recently pulled. I know the cutbacks affected the Landscaping Department and Janitorial Services. Rumor has it the men's rooms are now, sadly, devoid of urinal cakes. But isn't it possible that the well-being of the animals was also affected --

MITCH LARKIN

Anything is always possible. But not based on what I see here.

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Mitch pulls a FILE, and hands it to Jamie. As she reads...

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

Their body fat content was normal.  
No signs of bruising or lacerations.  
They were healthy, well-fed, well-  
adjusted creatures.

He moves to a PAN beside the table. On which there are --

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

Brains were each 250 grams, which is  
the high end of normal, but that's  
still, you know, normal. If you  
don't want to take my word for it, I  
can show you...

Mitch indicates the lions --

JAMIE

No, that's okay. I'd rather not see  
any half-chewed body parts.

MITCH LARKIN

Oh, there were no body parts. The  
lions didn't feed.

JAMIE

Is that... Typical?

MITCH LARKIN

Depends on your definition of  
typical. Typically, when a lion  
kills, the male eats first. He fills  
up til he's satisfied, and the female  
eats the remains. But then, people  
aren't their typical food source.

Jamie considers that.

JAMIE

You said you had a theory?

Larkin nods, gestures to the lions on the slab --

MITCH LARKIN

You don't wanna see this anymore, do  
you -- ?

JAMIE

No...

Larkin covers the lions back up with the sheet.

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MITCH LARKIN

A professor of mine at Harvard... My mentor really... He would say that they did it to ensure their own survival...

JAMIE

Their own survival? That zookeeper and those golfers in no way threatened those lions...

MITCH LARKIN

His theory, not mine. Among the many things he said, my professor would say that we all -- *humans* -- are the greatest threat to the continued existence of life on this planet. And that one day all the "*lesser creatures*" would figure that out.

JAMIE

... Come on --

MITCH LARKIN

I didn't say it was a *sane* theory. Though they all laughed at Newton when he proposed his notion of gravity.

Mitch deposits the brains into plastic specimen bags, which he seals inside travel containers as:

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

Anyway, it sort of loses its bubbles when you consider the eleven...

JAMIE

The eleven what?

MITCH LARKIN

The eleven times zoo lions have killed humans with no apparent mistreatment or provocation...

JAMIE

... ever?

MITCH LARKIN

Three hundred and fifty zoos in the United States. Which collectively attract 175 million visitors a year. The first one opened in 1874.

(MORE)

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MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

And, in all that time, there are only eleven documented cases of unprovoked lions killing humans... And approximately six hundred and twelve people that choked to death on hot dogs bought at the zoo...

(he looks at her, grins)

If the lions are waging a turf war, the hot dogs are doing a better job.

**EXT. ZOO - DAY**

Mitch walks Jamie through the grounds...

JAMIE

So, what now?

MITCH LARKIN

Now? Now I head back to San Diego. I teach at eight a.m., can't miss the first day of school.

JAMIE

But don't you want to know why this happened? So it doesn't happen again?

MITCH LARKIN

I'm confused. Is this still about budget cuts? Because, like I said, there's nothing to that.

JAMIE

I dunno. Maybe I'm looking for the unicorn that killed Kennedy...

MITCH LARKIN

Should I understand that? Is that, like, a saying?

JAMIE

No...

MITCH LARKIN

I'm sorry I couldn't give you what you wanted. But sometimes a mystery remains a mystery.

Jamie nods... Resigned...

JAMIE

Right. Like missing cats in Brentwood...

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MITCH LARKIN

Is that another saying?

JAMIE

No. Apparently there's a rash of missing cats in Brentwood.

MITCH LARKIN

Are you sure they've gone missing? Maybe they just couldn't get into a good private school.

Jamie smiles. Awkward as he is, he's kinda charming. She hands him a business card...

JAMIE

My cell number is on there. If you think of anything...

**END**

I/E. RIVERINE FOREST / LAND ROVER - MOVING - DAY

Red-orange tones shaft through the leafy greens of the forest's canopy, suggesting the approach of dusk... They drive in silence for a beat... Then:

OZ

I never asked: did you have... A friend or loved one with you? Did you lose someone?

CHLOE

No. But this is my honeymoon...

OZ

Was your husband... ?

CHLOE

My husband is back in Paris. Although he never became my husband. Five weeks before we were to be married I learned of his love for a travel agent with an office on Rue De Rivoli...

OZ

I'm sorry. That must have been a shock...

CHLOE

It was. I did not know there was still such a thing as travel agents.

He looks at her... She smiles slightly. Her sense of humor returning, albeit slowly. But he appreciates it.

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ACT FOUR

## EXT. BRENTWOOD - NIGHT

Jamie pulls her car to the curb on this dark, quiet, tree-lined street. Larkin is there waiting for her in front of a LARGE BRICK BUILDING. As she joins him:

**START** → JAMIE

I thought you said you were heading back to San Diego...

**#3** Unlike his earlier enthusiasm, Larkin looks somewhat drawn. Like he's reeling a little.

MITCH LARKIN

I was. But then I got to thinking about what you said. *Dozens* of missing cats. It seemed so... Odd.  
(beat)

Domestic cats will wander but they always return to their food source, which suggested maybe there was a predator...

JAMIE

Okay...

MITCH LARKIN

I figured I'd drive around this neighborhood a bit. See if I saw anything...

Jamie smiles a bit at the absurdity of this...

JAMIE

You went on a cat stakeout?

MITCH LARKIN

Something like that...

(shrugs)

Sounds foolish, I know... Then one ran across the road. A Siamese. Which means someone's pet. So I followed it.

JAMIE

You followed a cat--?

MITCH LARKIN

Yes. Which isn't easy...



JAMIE  
Okay, you're kind of freaking me out  
right now...

MITCH LARKIN  
You're not the only one...

Which is not at all comforting to her. After a beat:

JAMIE  
So what happened? To the cat? Where  
is it?

Rather than answer her, Larkin snaps on a FLASHLIGHT.

MITCH LARKIN  
You should see for yourself.

He turns and starts down a WOODED PATH beside the building.  
As Jamie follows, we CUT TO:

**EXT. EMERGENCY SHELTER - AFRICAN DELTA - NIGHT**

Oz and Chloe reach the small, wood framed EMERGENCY SHELTER.  
Oz dials the combination lock as:

OZ  
"The Defiant Pup 1."

CHLOE  
What is that?

OZ  
Up until today, I thought it was a  
student...

The lock undone, he opens the door.

**INT. EMERGENCY SHELTER - AFRICA - NIGHT**

Oz and Chloe enter. Oz flips on the lights to reveal the  
bare necessities for survival...

Shelves of first aid supplies. A potbellied stove in the  
middle of the room. A bathroom and small bedroom off to the  
back. The air is stale; no one's been here in a while. Oz  
moves to a HIGH-FREQUENCY RADIO. As he powers it up:

OZ  
My father was a scientist. He had  
all sorts of theories about animal  
behavior. Some of it real out-there  
stuff, but plausible.

(MORE)

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