

Madeleine
by
Roger Beckett

FADE IN:

1

EXT: SIDEWALK CAFE - DAY

1

A pleasantly warm Spring day in a nice neighborhood. The little storefront cafe has a few small tables out on the sidewalk to take advantage of the lovely weather.

There are very few cars on this side street, lending to the quiet atmosphere. The lack of noise and proximity to coffee and inexpensive food attracts a variety of students. On any given day, the cafe caters to artists of all types and draws the literary crowd as well.

This day, the streetside tables are all empty, save for one. At a table close to the front door, an attractive ASIAN GIRL, is reading a paperback while stirring her latte. She occasionally looks up at the passersby, which are few at this time of day.

From around the corner, a young man, MICHAEL (mid 20s) emerges. He is struggling with an overstuffed briefcase and a handful of looseleaf notebooks, which look ready to escape his grasp at any moment.

Even with intense concentration on his burden, he manages to notice the cute girl at the cafe and carefully maneuvers closer. She looks up from her novel to watch the balancing act for a second, then returns to her story.

Just as things look ready to collapse, Michael aims for a nearby table and the notebooks fall to the tabletop, some spilling extra papers and envelopes. A few of the envelopes fall to the ground.

He gives a roguish grin to the girl, but she doesn't seem to notice. Undeterred, he doffs his denim jacket to drape it over a seat that gives him the best vantage point.

Michael then arranges the notebooks in a more orderly pile on the table and makes room for his briefcase. He then bends to pick up the envelopes and sets them on the table next to the notebooks. The envelopes have writing in red ink that catches the eye. Phrases like "Past Due", and "Final Notice" are visible.

Just then, a bored looking waitress sidles up to the table, order pad in hand. She looks a question at Michael, who gives her a winning smile and places the order.

Without emotion, the waitress walks off to fill the order, leaving Michael to shake his head at his second strike out in just a few minutes.

Although dressed in his usual attire of black t-shirt and jeans, Michael doesn't seem to be drawing the attention of the ladies, as is usually the case.

Resigned to getting coffee and little else, he sits down and starts to prepare his space for a few hours of work.

He opens the briefcase to reveal an older iBook, which remains in the case as he starts to sort through his mail.

A few pieces of junk mail get set aside. A Victoria's Secret catalog goes into the briefcase for later viewing, with a quick glance at the Asian girl. Still not the object of her affection, he continues.

The envelopes are all that's left in the unsorted pile, and Michael quickly flips through the numerous unpaid bills, placing them all still unopened on the junk mail pile.

He holds up the last envelope, which is not a bill, and then looks at it with growing apprehension.

The waitress returns with his coffee, and Michael is temporarily distracted from the letter. He turns up the wattage on the smile, but still no luck. She walks over to the Asian girl and asks her a question. A quick shake of the head and back to the novel, and the waitress disappears again.

Michael stares after her for a moment then remembers the envelope. Holding it up, he looks at it to see if it contains a check. The logo and writing on the envelope indicate that it has come from Tiberius Press, one of the many publishers that Michael has sent manuscripts.

Unable to fathom the contents, and not being able to put it off any longer, he rips into the envelope, and extracts the letter inside. His anticipation turns to disappointment as he sees his own letter returned, with a pink rejection slip attached.

He winces as he notices the Asian girl finally watching him, and tries to put on a bold front as he sets the rejection aside. A shrug and timid smile from him causes her to go back to reading.

Michael takes a sip of coffee, and steels himself for another try at closer range.

Just as he stands to make his approach, the girl pulls out a cell phone and answers a call. She quickly pulls up stakes and heads off down the street, leaving Michael halfway to her table, looking uncomfortably caught in midstride.

Running a hand through his hair in a gesture that would have made James Dean proud, he returns to his own table, and crumples the rejection in disgust.

Stuffing all of the mail into the briefcase, he turns his attention to the notebooks. He opens the first, and flips through a few pages, before discarding it in favor of the next. This process repeats a few more times, the motions a little more rapid each time, until he finally settles on a ragged looking notebook.

This one slows him down and he flips to a page filled with handwriting from margin to margin. He takes out a pen and starts to write on the next page, which is blank.

He begins to write slowly, then pauses and considers. His pen returns to the page and another pause. He then looks up the street, takes a sip of coffee and starts to write again. Just a few words later, he rips the page out and crumples it. It joins the rejection letter and junk mail.

A Land Rover pulls to the curb in front of the shop next to the cafe, and a small family gets out. The father, TIMOTHY CAULFIELD (Mid 30s) looks defeated and unhappy, though well groomed and dressed. The mother, JANE (Early 30s) looks angry and sullen, like a runway model that got caught in the rain.

The father and mother are continuing an argument that looks to have been going the entire ride over. As Jane attends to unbuckling their daughter, MADELEINE(3), Tim opens the back and takes out a stack of boxes and a bucket with cleaning supplies. He quickly walks to the building next to the cafe and unlocks the door.

Jane pulls their daughter from the car, and drags her toward the building. The girl is about three years old and is dressed in a cute little Sunday dress. She stares at Michael with huge brown eyes as she is pulled past, dangling from her mother's grasp.

Michael smiles and wiggles a few fingers at her, but gets no response as she is whisked into the waiting doorway. The door opens onto a stairway leading to the apartment above.

Three strikes with the ladies, and Michael gives up. He returns to the task at hand as the door to the apartment slams closed.

2

INT: APARTMENT - DAY

2

The apartment door opens onto a time capsule. Heavy drapes cover the windows and block the light from the street, so the father flips the switch and antique lamps throw yellow light onto the scene.

The living room is filled with heavy furniture, some of which is covered in white drop cloths. Tim stands in the doorway a second, reliving memories, until Jane angrily pushes past him and closes the door, causing him to step inside.

She looks around in dismay at the work ahead and then sets about trying to find a suitable activity for Madeleine. Stepping into the dining room, daughter in tow, Jane surveys the state of things there. She finds it less hazardous than the living room, so she sets the girl in a heavy wooden chair at the large dining table and rummages through her bag.

Coming up with a juice box and crayons, she sweeps the drop cloth off of the table, producing a cloud of dust. She waves away the dust as Madeleine looks on wide eyed.

The juice box and crayons get placed neatly in front of the girl as she dangles her feet and scoots forward. Jane then goes back into the bag and comes up with a big yellow legal pad, covered in scribbles and colors. She sets this down next to the crayons and starts to tell her daughter to behave.

Madeleine waves the juice box at the mother, causing her to pause in mid speech. Jane takes the box and punches the straw through. The girl takes it and sips happily then picks up a crayon, no longer paying attention.

Jane gives up and then watches her for a moment to see that she stays put, and joins Tim in the living room.

Tim is at an old sideboard next to a draped window. Beneath the window is a padded window seat, which has a few of the empty boxes waiting their turn. He is placing framed photos carefully in one of the boxes, looking at each for a long time, before moving to the next.

The photos are vintage and some of them show a very attractive woman in an outfit from the fifties. Others show a slightly older man, dashing in his Army dress uniform. One of the military portraits has a Purple Heart hanging from the corner of the frame.

Still more photos show the man and woman together, smiling brightly for the camera.

Farther along, there are wedding photos, and then the happy couple proudly posing with their baby boy. The boy in the photos ages, picture by picture until it becomes evident that it is the same man who stands here, sorting through these memories.

Jane walks in, takes a moment to appraise the scene, then pulls the heavy drapes aside, letting in light and giving off more dust. To clear the air, she struggles to raise the window, finally giving up and demanding help from Tim.

He leaves the photos and lifts the window as Jane opens more drapes to see the room more clearly. She pulls off several drop cloths and then instructs Tim to find a place for them as she appraises the situation.

Looking around in dismay as Tim struggles with the load of heavy fabric, Jane decides to begin where he left off. She sets the boxes on the window seat on the floor and lifts the seat to reveal the storage space beneath.

She begins to unceremoniously empty the contents of the windowseat to the floor. Small boxes and photo albums pile up on one side and old afghans in faded colors stack up on the other.

At the bottom of the windowseat, and last to be removed is a very old, very tattered looking teddy bear, which gets dumped on the afghans as the lid to the seat gets closed.

Tim comes back from his struggle with the drop cloths, brushing himself off in a futile attempt to combat the dust. He motions to the kitchen and says something to Jane, who grabs her bag and goes to attend to Madeleine.

Tim sees the progress made and quickly sits on the windowseat and starts to arrange things in the piles before him. He looks at the teddy bear for quite some time, then checks the label and sees the faded name scrawled there, "Timmy". He sets the bear next to him and continues.

The afghans go right into the largest box, then he sets the smaller boxes on top after a quick look inside. He spends more time with the photo albums, opening the first, and getting lost in the past.

An old, hand embroidered handkerchief falls into his lap as he lifts the photo album. He unfolds it and looks at it carefully. The handkerchief was once white, but has been dulled to a light grey from age and wear. It is clean, but very, very tattered, and has a delicately embroidered letter "M" in one corner.

He holds the handkerchief to his face and inhales, closing his eyes.

Just then, Madeleine comes running into the room, shrieking happily as her mother gives chase. She makes a bee-line for dad, and he quickly sets the handkerchief down to intercept her.

As she wraps herself around his knee, he looks at his wife and she seems to have softened a bit in the presence of this tableau. Madeleine breaks her stranglehold the minute she sees the teddy bear. Lunging at the dusty old bear, she scoops him up and gives a squeal and a hug as her father looks on happily.

Jane is less pleased, somewhat dubious at the sanitary condition of the bear, but seeing her daughter's happiness, she resists the impulse to seize the offending toy. Tim begins to recount the story of how he got the bear, and so doesn't notice that a stray breeze has lofted the handkerchief out of the window.

3

EXT: SIDEWALK CAFE - DAY

3

Michael is still seated in the same spot, though now the table top is littered with crumpled note paper. He looks very frustrated as the ideas refuse to take shape on the notebook before him.

Not even a cute girl to look at and the waitress seems to have disappeared, leaving him to face this block without any distraction or inspiration.

Slamming the pencil down, Michael runs his fingers through his hair and lifts his now empty cup. As he looks around for the waitress, the handkerchief wafts down from above to land on his notebook.

He's surprised and looks around, then up at the open windows in the apartment above. Not seeing anything, he takes the handkerchief and holds it up for a closer look. At first the "M" is upside down, until he positions the handkerchief correctly.

Michael looks around again, still puzzled by this intrusion. He then holds the handkerchief close to his face and inhales the fragrance.

4 INT: APARTMENT - 1950S

4

The soldier from the pictures, JACK, stands near the doorway, holding a large olive green duffel bag and looking stoic. The woman from the pictures, MADELEINE, is crying, but tries to be strong as his departure draws near. She can take it no longer and throws herself into his arms, sobbing uncontrollably. He drops the duffel bag to embrace her, then holds her at arm's length to look her in the eyes. He says a few words to her that seem to calm her and then picks up the bag again. She takes the handkerchief that she has been holding, the embroidered handkerchief that has been catching her tears, and she solemnly places it in his breast pocket and kisses him on the cheek. He touches her cheek with his hand, then turns to go.

5 EXT: SIDEWALK CAFE - DAY

5

Michael breaks out of his reverie to see the waitress placing a fresh cup in front of him. He barely acknowledges her as she gives him a long look and then walks away.

He looks lost in thought as he lifts the cup to his lips, then jumps as the hot coffee burns him. He sets the cup down and looks up to the apartment again. Studying the handkerchief carefully, he brings it slowly to his face and inhales again.

6 EXT: KOREAN WAR TRENCHES - NIGHT

6

Jack is huddled in the sand bagged trench with his buddies, trying to keep warm. The front is quiet for now and the soldiers are using the down time to clean rifles or catch some sleep.

By the flickering light from a stub of a candle, Jack is reading a well worn letter from Madeleine. Along with the letter is a small photo of the beautiful woman. He takes the monogrammed handkerchief from his chest pocket and holds it to his face as he closes his eyes to dream of her.

One of his fellow soldiers, DUTCH, hunkers nearby and motions to Jack. Not getting any response, he taps him on the shoulder, bringing him back to reality.

Jack looks up, perturbed by the intrusion as Dutch asks for a cigarette. When Jack shakes his head no, indicating that he is out as well, Dutch give a rueful look and settles back.

Jack then takes the letter and the photo of Madeleine and wraps them up in the handkerchief and carefully places them in the pocket over his heart. He settles into his dugout and tries to catch some sleep.

7 INT: APARTMENT - PRESENT DAY 7

Tim has filled the boxes with the items from the windowseat and doesn't seem to notice the handkerchief missing. Madeleine is playing happily with the bear, and he watches her for a moment.

He then returns to the photos on the sideboard and holds up a portrait of his father that has a well worn picture of his mother stuck in the corner of the frame. This is the same photo that Jack carried into battle a half century earlier.

The next photo is of a group of soldiers posing on the field, looking young and filled with bravado. Jack is off to the side, looking directly at the camera. More serious than his buddies as they goof around for the photographer.

8 EXT: ARMY CAMP, KOREAN WAR - DAY 8

Jack's group of soldiers are sitting around a makeshift table, playing cards. They seem tired and in need of a bath and shave, but are in good spirits as they gamble the afternoon away. The colorful government scrip in the pot looks more festive than the mud and olive drab surroundings of the campsite.

Jack is off to one side, placing his money into a letter that he has written home to Madeleine. He takes a little ribbing from some of the guys for not betting with them.

He stands and starts off to his tent to stash the letter for safekeeping as an explosion knocks him off of his feet.

A mortar shell has landed almost on top of the poker game, the blast wave and shrapnel throwing Jack's legs out from under him. Laying in the mud, his legs torn, Jack watches helplessly as playing cards, paper money and body parts rain down around him.

The camp is thrown into chaos as soldiers scramble to repel the attack, and medics tend the wounded and dead. A medic drops down next to Jack and begins to work on his legs.

Jack looks down as the tourniquet gets tightened and, just beyond the medic, he sees the lifeless face of Dutch, staring directly at him with unblinking eyes.

The medic tightens the second tourniquet and Jack fades from consciousness.

9 INT: APARTMENT - PRESENT DAY 9

The portraits have all been boxed and the boxes stacked by the door. Tim takes a long look around, then picks up the first box and heads for the stairway.

10 EXT: KOREAN WAR CAMPSITE - DAY 10

Jack comes to and notices a pressure on his legs. Looking down, he sees the medic laying across them, dead. He looks around quickly and cannot see anyone else through the smoke. Sitting up painfully, he tries to push the body of the medic off, but is too weak to move the dead weight. He struggles in a futile attempt, trying to move the medic, then he tries to pull his legs from under the body, all to no avail.

As he is struggling, a KOREAN SOLDIER appears from the smoke, his rifle leveled at Jack's chest. Jack falls back defeated, as the soldier moves closer, warily looking around for more Americans.

He takes aim as Jack holds up a hand to forestall his own death a moment. The soldier doesn't shoot, so Jack reaches slowly into his pocket. The soldier raises the rifle quickly, ready for a surprise, but then Jack pulls out the handkerchief.

He unfolds it as the soldier looks on, and takes out the letter and picture. He shows the picture to the soldier, then raises it to his lips and kisses Madeleine goodbye.

The soldier looks at him for a long moment, then lowers his rifle and quickly moves on. Jack collapses in relief, holding Madeleine close to his heart.

11 EXT: SIDEWALK CAFE - DAY 11

Michael is looking at the handkerchief, tears in his eyes. He starts to gather up all of the crumpled papers and throws them in the trash can next to the table. He saves the rejection notice and begins to smooth it out, as Tim is loading boxes in the car.

12 INT: APARTMENT DOORWAY - 1950S

12

Jack stands in the doorway, framed in soft light from the stairway. He is leaning on a cane and has a bandage on his face. Madeleine just stands there in shock for a moment, then flings herself into his arms.

He staggers back from the force of the embrace and she notices his injuries for the first time, and pulls back in fear of hurting him further.

He smiles and drops the cane to limp forward and scoop her up in his arms. He lifts her off of her feet as she peppers his face with kisses.

He carries her into the apartment, his cane forgotten in the hallway.

13 EXT: SIDEWALK CAFE - DAY

13

Michael has set the rejection notice aside, and has gotten the iBook out. The handkerchief sets in front of him as he types furiously.

Tim has carried out the last of the boxes, and Jane is leading Madeleine out to the car as Tim locks up.

Michael wiggles his fingers at the little girl again as she goes by, clutching the teddy bear. This time, she smiles and tries to wave, flopping the bear awkwardly in her free hand. She continues to watch him as she is buckled in and the car pulls away.

Michael returns to the keyboard like a man possessed, no longer blocked and feeling renewed.

The waitress returns with the bill, and he pauses to set the money on the table for her. She takes the cash and he tells her to keep the change as she heads off to the register inside.

He notices that she left the bill, so he looks at it a bit more closely. In big red letters, she has signed her name and phone number, with the words "Call me" underlined beneath.

He smiles and places the handkerchief with the bill wrapped inside into the pocket over his heart and continues writing.

FADE OUT.