



THREE SHIRT DEAL

A Shane Scully Novel



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Stephen J. Cannell

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This one's for my two girls.

Tawnia, you always see the truth and show me
how to succeed with grace. You have enriched my
life in so many untold ways.

Chelsea, you put a smile on my face, keep me young,
and with your generosity show me how to be a
better friend.

No father has ever had two more beautiful
daughters. I love you guys.



"HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?" DR. LUSK ASKED.

"I don't feel much of anything about it," I answered, dodging the question.

"Detective Scully, I won't be able to help you if you keep putting up barriers, shielding me from your feelings and emotions."

"It's her car, okay? What happens to it is kinda her business, not mine. I was just saying it seemed odd."

"So you booked an appointment through the psychiatric support group and drove all the way over here from Parker Center on your lunch hour, but you don't have any feelings about the accident? It just seems odd to you and that's it?"

"I'm concerned, okay?"

"Concern is an intellectual response. Your wife crashes her car, doesn't tell you about it, drains your bank account to get it fixed on the sly instead of putting it through the insurance, then rents a duplicate car to hide it from you. But despite all this, you have no anger, no sense of frustration or betrayal. You have concern."

"Yeah."

I was thirty minutes into the forty-minute "hour." Dr. Eric

THREE SHIRT DEAL

They took up her case and she requalified and was marked fit for duty.”

“But you don’t think she is.”

I wasn’t about to answer that one.

We sat back and looked at each other. Dr. Lusk slouched in the heavy chair, his huge gut pushing up on his diaphragm, causing him difficulty breathing. His slick complexion shone white as a fish belly. I wondered why I booked this damn appointment and drove all the way over here.

“I’m not a neurologist, Detective Scully, I’m a psychologist. But I *have* studied the brain. According to what you told me, your wife Alexa’s TBI affected the frontal and temporal lobes. We generally associate behavioral disorders with injuries to the frontal lobe. That’s the emotional and personality control center. Damage in that area can diminish judgment. It can also cause trouble with concentration and thought organization. Sometimes it leads to an array of more serious behavioral problems such as inappropriate statements, or impulsive or inappropriate actions: social as well as sexual.”

“I see.”

“Do you?”

“I’m living with her. Kinda hard to miss stuff like that.” Now he was pissing me off.

“So what specific kinds of changes have you witnessed?”

“She used to be organized. Careful and specific. Now she’s all over the place. It’s causing her problems at the department. She’s never been wild or unpredictable before. She knows the ropes and plays by the rules. Alexa is brave and has risked her life in the field many times, but as far as department politics, she’s always been a team player. Now she doesn’t seem to have any early alert warning system. She just does stuff on impulse without regard to consequence. It’s getting her into a pile of trouble with Chief Filosiani.”

STEPHEN J. CANNELL

He nodded and then, without warning, asked, "Has your sex life been affected in any way?"

That was a big one. We'd only made love two or three times since she came home from the hospital six months ago. At first I'd thought it was just her headaches and the after-effects of her injury. But now it had become a pattern. We used to make love regularly, but now almost never. I didn't say any of this, afraid to answer. Afraid of what he might tell me. Awkward silence filled the space between us.

"Why did you make this appointment if you won't discuss any of this with me?" he said.

"I think this was a mistake." I looked at my watch and saw him smile slightly, as if my little peek down at the dial was a confirmation of some secret diagnosis he'd already put on me.

"From the little you've said I can't help you much. Maybe your wife shouldn't have gone back on the job so soon. If you could get her to stay home, it might lower her stress level and her symptoms might subside. People with brain injuries are often in a race to get back to normality. They want their old life back. They want it to be the way it was before the injury. By putting everything back the way it was, they think they can accomplish this. They can't."

"I see."

"No, you don't. But that's okay."

"Whatta you mean I don't? Where do you get off saying that?"

"Detective Scully, you don't want to be here. I've seen guys in the electric chair look more relaxed. The very thought that your wife is having seizures, crashing the car, and whatever else, is abhorrent to you. It threatens your existence. You don't want to focus on it."

"Then why am I here?"

"Because it's become unbearable. Your wife has changed. She's become reckless and unpredictable. That behavior was previously reserved for you. Now you're experiencing a major role-reversal in

THREE SHIRT DEAL

your marriage. It's suddenly become your job to contain her mistakes instead of vice versa. You don't like it. It's limiting the way you behave, impinging on your own sense of self."

"You got all that in just thirty-five minutes? Not bad." Trying to back him off, because he'd pretty much just nailed it.

"You know that you both need help. She won't come in and talk to me, so you did. You're looking for a quick fix, but I can't possibly treat your wife through you."

"I see."

"You keep saying that. Pardon my bluntness, but you don't see. You don't want to. At least not yet. You're in denial."

We stared at each other, locked in his beige-on-beige, forty-minute time capsule.

"Will she get better?" I finally asked.

"Recovery from traumatic or acquired brain injury can take years. A patient will sometimes experience mood changes, major shifts in behavior parameters, even temper control problems. Sometimes these changes will only be temporary and the patient will return to normal, other times not. I'd have to have many sessions with your wife to determine what, if any, of these things are present and how permanent they might become. The meds you found in her purse indicate she's having seizures. Maybe that's what caused the traffic accident."

"She won't book an appointment with a psychiatrist. She has a neurosurgeon in Westwood, Luther Lexington. He did her surgeries and he recommended a psychiatrist last summer. She only went to that doctor once and never went back."

"A mistake."

"You don't understand. She's running one of the highest-profile bureaus in the city. If it gets out she's going to a shrink or having seizures, crashing her car, or whatever, it's going to destroy her career."

"I'm hesitant to make a diagnosis not having seen the patient.

STEPHEN J. CANNELL

But I will tell you this much. I don't like what I'm hearing. If I were you, I would get her help regardless of the danger to her career."

I looked at my watch again.

"If you have someplace to go, don't let me keep you." Somehow he managed the sentence without sounding snotty.

"I'd have been better off going to McDonald's. At least I would have gotten lunch."

"Then I won't charge you for the hour."

"No. I want to pay. I want . . . I want to come back next week."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Same time, same place?"

"Okay."

I stood, accidentally hitting the little table with a Kleenex box next to the chair and tipping it over. Another slight smile. I righted the table and replaced the tissue box.

"Well, I guess that does it then," I said.

"That does it," he replied, wheezing it at me through tiny teeth buried in a fleshy smile. His chubby hands were laced across his belly. He had no intention of standing to see me out.

I turned and walked to the door.

"Detective?" I stopped and looked back at him. "People change. Even people who didn't get shot in the head. Change is an inevitable part of life. Sometimes by embracing change, it becomes less frightening and we open ourselves to the good that may be hiding there."

"I see."

The smile flickered again. Then he said, "Here's something you can do. Keep a diary. Everything that she does that bothers you, write it down. To be valuable, it should be mostly about what *you* feel.

THREE SHIRT DEAL

"Okay."

"Next week, then."

It was the first day of summer, but I stepped outside into an unseasonable Alaskan cold front, which had roared out of the north, blasting Los Angeles. A frigid wind whipped down the mountain passes, into the Valley. Even though it was June, it felt like November. The palm trees that lined Van Nuys Boulevard creaked and bent, swaying like gaunt old men in the brisk wind, leaning over to peer down as I wandered in confusion toward my car.