

An Inkling of Hope

by

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. SPEC TOWNS TRACK - DAY

ALEX, SEAN, and KYLE, 20s, stand near the starting line, Alex is stretching and preparing for the race. Alex sips water, shakes out his legs, checks his heart rate on his WATCH. COACH JONES, 40s, approaches.

COACH JONES

Feel good?

ALEX

Yeah.

COACH JONES

Good. Your race starts in twenty minutes. You know what to do.

ALEX

Ugh!

COACH JONES

You know you got this.

ALEX

Yeah, I got this. It's the waiting that's the killer.

COACH JONES

(Smiling)

I know. Take some deep breaths. Stay loose. Remember, you've done this a hundred times. It's just another race. You got this.

ALEX

Tell that to my knotting gut.

COACH JONES

Keep stretching. And, breathe.

Alex stretches his hamstrings, Achilles, hips, and glutes. He maintains his distance from the competition.

Many venues boasting modern amenities and training support. His eyes wander toward the bleachers where a PRETTY REDHEAD writes in a notebook. Their eyes meet. Alex smiles. It's like gazing at the rising sun.

(CONTINUED)

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SEAN
 (looking at his watch)
 Alright, Alex. Let's go over the
 strategy one more time.

KYLE
 (grinning)
 Yeah, because it's not like he
 hasn't heard it a hundred times.

ALEX
 Yeah. But one more time can't
 hurt.

SEAN
 (serious)
 Okay, first lap, keep a steady
 pace. Don't get caught up with the
 front-runners. Second lap, start
 to pick up speed, but conserve
 enough energy for the final
 sprint. And remember, take the
 inside lane whenever you can.
 It'll save you valuable seconds.

ALEX
 Got it.

Alex looks back toward the bleachers as Kyle and Sean
 walk away, but the pretty redhead isn't there anymore.

CUT TO:

EXT. STANDS - DAY

400-meter track, spectators, watching close-up action.
 Alex jockeys for position amid the pack, looping around
 the track.

SEAN
 GO, ALEX! COME ON, BULLDOG! GET
 IT!

KYLE
 YOU'VE GOT THIS! COME ON, BUD!

SEAN
 (concerned)
 He's off his pace!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Next to them, the redhead sits down. SARA, 21, looks up from the scribbles and doodles in her notebook. She focuses on Alex intently.

BACK TO:

EXT. TRACK FIELD

Alex settles behind back-of-the-pack ALABAMA STATE RUNNER SANDERS, 24. AUBURN RUNNER OWENS, 21, gallops along. The TRACK TIMER ticking. Alex inches up. Watching intensely, Coach Jones has the schedule of events And roster crumbled in his hand.

COACH JONES
(telepathically)
Not yet.

The laps click by. Alex maintains position. Owens is hurting.

COACH JONES
(perspiring)
Wait for it.

Final lap. Owens overtakes Sanders. Alex surges past Sanders. Steadily closing in on Owens, Alex's breathing is easy and controlled.

COACH JONES
(Shouts)
Now!

Alex opens his stride, now on Owens's heels, overtakes the leader. Owens tries to fight back. Final stretch, Alex turns the screw, busting loose. Glancing, he sees the pain in Owens's face.

Alex wins. The crowd ROARS.

EXT. TRACK FIELD PODIUM - LATER

The MEDAL hangs around Alex's neck, glinting in the sunlight.

COACH JONES
Hot damn! You did it!

ALEX
(grinning)
Did you have any doubt?

Coach Jones chuckles and slaps Alex on the back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COACH JONES

Take it in. You deserve it.

Coach Jones leaves Alex to celebrate with his friends. They excitedly pound fists.

SEAN

You did it. Miracles still happen, I guess.

ALEX

Ha! Not bad for being "off pace," huh? Winning's still winning.

Kyle hangs an arm around Alex's shoulders.

KYLE

(holding up his phone)

And I got the whole thing on video. Including my dance. You're welcome.

ALEX

You better not tag me in those. I'd like to preserve my self-image.

KYLE

Hang on. Move over.
(turning his camera on Alex)
I gotta get the champ.

ALEX

Don't dance!

KYLE

Just come over. No dancing. I swear.
(beat)
One more, one more! Just you. Hold up the medal.

Kyle takes one more picture. Alex gives an uneasy smile.

KYLE

Oh! Here comes the press.

The redhead appears.

SEAN

(whispers)
She's hot!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KYLE

Hey Sara!
(beat)
Alright, we'll leave you to it.
(scampering away)
Party tonight! You two have fun!

ALEX

Party? What party?

Kyle grins, running away.

ALEX

(sighs)
I know that look!

She's caught him with his tank shirt off. Feeling self-conscious, Alex rifles through his gym bag, but doesn't find another shirt to put on.

ALEX

(under his breath)
Shit!

SARA

(smiling
professionally)
Hi, Alex. Sara Mathis, from The Red and Black. Do you have a moment to talk about your win?

They shake hands.

ALEX

Uh, sure. What do you want to know?

SARA

Everything! What motivates you to keep running, to push yourself so hard?

Alex looks thoughtful, glancing at the track.

ALEX

Running has always been my escape. It's the one place where I feel completely free, where nothing else matters but the rhythm of my feet and the beat of my heart. Running means everything to me.

Sara's eyes soften, impressed by his passion.

(CONTINUED)

SARA

That's incredible, Alex. Have you always had this drive? Was there a specific moment that sparked your passion for running?

ALEX

(smiling)

Well, my dad was a runner. He found running after he blew out his knee in wrestling. Of course, it was the running boom of the eighties. Everyone was into it. He pushed me in one of those little jogging strollers, but I hated it. I hate the feeling of being pushed. I would cry and scream and jump out of the jogger. Finally, he got me a pair of running shoes and said, okay, you want to run? Run.

SARA

So, even as a little boy, you were fast.

ALEX

(laughing)

You kidding? I was slow as hell. It took years to find the spring in my step. With two left feet, that learning curve was brutal. I never thought I'd get it, but one day, it just clicked.

SARA

(smiling)

And what's been the most challenging part of your journey?

ALEX

There've been a lot of challenges, but the hardest part is the mental toughness. There are days when you just want to quit, but you have to find something, anything, within you to keep going.

SARA

How do you keep that motivation alive? Especially on the tough days?

(CONTINUED)

ALEX

(grinning)

I remind myself why I started and that rush of crossing the finish line. It's not just about winning. It's about the grind, the struggle, and the moments that define you. Running is freedom. Coach Jones gets that. He stuck with me through the lows. UGA's program? Top-notch.

SARA

Speaking of support, do you think running has shaped your relationships with your friends and family?

ALEX

(after a beat)

Well... It's a great way to meet girls.

Sara doesn't laugh. Alex forces a chuckle that fizzles out under her gaze.

SARA

You said your dad was a runner. What about your mom? They must be proud.

ALEX

You'll have to ask them. I can't -

Beat.

SARA

Let's move on. I was also curious about your training. Your obviously very fit.

ALEX

You're not so bad yourself.

SARA

I'm glad you think so. But my 'training' is mostly just running to class. Let's get back to yours, though. How many miles do you run a week?

ALEX

well, I usually run five days a week. I'm supposed to do

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

ALEX (CONT'D)

Well, I'm supposed to do 1 long run 12-18 miles. 2 workouts at threshold or race pace. Easy/recovery runs in between. But, I don't always get to them. Still gotta keep my grades up. Or else, my parents will have my ass.

SARA

Wow. That's a huge range. So you're either a "sometimes I feel like it" runner, or a "can't stop, won't stop" kind of guy. Which is it?

Alex thinks for a moment.

ALEX

Both.

SARA

Both? How does that work?

Alex smiles and looks away, as if remembering something.

ALEX

The difference is who's waiting for me at the finish line.

Sara smiles at that line. She looks at Alex as if deciding something.

SARA

You've earned a headline. Here—
(hands him a small notepad page)
That's my number, in case you remember more quotes.

ALEX

(smiling)

Guess I'll have to think of something worth saying.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - LATE NIGHT

The car speeds along a dimly lit, winding road. The atmosphere inside is lively but tense. Music blares from the speakers. Something upbeat and nostalgic.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX
(focused on the road,
glancing at Sean)
Can one of you turn that down?

Sean leans forward to adjust the volume, but doesn't turn it down much.

SEAN
Come on, Alex. This song's a classic. Lighten up!

KYLE
(from the back seat,
smirking)
Alex doesn't know how to lighten up. Captain Buzzkill, reporting for duty.

Alex shoots him a glance in the REARVIEW MIRROR.

ALEX
Kyle, I swear—

Kyle interrupts, holding up his phone with a sly grin.

KYLE
What if I call her?

ALEX
(irritated)
Don't. You're not funny.

Kyle scrolls on his phone, ignoring Alex.

SEAN
(confused)
Wait, call who?

KYLE
(taunting)
That little cute red-head. Charlie Brown over here hasn't mustered up the courage to -

ALEX
(glaring in the mirror)
Kyle, stop being an ass.

SEAN
(turning halfway to Kyle)
Who?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Kyle snickers but doesn't answer. Alex tightens his grip on the steering wheel.

ALEX
Sean, take that away from him.

Sean stretches back awkwardly, trying to grab Kyle's phone.

SEAN
(half-laughing)
The boss said stop, so..

Kyle leans away, holding the phone out of reach.

KYLE
What, you on his side now?

Sean and Kyle's WRESTLING gets louder, spilling into Alex's space.

ALEX
Guys, knock it off!

Alex's eyes dart from the back to the road.

SEAN
(grinning, trying to grab
Kyle's arm)
You're gonna break your phone,
dude!

KYLE
Better than breaking your face.

They laugh, but their laughter is interrupted by Alex's sharp voice.

ALEX
Seriously, STOP-

The car swerves as Alex realizes too late that they've drifted toward the shoulder.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The tires SCREECH. The car jerks violently, fishtailing as Alex overcorrects.

INT. CAR - SAME TIME

Alex struggles with the wheel. The car heads straight for a tree-

SMASH TO BLACK.

SOUND: A deafening CRASH. Then silence, except for the faint sound of something dripping.

INT. HOSPITAL SURGERY - NIGHT

BEGIN MONTAGE

The operating room buzzes with focused activity. Nurses and surgical assistants move swiftly, ensuring everything is ready.

Alex, lying face down on the operating table under anesthesia.

CLOSE-UP:

DOCTOR HENDERSON's gloved hands making a precise incision along Alex's spine.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Alex lies in a hospital bed, face pale and drawn.

The rhythmic BEEP... BEEP... BEEP of the heart monitor fills the silence.

Charles and Eileen sit nearby, their expressions heavy with worry.

Eileen grips Charles's hand, her knuckles white.

The door opens - DOCTOR HENDERSON steps in, expression careful and measured.

DOCTOR HENDERSON
Alex. Good to see you awake. How
are you feeling?

ALEX
(hoarse)
Like I've been hit by a truck.

The attempted humor dies quickly.

Charles forces a strained chuckle. Eileen looks down, trembling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alex glances toward his legs – the sheets motionless.

ALEX
(quietly)
How come I can't... feel my legs?

Silence.

Eileen presses a tissue to her eyes.

DOCTOR HENDERSON
Alex, your spine was injured in the
crash. We stabilized it during
surgery, but... the damage was
severe.

He pauses, careful.

DOCTOR HENDERSON
We're still monitoring, but the
injury appears to be significant.

ALEX
(confused)
So... what does that mean?

EILEEN
(teary)
Alex–

DOCTOR HENDERSON
It means you've suffered a spinal
cord injury, resulting in paralysis
from the waist down.

The words hang heavy in the sterile air. Alex stares,
unblinking – then panic flickers across his face.

ALEX
No. No, that's not right. I can
move.

He strains to lift his leg. Nothing. His breathing
quickens. The monitor speeds up. Charles puts a consoling
hand on Alex's shoulder.

ALEX
This isn't real! This can't be
real!

CHARLES
Son –

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALEX
Don't touch me!

Eileen breaks down, covering her mouth to stifle sobs.

EILEEN
Alex, please...

ALEX
Please what, Mom? Pretend
everything's fine? Like it's all
gonna be okay?

His voice cracks – anger slipping into despair.

ALEX
It's not fine. Nothing's fine.

Charles walks out of the room before totally losing it.

Alex's chest heaves. Eileen reaches for his hand but stops halfway, uncertain.

DOCTOR HENDERSON
(gently)
It's going to be a long road, Alex.
But you're not alone. We'll make
sure you have the best team –
rehab, counseling, everything you
need.

Alex doesn't respond. He stares past the doctor, eyes glassy – the sound of the heart monitor echoing in the void.

Doctor Henderson gives a small nod to Eileen, then steps out quietly.

The door shuts with a soft click. Only the steady beep of the heart monitor remains.

Eileen sits frozen, her tissue crumpled in her hand. She stares at her son but can't find words.

Alex's gaze stays fixed on the blanket covering his legs.

He blinks slowly, as if trying to wake up from a dream he can't escape.

EILEEN
(softly)
Alex...

He doesn't look at her. His voice is distant, hollow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ALEX

I was supposed to run next week.
Regionals.

Tears spill down Eileen's cheeks. She reaches for his hand, tentative. He doesn't pull away, but he doesn't squeeze back either.

EILEEN

You're still you. That hasn't
changed.

ALEX

(quietly, almost to
himself)
Doesn't feel like it.

The door opens slightly. A NURSE steps in, clipboard in hand. She glances at Eileen, reading the room instantly.

NURSE

Just checking his vitals. I'll be
quick.

Eileen wipes her eyes, nods, and steps aside. The nurse adjusts the IV, scans the monitor, and then checks on Alex.

NURSE

You're in good hands. Try to rest,
okay?

He gives a faint nod. She leaves, closing the door behind her. Eileen sits again. The silence is heavy.

ALEX

(voice breaking)
Mom... what if I can't do anything
anymore?

Eileen moves closer, brushing his hair gently from his forehead.

EILEEN

Then we'll find something new.
Together.

Her words tremble but hold strength.

Alex finally turns to her, eyes glassy. He breaks. Tears sliding down his face as she leans forward and hugs him, careful not to disturb the IV lines.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

For the first time, he lets her hold him. The heart monitor keeps its rhythm. Steady, fragile, alive.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - EARLY MORNING

Harsh fluorescent lights hum. Weary and pale, Charles stands by a window. He stares at the PHONE in his hand for a long beat before finally calling.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

INT. JENNIFER'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

JENNIFER MURRAY (30s) answers, cheerful and unsuspecting.

JENNIFER

Hey, Dad. Everything okay?

Charles swallows hard, his voice trembling.

CHARLES

No... Jen, it's - it's Alex.

Beat.

JENNIFER

What? What happened?

Her smile fades.

CHARLES

There was... an accident. Late last night.

Jennifer covers her mouth, eyes wide.

CHARLES

Alex survived. But... the doctors say he won't walk again. His spine - it's -

Jennifer's breath hitches.

JENNIFER

I'm coming. I'll call Claire.

CHARLES

Let me call her.

Charles switches lines.

INT. CLAIRE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Stuff scattered everywhere. CLAIRE, 24, meditates in the morning sun. She goes back inside with her yoga mat and drinks something green in a blender. Her PHONE RINGS.

CLAIRE

Hi Dad -

She stops when the news hits her like a truck.

CLAIRE

(whispering)

Oh my God.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Charles pinches the bridge of his nose, voice cracking.

CLAIRE

No... no, that can't be right.
He's an athlete. He just - he just
made the team...

CHARLES

I know...

He closes his eyes, as if the word itself weighs tons.

Sara takes one last look toward Alex's room, then turns and walks away. The door closes softly behind her. Charles doesn't stop her. His jaw tightens, eyes glassy.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

The waiting room is quiet. Too quiet. A TV hums softly in the corner, playing an old sitcom no one's watching.

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CONTINUED:

Charles sits motionless, eyes fixed on the doors leading to the ICU. His hands grip a Styrofoam coffee cup that's gone cold hours ago.

Footsteps ECHO in the lobby. The entrance opens. There's Sara, a tote bag dangling from her shoulder. She hesitates, then steps forward.

SARA
Mr. Murray?

CHARLES
Yes?

SARA
How are you holding up? Is there anything I can do?

Charles is startled, his expression weary

CHARLES
Who are you?

SARA
Sorry. I'm Sara. I - I heard about Alex, and... I wanted to see if you needed anything.

Beat. He can't place her.

CHARLES
We're fine.

Sara's fingers tightening around the strap of her tote.

SARA
Can I see him?

CHARLES
Alex is resting.
(beat)
How do you know my son?

SARA
I'm with the Red & Black - the UGA paper. I interviewed him after the meet today. He's incredible.

CHARLES
(distant)
I'll tell him you stopped by.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SARA
(hesitant)
I came to tell him something.
(softening)
Kyle and Sean...

Charles finches at the names.

CHARLES
I don't care about Kyle or Sean
right now! My son won't be able to
walk for the rest of his life
because of them! So, whatever the
hell it is, don't -

SARA
They're dead. They died a couple
of hours ago.
(beat)
I thought Alex would want to know
before it became gossip.

The words hang in the air - thick, heavy, inescapable.
Charles sinks into his chair, the fight gone from his
eyes.

CHARLES
I'll tell him. When the time is
right.

Sara nods, blinking hard, then turns toward the hallway.
She pauses just for a moment. Her eyes linger on the ICU
doors. Then she walks away.

INT. HOSPITAL HALL - CONTINUOUS

Sara stops at a vending machine, stares at her reflection
in the glass. Her eyes are red.

She fumbles for change, then gives up - leans against the
wall instead, trying to steady her breathing.

From down the hall, the faint beep of a heart monitor.
She glances toward the ICU doors again.

Her phone buzzes. A text from her editor: "Any updates on
the story?"

Sara types, No story tonight, then deletes it. Instead,
she pockets the phone, wipes her eyes, and whispers -
almost to herself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARA

Hang in there, Alex. Please.

She takes one last look down the hall, then turns and walks out, her footsteps echoing softly into the quiet.

ALEX'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Alex stares at the ceiling in his bed. Sunlight cuts through the blinds, striping his face. A beautiful day – the kind that feels wasted indoors.

ALEX

Mom?

No answer.

ALEX

Mom!

Still nothing. A phone buzzes. Meeting with LAURA.

ALEX

(mutters)

Where's a PA when you need one?

Next to his bed sits his wheelchair with clothes from yesterday draped over it. He grabs a ratty T-shirt from the chair, then struggles into a pair of running pants.

BLEEP. His computer flickers to life – a Zoom call.

LAURA (50s), sharp-eyed, all polish and posture, fills the screen.

LAURA

Morning, Alex. Let's talk about The Real Deal.

ALEX

Uh... yeah. It's coming along.

LAURA

"Coming along"? You signed six months ago. I've seen sloths move faster.

ALEX

(laughs thinly)

Great art takes time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

So does making excuses. What have you actually got?

Alex fidgets with the armrest of his wheelchair.

ALEX

Well... I've got a killer title.

LAURA

Just a title? No draft, no outline?

ALEX

Titles matter. They set the tone.

LAURA

(sighs)

Alex, we pitched this as a raw, honest look at living with a disability. Not a Hallmark special. Something real.

ALEX

Exactly. Which is why it's taking time. I want it to be authentic.

LAURA

Authentic is great. Finished is better. What's the holdup?

ALEX

You want the truth?

LAURA

Now, that would be something *real*.

ALEX

I don't want it to read like some pity parade. You know, "look at these brave souls, so inspiring." That's not who we are.

LAURA

That's exactly why you should write it. To kill that narrative.

ALEX

And if I screw it up? What if I just make it worse?

Laura softens. Her voice loses its edge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LAURA

Alex, people don't need you to be perfect. They just need you to be honest.

A long beat.

ALEX

Truth's messy.

LAURA

Good. Messy sells. Now stop stalling and start typing. I need something or else that publishing advancement we gave you will be the publishing debt you owe us.

ALEX

(reluctant)

Friday. I'll send something by Friday.

LAURA

(grinning)

That's the Alex I signed.

The call ends.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Blank doc. Blinking cursor. Existential crisis.

Alex writes "Chapter One." Deletes "One."

He flicks on the TV. Cue the laugh track. A "heartfelt" episode where a wheelchair kid teaches an injured gymnast about life, love, and how to clap without irony. The audience goes feral with emotion.

The audience "awws."

Alex stares, deadpan. Then he starts typing fast this time.

ALEX

Let's give readers a real inspirational story.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - LATER

A single lamp burns over a cluttered desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On-screen: "Finding My Own Space."

Alex's fingers hover, hesitant. Then he types.

ALEX (V.O.)
For Trey, it wasn't about fitting
in. It was about standing out.
Even if the world didn't make
space, Trey would find his own.

He reads the words, half-convinced.

ALEX
Yeah... that's it. He'd find his
own.

His reflection stares back from the dark window – the
wheelchair framing his silhouette.

He scrolls up, rereading earlier pages. The words feel
hollow.

His cursor blinks. A beat of paralysis. Then, frustration
– he slams the laptop shut. After a long moment, he opens
it again. He smirks – a small, bitter smile.

ALEX
(murmurs)
Guess I'm still looking for mine.

He starts typing again – slower this time, not as a
writer chasing perfection, but as someone finally writing
truth.

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAILHEAD - DAY

Alex wheels himself up to the trailhead where a group of
cyclists are getting ready. The sound of chirping birds and
the rustling of leaves fill the air. He pauses, taking in the
sight of the winding trail ahead.

COACH JONES
(off-screen)
You ready for this, Alex?

Alex turns to see Coach Jones approaching with a supportive
but challenging look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

(sighs)

I don't know, Coach. I've never done this before.

COACH JONES

That's exactly why you're here. Remember, it's not about winning. It's about trying.

Alex nods anxiety in his eyes. Coach Jones helps him transfer from his wheelchair to the handcycle. The other cyclists watch with curiosity.

COACH JONES

(Whispers)

Don't worry about them. Just get use to the bike. Remember, go easy until you get the hang of it.

ALEX

It feels weird.

COACH JONES

It's literally riding a bike.

ALEX

Yeah, there's a reason why I picked track. Never got the hang of being on two wheels. Never saw the point.

COACH JONES

Well, luckily it's got three.

ALEX

Ever heard the saying "the third wheel"? People don't like three. They like two. The Tour De France was never ridden by a guy on a trike!

COACH JONES

Those guys crash all the time. But you know what they do? They get back on their bikes and finish the race no matter how banged up they are. Lance Armstrong would never have won all those races if he didn't get back on his bike.

ALEX

No, he wouldn't have won if he hadn't have taken EPO.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Beat.

COACH JONES

I had to get the trailer out for this. It took two hours. I woke up 4 A.M.! But, if you're not ready we can -

ALEX

No, no! Damnit.

(Sighs)

Let's do this. Before anyone sees me.

EXT. TRAIL - LATER

Alex is on the handcycle, wearing a helmet. He struggles to find a rhythm as he pedals with his hands, the uneven terrain making it even more challenging.

ALEX

(grunting)

This is harder than it looks.

COACH JONES

(from the trailhead)

One stroke at a time, Alex. Focus on the next stroke.

Alex takes a deep breath and starts pedaling. His movements are awkward and uncoordinated, but he pushes forward.

EXT. TRAIL - MIDWAY

Alex is now halfway along the trail. His strokes become more rhythmic, though he's clearly exhausted. He catches sight of Sara, who's arrived and is cheering him on from a vantage point.

SARA

You got this, Alex! Keep going!

Alex's determination reignites. He pushes himself harder, each stroke a testament to his resolve.

EXT. TRAIL - NEAR THE END

Alex reaches a steep incline. He pauses, looking up at the daunting slope.

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CONTINUED:

COACH JONES
 You've got this, Alex! Keep
 pushing! One stroke at a time!

Alex grits his teeth, the challenge ahead seeming
 insurmountable. The strain visible on his face.

EXT. TRAIL - END

Alex reaches the top of the hill, sweat pouring down his
 face. A small crowd, including Coach Jones and Sara, erupts
 in applause.

COACH JONES
 (smiling)
 Well done, Alex. Well done.

Alex looks up, a mixture of exhaustion and pride on his
 face. With Coach Jones' help, Alex settles back into his
 wheelchair.

ALEX
 (breathless)
 Was that Sara back there?

COACH JONES
 I don't know.... Maybe. How do you
 like the bike? Pretty fast on the
 down hill, eh?

Beat.

COACH JONES
 Alex?

ALEX
 Yeah, no, it's good....

COACH JONES
 So, you want me to take it to your
 place, or what?

Alex pushes his wheelchair to the edge of the trail,
 peering through the trees.

COACH JONES
 Alex? Alex? Earth to Alex?

Alex checks his watch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

Alright, can you take it back to my apartment please? I'm going to wait for a minute.

COACH JONES

It's getting dark, Alex.

ALEX

(distantly)

Yeah-huh. You have a good one too.

Coach Jones shakes his head, laughing.

COACH JONES

Alright, well I guess I should go ahead and sign you up for the marathon next weekend!

ALEX

(Distant)

Sounds good. Have a good one too, Coach.

Coach Jones heads off with the bikes.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - LATER

Alex checks his watch. He sees Sara emerge from the woods with a mix of elation and nerves.

ALEX

There she is!

SARA

You weren't waiting on me, were you?

ALEX

Well.... we just got done with the ride. I was wondering if you would be interested in getting something at Chipotle.

SARA

(tentatively)

Alex, I... I'm really flattered. And I care about you a lot, but...

Alex's smile fades slightly, a hint of disappointment in his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX
(trying to stay upbeat)
But?

Sara steps closer, her expression earnest and caring.

SARA
I think we need to take things
slow. You've been through so much,
and I want to make sure we're both
ready for this.

Alex nods, understanding but still feeling the sting of rejection.

INT. CHIPOTLE RESTAURANT - EVENING

Alex and Sara place their orders, moving down the line.

ALEX
A chicken bowl for me.

SARA
And, I'll have a sofrita.

ALEX
(Teasingly)
Huh. Thought you would have gone
just a delicious bowl of black
beans, as a proud vegan.

SARA
I'm technically plant-based - not
vegan. And, Vegans are trying to
save the world.

ALEX
Captain Planet would be really
proud.

They take their orders to a table. Alex steals a sample from Sara's bowl.

ALEX
That's actually not half bad. It
needs a different name, though.

Sara studies Alex.

SARA
I can't believe you're here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

I didn't know you were in New York.

SARA

I just moved in, actually. I just did my internship at New York Presbyterian.

ALEX

For some reason, I thought were a journalist.

SARA

I was. For medical journals. But, there were so many tragic stories and people in pain, I decided I could better serve by being on the front lines. I... I saw you.... you know, when you were in the hospital.

A moment of strained silence passes.

SARA

So, what brought you to New York?

Beat.

ALEX

I needed to get out of Georgia. Every time I went past Sean's and Kyle's homes, I just... couldn't take it. Their memories. Their funerals. Spreading dirt on their coffins.... I couldn't help but feel like I put them there.

SARA

(sympathetically)

Alex...

Alex looks up, his eyes filled with pain.

ALEX

(voice shaking)

We were supposed to be a team, you know? We were supposed to have each other's backs. But I wasn't there when they needed me the most.

Sara squeezes his hand, her eyes soft with understanding.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SARA

(tenderly)

It wasn't your fault, Alex.
Sometimes... things happen that
are beyond our control.

ALEX

(sighs)

It doesn't make it any easier.

SARA

Neither does blaming yourself.

Beat.

ALEX

You don't know what it's like...
That night playing over and over
like a tape in your head. You try
to move on, try to get out, but
everywhere you go, it's in a
wheelchair. And... The tape starts
again.

SARA

Well then, maybe writing about it
would help.

ALEX

(tightly)

I'm not that kind of writer.

(beat)

Anyway, enough about that. How's
your medical career going?

Sara brightens, but a hint of stress remains in her eyes.

SARA

I'm doing my rotations. It's been
intense. But I love it. The long
hours, the constant learning...
it's exhausting but rewarding.

ALEX

That's great! I knew you would be
amazing at it.

SARA

Thanks, Alex. And what about you?
How is the writing going?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ALEX
Rocking and rolling. But, I think
I had a breakthrough the other
day.

SARA
(interested)
I'd love to read it someday.

ALEX
(playfully)
Maybe when it's finished. Right
now, it's a mess of thoughts and
emotions. You heard of, ah, ethos,
pathos, and logos?

SARA
Ethical, logical, pathetic?

ALEX
Yeah. Well, in its current state,
my manuscript is very, very
pathetic.

Sara laughs.

ALEX
(Grinning)
I'm not kidding. It needs a lot of
work.

SARA
Well, I'm sure you'll work it out.
You always had that creative
streak in you.

Alex grins. He finds himself looking into Sara's eyes,
and she his. The trans holds for a moment, then breaks.

SARA
(serious)

I got an invitation to Kyle and Sean's memorial.

(beat)

I can't believe it's been a year.

Are you going?

Alex stares out the window, his jaw tightening.

ALEX
I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

(beat, under his breath)

God... I haven't spoken to their parents. Or anyone. Not since...

His voice trails off. Sara steps a little closer, her tone softening.

SARA
Come with me.

(gentle)

It might help. Closure, maybe.

Alex exhales sharply – a mix of frustration and fear. He doesn't answer.

SARA
(quietly)

You don't have to stay long.

Alex finally looks at her. His expression softens – just a flicker – before he looks away again.

ALEX
You're going?

SARA
Yeah. I think... I need to.

A long beat. Alex nods slowly.

ALEX
Then, I'll go.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The church is filled with mourners dressed in black, a somber atmosphere settling over the congregation. A photo slideshow of SEAN and KYLE, both smiling, is placed at the front near the altar.

Heads turn as they make their way down the aisle. Whispered conversations ripple through the crowd.

INT. CHURCH - BACK ROW - CONTINUOUS

Alex and Sara sit quietly. Alex anxiously looks around. Sara holds Alex's hand, offering silent support.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Across the aisle, SEAN'S PARENTS, visibly grief-stricken, exchange tense glances upon seeing Alex. MRS. HAWKINS leans over to her husband, MR. HAWKINS.

MRS. HAWKINS
(whispering, but
audible)
What is he doing here?

MR. HAWKINS
(grimacing)
Not now, dear.

Alex and Sara overhear, but Alex remains stoic, eyes fixed ahead.

The MINISTER steps up to the pulpit and begins the service.

MINISTER
Thank you all for coming to honor Sean and Kyle. They were taken from us far too soon, but their memories live on in our hearts.

As the minister continues, Sara notices the growing tension between Alex and Sean's parents. She squeezes Alex's hand tighter.

EXT. CHURCH - AFTER THE SERVICE - DAY

Mourners offering condolences to Sean's parents. Alex and Sara wait patiently to pay their respects. Alex offers a comforting smile.

ALEX
Those Christmas parties were always the best. Remember that time you caught us in the pool? Sean, always the ladies man, tried to swindle.... Anyway, she dared us to skinny-dip-

MRS. HAWKINS
(coldly, to Alex)
I can't believe you had the nerve to show up here.

Alex remains calm, but there's a hint of pain in his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

I'm here to pay my respects to my friends.

MRS. HAWKINS

(fury rising)

Friends? They wouldn't be dead if it wasn't for you!

SARA

(defensively)

With all due respect, Alex is suffering too.

MR. HAWKINS

(stepping in)

Please, let's not do this here.

Mrs. Hawkins glares at Alex, tears welling up in her eyes.

MRS. HAWKINS

(to Alex)

It's not fair! It's not fair that you survived. You're here right now, today, and my son is six feet in the ground! You remind me of him. You remind me of the pain I have to endure waking up every day, knowing I'm never gonna be able to talk to my boy. I'm never gonna be able to talk to him, to touch him, to hug him again!

Alex lowers his head, unable to respond. Sara steps forward, standing protectively by his side.

SARA

We're all grieving. Blaming Alex won't bring them back.

Mrs. Hawkins turns away, unable to look at them any longer. Mr. Hawkins nods curtly and guides her towards their car.

Sara puts a comforting hand on Alex's shoulder, her eyes filled with concern.

SARA

Are you okay?

Alex takes a deep breath, his voice shaky.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALEX

I'll never be okay. But I won't
let their memories be tainted by
anger.

Sara wraps her arms around him in a comforting embrace.

They sit in silence, the weight of the loss heavy but
shared.

INT. CAR - DAY

Sara is driving, the car moving steadily down a quiet, tree-lined road. Alex sits in the passenger seat, staring out the window, his face a mix of pain and contemplation. His wheelchair in the back. The hum of the engine and the occasional sound of passing cars fill the silence.

SARA

(softly)

You were really brave back there.

Alex doesn't respond, his eyes still fixed on the passing scenery.

SARA

(turning to glance at him)

Alex?

Alex's hand tightens around the armrest. His leg twitches—a ghost reflex that never answers back.

The passing headlights strobe across his face like flashes from the past.

Sara watches him, waiting for words that don't come.

SARA

You're somewhere else again.

Alex nods faintly, eyes still on the glass.

ALEX

Yeah. I never really came back.

SARA

(interrupting)

Alex, stop. It wasn't your fault.

ALEX

(voice breaking)

I was the one driving, Sara.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)

I should have... I should have done something.

Sara pulls the car to the side of the road and stops. She turns to face him, her eyes filled with concern and determination.

SARA

Alex, listen to me. What happened was a tragedy, but blaming yourself won't change anything. Sean and Kyle wouldn't want you to carry this guilt.

Alex's eyes well up with tears, and he clenches his fists in frustration.

ALEX

I replay that night over and over in my head. Every second, every decision. I should have done something different. Anything.

Sara reaches out and gently places her hand on his.

SARA

You did everything you could. You survived, Alex. And you're still here. They would want you to live, to find some kind of peace.

Alex's shoulders start to shake as he finally lets the tears fall. Sara leans over and hugs him, holding him tightly.

SARA

It's okay to cry. It's okay to feel. You don't have to be strong all the time.

Alex buries his face in her shoulder, his sobs coming in waves. Sara strokes his back, offering silent comfort.

ALEX

(through tears)
I miss them so much.

SARA

(whispering)
I know you do. But they'll always be with you.

EXT. TRACK FIELD - DAY

Alex adjusts his position on the handcycle, still awkward. JAIMIE, 18, rolls up beside him, confident, joking with the other athletes.

JAIMIE

Not bad. You keep that up, you might even look like you know what you're doing.

ALEX

Yeah, maybe. Just don't start thinking I actually belong here. I'm still figuring out this whole... chair thing.

JAIMIE

See, that's the difference between us. You call it "a thing." I call it me. My wheels are just as much a part of me as my legs used to be.

ALEX

Maybe. I just don't want people staring at me like I'm some sideshow act.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Eileen puts the phone down as CHARLES, 60s, walks by. Eileen seems concerned and distant.

CHARLES

What is it?

EILEEN

That was the physician's assistant... Dr. Buteficsh wants to talk about my mammogram.

CHARLES

When?

EILEEN

Soon.

CHARLES

Then, check if you can get in tomorrow -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EILEEN

No.

(Beat.)

Everyone will be here. They don't need to know about it.

CHARLES

Eileen, I don't care about the others. But, Jen, Claire, and Alex need to know. Maybe if you just went in for a blood test, it would make you feel better.

EILEEN

No. It'll start with a blood test. Then, it's CT scans, bone scans, MRIs, PET scans, ultrasound, X-ray. Christ, before shake a turkey leg, I'll be undergoing surgery. It can wait.

INT. HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

A stack of unsorted mail welcomes Alex on the kitchen counter. He begins rummaging.

The room has a lived-in feel—family photos on the wall, a fruit bowl in the center of the table—but the energy is quiet. A pile of unopened mail sits in front of Alex.

He grabs an envelope, rips it open, glances at the contents, then tosses it into a trash pile. He picks up a flyer for a local pizza place.

ALEX

(Smirks)

Well, at least you know what you're about.

The flyer lands on the "keep" pile. Next, he pulls out a glossy pamphlet titled: "Find Strength in Connection: Disability Support Group Meetings Every Thursday."

Alex raises an eyebrow, flipping it open.

ALEX

(Reading, mocking)

"Strength in connection." Right, because sitting in a circle whining about life changes everything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He rolls his eyes, holding the pamphlet over the trash pile. But something catches his attention—bullet points:

Peer Support

Life Skills

Opportunities for Independence

His fingers stop. He scans the pamphlet again, slower this time. His sarcastic smirk fades, replaced by faint curiosity.

ALEX
(Quietly, to himself)
Could be worse, I guess.

Alex slouches in his chair, a pamphlet hidden beneath him. He eyes Charles and Eileen as they stumble through the front door, arms weighed down with shopping bags.

ALEX
Wow. Did you leave anything for the rest of the town, or should we all just call it a day?

Eileen sets her bags on the table with a huff.

EILEEN
It's for the boys, Alex. Christmas magic, remember?

ALEX
Magic. Right. You mean the kind where their wish lists read like Forbes magazine?

Charles unzips his coat, chuckling.

CHARLES
Don't be such a Grinch.

ALEX
Hey, I'm just saying — when I was a kid, we didn't need a mountain of gifts to have a good time. One Tonka truck, and we were set for life.

Eileen pulls out another bag and glares at him.

EILEEN
Yeah, and you probably broke it by New Year's.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EILEEN (CONT'D)

Besides, it's for Christmas morning. You want your nephews waking up to nothing?

ALEX (MUTTERING)

Wouldn't kill them to know what coal looks like.

EILEEN (IGNORING HIM)

Speaking of Christmas disasters, Jennifer and Max will be late. Again.

Charles rolls his eyes as he hangs up his coat.

CHARLES

Of course they will.

EILEEN

Jennifer said six, which means they'll get here at seven. Maybe seven-thirty.

Alex leans back smugly.

ALEX

Well, as long as they don't expect the roast beast to still be warm.

Eileen grabs a pillow from the couch and throws it at Alex. He catches it, grinning.

EILEEN

One day, you're going to have kids of your own, and I can't wait to hear them complain about how you don't buy them anything nice.

ALEX

Not gonna happen. They'll be too busy hand-carving their Christmas presents out of wood. Just like the good old days.

Eileen rolls her eyes and disappears down the hall. Charles heads to the kitchen, shaking his head with a smirk.

Alex waits until the coast is clear. He retrieves the pamphlet from under him, smoothing it out carefully.

ALEX

Let me ask you guys a question. Do I look... disabled?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ZACH

(smirking)

Well, yeah, you're in a
wheelchair, buddy.

ALEX

(rolling his eyes)

No shit, Zach. What I mean is...
do I fit the stereotype?

Claire and Zach exchange a look, trying to gauge the best
way to respond.

CLAIRE

Alex, I don't think there's a
single stereotype for someone in a
wheelchair. You're still you.
Just... with some extra equipment.

ZACH

Yeah, man. I mean, if you're
asking if people will notice,
sure, they will. But fitting a
stereotype? I don't think so.
You've never been one to fit into
any mold.

ALEX

Every "groundbreaking" show with a
cripple makes him look incapable.
Then some idiot side character
rolls him into trouble, only to
play hero in the nick of time.
What a joke.

Beat.

CLAIRE

So, Jen and I will bake apple and
pumpkin pies. Jen too. Maybe you
can show Louis and Bruce your
handcycle thingy.

ZACH

You're right, Alex. Just go and
run over those guys with your
chair. I got a video game we can
play. You can pretend the bad guys
are those asshole executive
producers.

ALEX

Zach, that's an offensive
stereotype. That's perfect!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Alex fiercely scribbles in his notebook.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex continues to write. Charles and Eileen are in the their room, the TV on. Zoom bleeps loudly.

ALEX

Goddamn!

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

On the other side of the house, Charles watches CNN in bed. Eileen is washing up in the bathroom. Charles finally switches off the TV.

CHARLES

I'm worried about Alex.

EILEEN

Me too. But, we have to give him time.

CHARLES

Are you sure this is a good idea - you know - having people over?

EILEEN

They're family, for crying out loud. Your family, by the way

CHARLES

Think about your son, Eileen. I want to do what's best for Alex. He's under a lot of stress.

EILEEN

Aren't we all?

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex runs a hand through his hair. This conversation with Laura isn't going well.

ALEX

Run that by me again.

LAURA

(on Zoom)

Six weeks, Alex. You miss this deadline, we're done.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLES (O.S.)
Eileen! Eileen!

Alex pivots to the commotion. He turns back to the computer before hitting the end button

ALEX
I'll call you back.

INT. CHARLES AND EILEEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex pushes the computer aside and rushes in. Eileen is unresponsive.

ALEX
What's happening?!

CHARLES
We don't have her medicine.

Charles clears Eileen's airways.

CHARLES
What time is it?

ALEX
Eleven.

CHARLES
Call it out every five minutes.
Get a pillow.

Alex grabs one off the bed. Charles puts it beneath Eileen's head. He gently rolls Eileen on to her side.

Alex and Charles helplessly watch Eileen. Finally, she breaks out of the fit.

ALEX
That was forty-five seconds.

CHARLES
Okay.
(beat)
Eileen? Eileen?

EILEEN
(groggy)
I'm okay.

ALEX
Do you need some water, Mom?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLES

You do that while I call the
doctor.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT 2

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The sterile hum of machines fills the space. Eileen, frail but dignified, sits propped up in bed. Charles hovers at her side. DOCTOR HENDERSON, 40s, closes a folder with clinical finality.

DOCTOR HENDERSON

The scans show the tumor has metastasized. We'll need to discuss next steps.

The news is beyond comprehensive for Eileen. For Charles, it's a reason to worry.

CHARLES

Thank you, Doctor.

Doctor Henderson nods and exits. Silence hangs. Eileen stares at the muted TV in the corner, avoiding his eyes.

CHARLES

We've gotta tell the kids.

EILEEN

Not yet.

CHARLES

Eileen, you just had a seizure.

(beat)

What happens if, God forbid, you have another one in front of them?

(beat)

And, don't forget about Stu and Linda? You know what, I'm going to call them and just tell it's not a good time.

EILEEN

No. They'll ask questions. No.

Phone at the ready, Charles hesitates. His shoulders sag with the weight of the world. He checks his WATCH, takes out his heart medication, and swallows two pills.

CHARLES

You don't need to hide this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EILEEN

I'm not hiding it. I'm... buying time.

Charles finally meets her gaze—she looks smaller, almost childlike, but her resolve burns.

EILEEN

Let me get through Thanksgiving. One more dinner, one more night with laughter instead of tears. Then I'll tell them. I promise.

Charles exhales, torn. He presses his lips together, fighting the urge to argue.

CHARLES

Eileen, we've never hid from them. They are going to be angry we didn't tell them sooner.

EILEEN

They'll feel loved. Because this holiday will be real. Not a vigil.

Charles's eyes shine. He sits on the bed's edge, taking her hand.

CHARLES

(reluctant)

After Thanksgiving. No more waiting.

EILEEN

After Thanksgiving.

She rests her head against his shoulder. He holds her, the weight of her promise heavier than the diagnosis.

CHARLES

But, we really should tell Alex at least.

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The dim light of a desk lamp casts a golden glow on stacks of books and crumpled paper. Alex sits in his wheelchair, typing furiously on his laptop. The screen reads the title of his work-in-progress: "Able Enough: The Illusion of Inclusion" by A. Murray.

His face is a mixture of determination and frustration as he scrolls through his draft.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX
 (quietly, to himself)
 If they want a token story, I'll
 give them the truth they're not
 ready for.

He scrolls down, editing a paragraph about how society's perception of disability often contradicts the lived experience.

Behind him, his German Shepherd whines. It's dinner time.

ALEX
 Okay, Vinny. I got you.
 (beat)
 Where are the parents?

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Alex snaps his fingers.

ALEX
 Vin, bed.

Vinny scrambles excitedly to his bed, only to the edge. Tail wagging.

ALEX
 Vin... You know the drill. Bed!

The dog reluctantly backs up until all four paws are on the dog bed.

ALEX
 Stay!
 (beat)
 Good boy!

Three scoops of kibble into Vinny's bowl. Alex shuts the pantry and sets the bowl near Vin.

ALEX
 Okay.

Vin gobbles up the kibble. Alex gives him a quick, loving pat.

INT. EILEEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eileen sits on the couch, a faint tremor in her hand as she clutches the phone. The walls are lined with family photos, a stark contrast to the somber look on her face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EILEEN
 (on the phone)
 Alex, I need to tell you something.

INTERCUT BETWEEN ALEX AND EILEEN

Alex grips the armrest of his wheelchair, sensing the weight in her voice. Eileen takes a deep breath, her voice faltering.

EILEEN
 Alex, I need you to hear this straight. I've been diagnosed with ALS.

ALEX
 Jesus, Mom. That's not just bad news, that's end-of-the-world news.

EILEEN
 I know. And I hate that I'm the one putting it in your lap.

ALEX
 You're supposed to be indestructible. The one person in this house who doesn't break.

EILEEN
 I wish that were true. But it isn't. This is real. And it's going to change things.

ALEX
 (breath shaking)
 Well. If you were looking for a way to upstage me, Most people just buy a sports car. You went with terminal illness. Bold move.

Beat.

ALEX
 This really sucks.

EILEEN
 (emotional)
 Please promise me that you won't say anything to Jennifer or Claire. Not yet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

You want me to sit on this? That's like asking me to balance a piano on my lap. Well, this is gonna be an awkward Thanksgiving.

EILEEN

Promise me anyway. Please.

ALEX

(long pause, then
quietly)

Okay. I promise. But you'd better be the one to tell them, when you're ready. Okay?

EILEEN

I will.

ALEX

Good. Because if Jennifer or Claire find out, I'm dead.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - LATER

Alex sits back at his desk, his mother's words still lingering. He erases the title of his book and types: "Rewriting the Script: Stories They Don't Want Told."

The sound of his typing fills the room, growing faster and louder as his determination grows.

CHARLES

You good?

ALEX

Yeah, I'm good.

CHARLES

What'd ya say we work on your bike tomorrow? You know, get it ready for the Turkey Trot?

ALEX

Uh, okay.

CHARLES

Do you have other plans?

ALEX

No. Just writing.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'm just wondering if this story
can be more than just words. Maybe
this story can help others.

CHARLES

Mhmm.

(smiles)

Good night, kiddo.

ALEX

Night, Dad.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - LATE NIGHT

ON SCREEN: BRYCE (20s, wheelchair-bound, saintly smile).

Suddenly, in Alex's mind, BRYCE materializes in the room
- overly noble, soft-spoken, the "inspiration" type.

BRYCE

Dad, I just want to show the world
that I can be amazing.

Alex groans.

ALEX

No. That's what they're going to
expect.

Alex presses and holds the backspace button.

ALEX

The brave cripple, grinning
through the pain. I can't write
that.

BRYCE

But I'm what sells, right?
Audiences love a miracle. I'm here
to make them feel better about
themselves.

ALEX

No. That's a lie. That's the cage.
You're not supposed to make them
comfortable. You're supposed to
make them see what you are out of
the cage.

Bryce's smile falters, his posture shifting into
something more human.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

Then, who am I?

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Pages litter the floor – fragments of something he can't finish. Alex gathers them one by one, then stops. A sticky note clings to his palm.

He peels it off, studies it for a beat, then crumples it. He aims for the wastebasket – shoots – misses.

The ball of paper lands on his footrest. He stares at it, motionless, the tension in his jaw tightening.

After a long moment, he wheels toward the window.

Outside, the streetlamp flickers – a dull pulse of light in the dark.

Behind him, the crumpled page sits still.

FADE TO:

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - NIGHT

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After a long moment, he wheels toward the window. Outside, the streetlamp flickers – a dull pulse of light in the dark. Behind him, his laptop screen glows. The cursor blinks – impatient, expectant.

ALEX

(typing, V.O.)

Of course, she didn't know anyone who had entered this realm of the dating scene before, and, frankly, she felt lost.

Swallowed into a black hole.

Reaching for something to help pull her out of this unknown frontier.

But, she wouldn't let on.

INT. ALEX'S MIND - IMAGINED SCENE

A woman - Sarah - sits alone at a café, staring at her phone. The world around her is muted, slightly surreal.

Her reflection in the window flickers - confident one moment, uncertain the next.

ALEX (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 She smiled like she had a plan.
 But she didn't. Not really.

BACK TO:

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - NIGHT

He rereads the line. Sighs. Backspaces slowly - each word vanishing into silence. He sits back. Rubs his temples.

ALEX
 (quietly)
 What the hell am I even writing
 anymore?

A voice answers.

BRYCE
 Something you don't believe in.

ALEX
 Thanks for the advice. But, you're
 not real.

BRYCE
 I'm real as that turkey stuffed in
 the freezer, motherfucker.

Alex freezes. He looks up.

Across the room, sitting in the dim light, is BRYCE - late 20s, seated in a wheelchair, calm, dry, and direct.

Alex blinks, unsure if he's hallucinating or imagining.

ALEX
 This is some real Secret Window
 shit. You're really talking back
 to me?

BRYCE
 You gave me a mouth, shithead.
 What'd you expect me to do - sit
 here and smile politely?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alex lets out a short, humorless laugh.

ALEX

You're not supposed to be real.

BRYCE

Neither are half the people in your stories, but that doesn't stop you from pretending they matter.

Alex turns toward the wall, covered in sticky notes and scribbled arrows – his mind map of ideas: Love story? Representation? Too tragic? Make it honest.

He looks back at Bryce.

BRYCE

I think you're afraid of what writing me says about you.

The streetlamp outside throws their shadows across the room. Two men with disabilities caught between reality and fiction.

Alex looks back at the laptop. The screen's still blank.

ALEX

Okay then... let's start over.
 (typing, VO)
 She wanted to help people. Fix what was broken.
 Maybe that's what drew him to her – that quiet certainty she carried, even when she was scared.

FADE TO:

INT. SARA'S ROOM - DAY

A lamp burns over an open medical textbook. Sara's hand traces a line of text as she reads. A half-empty mug of coffee, notes scattered – but in her chaos, there's purpose.

ALEX (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She never waited for someone to save her.

She just kept moving forward.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sara exhales, flips a page. The sound echoes faintly, like the soft click of a keyboard.

BACK TO:

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Alex stops typing, re-reading the words. Bryce watches him carefully.

BRYCE

You sure you're writing about her
- and not yourself?

Alex looks at him, not answering. He rolls out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eileen sits in a dark living room, watching old home movies. A box of tissues by her side, she dabs at her eyes while an old home video plays. The sound of children laughing and playful banter fills the room.

ON THE TV:

Young Alex, Kyle, and Sean run around a backyard, play tag, and then bounce on a trampoline. An inflatable ball bounces into the picture. It hits Alex in the face. Kyle and Sean laugh. Young Alex throws it at them, laughing. Trampoline Dodgeball commences.

YOUNG SEAN

Gotcha, Alex!

YOUNG KYLE

Ooooh!

YOUNG ALEX

(aiming for Sean's
head)

Gotcha back!

The screen shows a close-up of their joyful faces, carefree and full of life. Young Alex blows out the candles on his birthday cake.

BACK TO SCENE:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alex hesitantly enters when he sees what's on the TV. He looks down at his wheelchair, his face a mix of sorrow and nostalgia. Eileen is reclined on the sofa, pillow supporting her back. Alex hopes she won't notice his welling eyes.

ALEX

I can't believe you kept these.

EILEEN

Your father found them under the eaves.

(Dabs at her eyes)

You were so happy back then.

ALEX

We were all great, little, naive, happy kids.

On the screen, Young Alex is on his bike, sprinting downhill.

EILEEN

Oh, look! You were fearless!

ALEX

(Stares at the TV,
voice low)

Stupid is more like it. Look, I'm riding without a helmet.

EILEEN

(Eyes Alex, smiling
softly)

Even when I scolded you, you still never wore one. You said that you would still fall, so what's the difference? Fearless. You've always been. You've never let anyone tell you what to do.

Alex smiles tightly, fiddling with his fingers, until he looks back at the TV.

ALEX

(Sighs, voice
strained)

I'm not anymore. Night, Becky.

Alex starts heading back to his room.

EILEEN

Alex?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALEX
 (Pausing, not
 turning)
 Yeah?

EILEEN
 It's okay to be afraid. But, it's
 not okay to be angry. If something
 was wrong, you would tell us,
 right?

ALEX
 (Swallowing, voice
 low)
 Of course.

Alex glances at the TV uneasily. The video continues to play, showing the boys lying on the grass, staring up at the sky, dreaming of the future before Alex exists.

FADE TO:

EXT. BIKE TRAIL- DAY

Alex adjusts his position on the handcycle, still awkward. Jamie rolls up beside him, confident, joking with the other athletes.

JAMIE
 First time on a handbike?

ALEX
 (smiles, deflects)
 I was a runner - not a cyclist,
 before my accident. Now, I don't
 know what I am. I'm just this
 fucking thing constantly writhing.
 (beat)
 And, WHY WON'T THIS BOOM GO DOWN?

Jaimie hails down CHRIS, the bike mechanic.

CHRIS
 Need an adjustment?

ALEX
 Oh, in more ways than you know.
 Thanks, Chris.

CHRIS
 No problem.

With a RACHET, Chris adjusts the handbike's boom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRIS

Give it a try.

Alex tests the handbike in the parking lot. He gives a thumbs-up.

ALEX

Thanks, Chris.

CHRIS

No problem. Handbikes are hard to get used to. Let me know if you need more adjustments.

ALEX

Oh, I will.

Chris smiles and tends to other Para athletes.

ALEX

(sighs)

I used to be a runner. I was great. State champ. I knew who I was when I ran. Now, I am just a guy strapped to this thing pretending it's the same thing.

JAMIE

(chuckles,
unapologetic)

See, that's the difference between us. You call it "a thing." I call it my equalizer. Just because we have disabilities does not mean we have to give in to them.

ALEX

(shrugs, uneasy)

What about when people stare? Don't you feel like a sideshow act?

JAMIE

Sometimes. But, fuck it. Let 'em stare. Better than being invisible.

Alex looks away, not ready to admit how much that lands.

JAIMIE

Come on, Alex. Let's just have some fun.

EXT. TRACK - EVENING

Alex finishes a sloppy lap, frustrated, sweat dripping. He wheels off to the side, trying to hide his exhaustion. Jamie notices and rolls over.

JAMIE

You keep pulling back every time
you hit a wall.

ALEX

(avoiding eye
contact)

I just need more time. Don't want
to look weak in front of everyone.

JAMIE

Weak? Man, every push we make out
here only makes us stronger.
You're just not seeing it.
Remember, weak is a four-letter
word. Embrace the suck. That's how
you get better. That's how we
don't let our disabilities define
us.

Alex sits in silence, chewing on the words, but still not ready to accept them.

INT. HOME GARAGE - NIGHT

"Just a guy strapped to this thing" echoes. Resentment he held for himself builds. He ran a hand over the cold metal frame of his cycle, then squeezed his eyes shut. He isn't hiding from his accident; he is hiding from the person he became after it. A person who felt fundamentally unworthy of someone like Sara.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. CHIPOTLE - NIGHT

Sara smiles across the table, oblivious to the panic tightening in Alex's chest.

SARA

You know, this whole thing—the
rehab, the training—it's amazing.
But you don't have to keep a wall
up with me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX
 (Stiffly)
 I'm fine.

SARA
 No, you're not. And that's okay.
 When you said we had to slow down,
 I thought you meant for my sake,
 with my rotation. Now I think you
 meant for yours. You're scared of
 being a burden.

END FLASHBACK

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The memory fades.

The shame of pushing away the one person who saw him as
 whole weighs heavier than his injury ever did.

Jamie was right. Hiding was killing him.

Alex digs out his phone. The screen glows in the dim
 room. He pulls up her contact, thumb hovering.

A deep, shaky breath. Then -

ALEX
 (texting)
 Hey. Are you busy?

SEND.

The silence after is deafening. Just the pounding of his
 heart.

He exhales, steadying himself. The wall is down.

Alex swivels to his laptop. The manuscript sits
 open-finished, but daring him to send it.

Its pages tear into the clichés of the "brave cripple"
 story. Every line a refusal of the box people keep
 shoving him into.

His fingers hover. He freezes. Doubt claws at him.

A knock at the door.

ALEX
 One minute!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Another breath. He clicks SEND. The draft shoots off to Laura.

Another knock.

ALEX
Coming!

He opens the door. Sara leans against the frame, casual, smiling.

SARA
Hey.

ALEX
Hi.

SARA
I've missed you. Wanna get out of here?

ALEX
(smiling)
You read my mind.

BEGIN MONTAGE: THE BOOK PRINTING PROCESS

INT. PUBLISHING OFFICE - DAY

Laura and her team are gathered around a conference table, reviewing Alex's manuscript. The room is filled with lively discussion and marked-up pages.

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Alex is on a video call with a sensitivity reader. They nod and make notes, discussing changes. Alex looks relieved.

INT. GRAPHIC DESIGNER'S OFFICE - DAY

A designer is at their computer, working on the book cover. Various drafts flash on the screen: different fonts, images, and colors. Finally, they settle on a striking design.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INT. PRINTING PRESS - DAY

Massive rolls of paper are fed into the printing press. Ink jets spray words onto the pages in rapid succession.

CLOSE-UP: PRINTING MACHINERY

Mechanical arms lift sheets of freshly printed pages, aligning them perfectly before binding. The hum of the machines fills the air.

INT. BINDING ROOM - DAY

Stacks of printed pages are fed into a binding machine. The machine clamps down, securing the pages together with a strong spine.

INT. COVER DEPARTMENT - DAY

The completed covers are placed onto the bound pages. Another machine presses them firmly together. A worker inspects each book for quality.

INT. PACKAGING AREA - DAY

Finished books are stacked high on pallets. Workers carefully wrap them in protective plastic before placing them into boxes.

INT. DISTRIBUTION CENTER - DAY

Boxes of books are loaded onto trucks. The camera follows one truck as it drives away from the center, heading to bookstores and warehouses.

EXT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

A delivery truck pulls up to a bookstore. Workers unload boxes of Alex's book and carry them inside.

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

A bookseller opens a box, revealing the crisp new books. They place the books on a prominent display, arranging them neatly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - NIGHT

Alex receives an email notification: "Your book is now available in stores."

MONTAGE ENDS

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Alex and Sara sit across from each other. The BARISTA, 20s, sets down two steaming cups. Steam curls upward, ghostlike between them.

SARA

This is a much-needed break.

ALEX

Yeah? Med school giving you hell?

SARA

It's not just the grind. It's my family. They mean well, but... it's like I'm on call for their lives, too. My dad's questions, my brother's guilt trips. It's endless.

Alex nods, but his gaze drifts.

ALEX

You used to thrive on that—being the one everyone leaned on.

SARA

(half-smile)

And you used to pretend you didn't need anyone.

A flicker of a smile from Alex, then it fades. He stirs his cup.

ALEX

I write. That's... what I do.

SARA

That's who you are. But you say it like it's a consolation prize.

Alex's jaw tightens. He hesitates.

ALEX

It feels that way sometimes. Like I'm stuck in half a life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sara's eyes soften. She almost reaches across the table, but stops just shy of touching his hand.

SARA

You're not half of anything, Alex.

Alex looks up at her, vulnerable. For a moment, neither of them speaks. The hum of the coffee shop falls away.

ALEX

(quietly)

You make it sound easy to believe.

Their eyes hold. The steam drifts upward, dissolving into the air.

FADE TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Got it – let's streamline the arc so it's kitchen → publisher meeting → podcast interview. That way, we track Alex from personal pressure (friends gossiping about Sara) → professional pressure (publisher/marketing push) → public pressure (performing on a podcast). Each step forces him closer to cracking open.

Here's how it could play:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The coffee pot hisses. Zach and Jennifer sit at the table, mugs in hand. Alex enters, rumpled, half-awake.

JENNIFER

Morning.

ZACH

So... who was climbing out of your car last night?

Alex yawns, opens the cupboard.

ALEX

Coffee first. Inquisition later.

Jennifer slides the pot toward him, smirking.

JENNIFER

It was Sara, wasn't it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alex pours, avoiding eye contact.

ALEX
As a matter of fact, it was.

Zach leans back, intrigued.

ZACH
And Sara is...?

JENNIFER
College. She was there when he won
state track. She got the exclusive
interview.

Alex sips, flat.

ALEX
That was ancient history.

ZACH
History has a habit of showing up
uninvited.

Alex shoots him a look, drains his mug.

ALEX
Speaking of unwanted guests, I've
got a meeting.

He grabs his jacket and leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

A sleek conference room. A stack of Crip advance copies
on the table. Alex sits with LAURA, 40s, polished and
blunt. Two PR REPS, 20s, buzz with energy.

LAURA
Alex, marketing is ecstatic.

PR REP #1
We've lined up podcasts, TikTok
reviewers, Insta reels-

PR REP #2
And with the holidays coming, this
is the perfect storm.

Alex stares at the books.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX
You sent copies out already?

LAURA
Of course. That's how buzz works.
And you've got buzz.

ALEX
It's not buzz. It's branding. You
plastered Crip everywhere like
it's a slogan.

Awkward silence.

PR REP #1
Not a slogan. An... identity.

ALEX
(icy)
My identity isn't your campaign.

LAURA
Come on, Alex. It's exposure. Do
you want people to read it or not?

Alex doesn't answer, just glares at the cover in front of
him.

CUT TO:

Perfect – that gives this scene real emotional weight. So the
tension isn't just awkwardness under pressure – it's guilt,
exposure, and resentment of being turned into a symbol. The
podcaster is performing empathy while Alex feels like a fraud
for feeding the very system he hates.

Here's an expanded version of the scene that builds that
pressure gradually until it's almost unbearable – the smiles
thinning, the lights feeling hotter, the air tightening:

INT. PODCAST STUDIO - EVENING

A soundproof booth that feels smaller the longer you look at
it. Warm LED lights. Two mics. A laptop streaming comments in
real time.

The REC light glows red.

PODCASTER
Welcome back, everyone! Today's
guest – you know the name.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PODCASTER (CONT'D)

You've seen the book on every "must-read" list – Crip, by Alex Moran. Alex, man, thank you for being here.

ALEX adjusts his mic, awkwardly.

ALEX

Thanks for having me.

PODCASTER

So let's get into it. That title – bold, controversial, beautiful. Where'd it come from?

ALEX

From me. From my body. From what people don't see unless I write it down.

PODCASTER

That's real. That's truth. You're giving people a voice, man. That's powerful.

Alex forces a smile, eyes flicking toward the livestream chat – hearts and clapping emojis.

ALEX

I'm not... trying to be powerful.

PODCASTER

Well, too late – you are. I mean, readers say it's inspirational. That it opened their eyes. That must feel incredible, right?

A pause. Alex's fingers tighten around the mic stand.

ALEX

It feels... complicated.

PODCASTER

Complicated how?

ALEX

I didn't write it to make people feel better.

PODCASTER

Sure, sure – but still, you've inspired a lot of folks. Especially in the disabled community–

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALEX
 (quietly)
 I'm not sure they'd agree with
 that.

A small, uneasy laugh from the podcaster. He thinks Alex is joking.

PODCASTER
 Hey, don't be modest. The book's a
 movement. It's—

ALEX
 It's fiction.

Beat. The air goes flat.

PODCASTER
 Right. But fiction can tell the
 truth, you know?

Alex swallows, jaw working.

ALEX
 The truth is... I gave them what they
 wanted to see. What sells.

The chat scrolls faster – heart emojis replaced by question marks.

PODCASTER
 Wait – you're saying you didn't
 mean what's in the book?

ALEX
 I meant it when I needed to.

PODCASTER
 (laughing, nervous)
 Wow, okay. That's... raw honesty
 right there. I love it.

Alex sits still, eyes fixed on the glowing ON AIR light.

ALEX
 Yeah. That's what they keep buying.

The booth hums. The podcaster beams at the camera, filling the silence.

PODCASTER
 You heard it here first, folks –
 Alex Moran, the voice of a
 generation!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Alex's expression doesn't move. The smile's gone.

Perfect – that's the next natural beat: the "afterglow" of the interview, where the lights cool but the pressure doesn't. Laura, the publisher, represents the machine – cheerful, efficient, always thinking in clicks and engagement. Meanwhile, Alex feels the dread kicking in, like the words he said are about to turn into headlines he can't control.

Here's the continuation:

INT. PODCAST STUDIO - LOBBY - NIGHT

The booth door swings open. Alex steps out, blinking under cooler hallway light. He looks drained, like the recording pulled something out of him.

LAURA (40s, sharp, unbothered) is already there – phone in hand, earbuds in, a PR smile ready before she even looks up.

LAURA

You killed it in there. I've already got clips trending. Twitter's eating up that "I gave them what they wanted to see" line.

ALEX

Yeah. That's what I'm worried about.

She waves a hand, brushing it off as she scrolls.

LAURA

No, no – it's perfect. Authentic. Vulnerable. People love that. We'll spin it as a creative confession – "The artist wrestles with his own success." It's humanizing.

ALEX

It's hypocritical.

LAURA

Alex, come on. Every writer plays the game a little. You're not a politician; you're an author. What matters is that they're talking. Engagement is empathy, now.

Alex leans against the wall, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

They're not talking about the book.
They're talking about me.

LAURA

Exactly! That's branding. You are
the book.

He stares at her.

ALEX

Do you hear yourself?

She finally looks up from her phone, patient but patronizing.

LAURA

I hear opportunity. You said
something honest – maybe too
honest, sure – but that's gold.
We'll do a follow-up statement
tomorrow. Clarify tone, double down
on your "authenticity."

ALEX

Clarify what? That I didn't mean
what I wrote? Or that I didn't mean
what I said just now?

LAURA

(smiling thinly)
Both can be true.

A long silence.

Laura checks her phone again – a ping.

LAURA

Okay, the publisher's account wants
to post a clip. Can we get you to
like it?

Alex looks toward the dark booth – the red light finally off.

ALEX

I think I already did.

Laura doesn't catch the meaning.

LAURA

Perfect. You're doing amazing,
Alex. Don't spiral – this is what
success looks like.

She walks off, phone already to her ear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Alex stays where he is, the hum of the studio faint behind him. His reflection stares back from the glass – just a shape now, not a person.

He exhales, slow. The red light flickers once more from inside the booth – a recording light someone forgot to turn off.

INT. FAMILY LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

The TV glows in the corner – paused on the interview thumbnail: ALEX MURRAY: "I GAVE THEM WHAT THEY WANTED."

Alex sits stiffly in his wheelchair. His family crowds the room like it's Thanksgiving, not damage control.

JENNIFER

So... that's what everyone's talking about?

CLAIRE

You didn't look happy.

Eileen sets a plate of cookies on the coffee table, careful not to meet his eyes.

EILEEN

You looked... tired.

MAX

Tired? Hesounded cool. Like unfiltered. People love that now.

ZACH

Wow! That podcast was everywhere. Social media is blowing up. That's a mic drop. Sweet!

ALEX

Ughhh... It wasn't a mic drop. It was a mistake.

MAX

You're trending. All of Facebook is talking about your book! You can't plan that kind of buzz.

CLAIRE

Max, Alex's interview with that Podcaster didn't sound like buzz. Alex, you didn't seem like yourself at all. It sounded like guilt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Silence. Everyone looks at her.

CHARLES

Claire, ease up on your brother. Alex, forget about it. We should be celebrating. Your book's selling. That's what matters.

ALEX

Are you sure about that, Dad?

CHARLES

You did the work. Don't apologize for it.

EILEEN

People are finally listening. Take the win.

ALEX

They're not listening. They're consuming. It's like they're feeding on the stereotypical disabled person.

ZACH

That's what audiences do, man. You gave them what they want. Nothing to be ashamed of.

Alex stares at him – a mix of disbelief and exhaustion.

ALEX

Writers don't conform. They rebel against stereotypes! I didn't want to become famous this way.

MAX

Well, guess what. Yijing.

ALEX

What does that mean?

MAX

It means roll with it.

Jennifer elbows Max lightly, but she's fighting a smile.

CLAIRE

You think you really think people will attack you for what you said?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALEX

Oh, what the hell? Maybe they should. Why not?

The only sound is the low hum of the TV. Eileen finally sits beside him.

EILEEN

You always wanted people to read your work, Alex. This is the nature of the beast.

Alex looks at her, contemplating.

ALEX

I don't even know which part of me they're reading anymore.

No one answers.

Max opens a beer. Zach scrolls on his phone. Claire looks at Alex with quiet worry.

The family sits together, each staring at a different kind of silence.

The headlights sweep across the living room wall – like a spotlight still looking for him.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - LATER

Alex rolls in like he doesn't want to wake the past.

He opens his laptop. The glow hits his face – pale, tired.

Onscreen: notifications stacked like falling dominoes. Tweets, headlines, clips.

#AlexMoranTruth trending. "Author admits to manipulating disability narratives." "Brilliant or Betrayal? The Ethics of Crip." "Finally, a writer brave enough to say the quiet part out loud."

He scrolls – the words blur together.

Videos, reaction takes, thumbnails with his face frozen mid-blink. His sentence – "I gave them what they wanted to see" – looped, meme'd, remixed.

A TikTok plays automatically: a smiling influencer summarizing his "controversy."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He closes it fast.

INT. SARA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sara and younger brother JASON, 16, are sitting on the couch, studying. Jason frustratedly writes, erases, then rewrites the solution to a math problem. Their grandmother, PEGGY (70s), is in the kitchen, slowly making breakfast.

JASON
(frustrated)
Sara, I don't get this math problem. Can you help me?

SARA
(glancing up from her notes)
Sure, Jason. Let me see.

Sara walks over to Jason, looks at the math problem, and explains it quickly but clearly.

SARA
Got it now?

JASON
Yeah, thanks!

Sara smiles and ruffles his hair. Jason pulls away, annoyed.

JASON
Gah! Stop!

Sara chuckles then concentrates on her notes. Grandma Peggy calls from the kitchen.

PEGGY (O.S.)
Sara, can you help me with the stove? This burner won't light.

SARA
(sighing)
Coming, Grandma.

Sara returns to her textbooks, trying to focus.

BECKY
(off-screen)
Sara, do you have a minute?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sara sighs, closing her eyes for a brief moment to gather patience.

SARA

Mom, I'm studying. What is it?

Becky opens the door, holding a basket of laundry.

BECKY

I just need you to help me sort these. It'll only take a minute.

SARA

Mom, I really can't right now. This test is really important.

BECKY

I know, honey. I'll leave these here for later, then.

Becky leaves the basket in the corner of the room and exits. Sara turns back to her laptop, trying to regain focus.

SARA

(to herself)

Alright, question number 42...

She barely reads the first line when her younger brother, JASON (13), bursts in holding a video game controller.

JASON

Sara, I need your help with this level. It's impossible!

SARA

Jason, I'm studying for the USMLE. Can you ask Mom?

JASON

But Mom's terrible at this game.

SARA

Then, ask Dad.

JASON

Dad's no fun either. You're the best!

SARA

Jason, please. I need to concentrate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JASON

Fine, fine. Good luck with your doctor stuff.

Jason leaves, sulking. Sara rubs her temples, then turns back to her laptop. She takes a deep breath and starts reading again.

SARA

(determined)

Question number 42...

Suddenly, her phone rings. She glances at it and sees it's her older sister, EMILY, 30. With a frustrated groan, she answers.

SARA

Emily, this better be important. I'm studying.

EMILY

I know, I know. But I just needed to ask if you can babysit tonight. I have a last-minute work meeting.

SARA

Emily, I can't. I'm studying for one of the biggest exams of my life.

EMILY

It's just for a couple of hours. Please, Sara?

SARA

Emily, I need to focus. Can you ask Becky?

EMILY

She's busy. But fine, I'll figure something out. Good luck, sis.

Sara hangs up, feeling the pressure mounting. She takes another deep breath, centering herself.

SARA

(to herself,
resolutely)

You've got this. Focus.

As she resumes studying, her dad, JOHN, knocks and pokes his head in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JOHN

Hey, kiddo. Want some tea? It might help you relax.

SARA

(forcing a smile)

Thanks, Dad. That'd be great. Can you just leave it outside the door?

JOHN

Sure thing. Hang in there, kiddo.

He closes the door. Sara finally finds a moment of peace. She closes her eyes, breathes deeply, and then opens them with a steely determination.

SARA

(to herself)

Question number 42...

She finally focuses completely on the screen, shutting out all distractions.

Sara's phone buzzes again -

SARA

Ugh!

- this time with a message from Alex: "Want to meet at a corn maze?" Sara glances at the time, thinking. Then, a smile appears on her face.

INT. JENNIFER'S CAR - DAY

Jennifer is driving. Charles looks out the window, while Eileen checks a list of questions for the doctor. Jennifer glances in the rearview mirror at her parents, chatting softly.

CHARLES

Make sure to ask about the new medication. I want to avoid going to the hospital at all costs.

EILEEN

I've got it on my list, dear.

Jennifer smiles to herself, feeling the weight of responsibility but also the warmth of family

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

Alex sets up his phone on a holder, on an ottoman near a love sofa. He positions a copy of his new book, "Crip", in front of him and starts recording a video.

ALEX
 (speaking to the camera)
 Hey everyone, I'm thrilled to share my new book with you. It's been a journey, and I can't wait for you all to read it.

He smiles confidently.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Zach, Claire, and Aunt Linda sit down at the table, enjoying their homemade spaghetti. They laugh and share stories, using both spoken words and sign language.

CLAIRE
 (signing and speaking)
 This is delicious, Aunt Linda. We did good!

AUNT LINDA
 Huh?! What are you doing with your hands?!

Claire gives a thumbs up, chewing a noodle. Linda beams with pride.

INT. JENNIFER'S CAR - LATER

Jennifer drives her parents back home, the doctor's visit complete. Charles and Eileen seem relieved and more at ease.

JENNIFER
 (smiling)
 See? Nothing to worry about.

Charles and Eileen nod, feeling cared for and supported by their daughter.

EXT. HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Bruce and Louis are bouncing around the room like two hyperactive kangaroos. Jennifer b, Eileen, and Charles exchange worried glances. Claire hands Alex a bag.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I put in snacks in case you guys get hungry.

ALEX

Thanks.

BRUCE

(cheerfully)

Corn maze! Corn maze!

LOUIS

(yelling)

I'm gonna be the first to the middle!

ALEX

(grinning)

Alright, guys, calm down. We haven't even left the house yet.

JENNIFER

Alex, are you sure about this? I mean, two toddlers and a corn maze...

CLAIRE

Relax, Jen. He's got this.

JENNIFER

(sighing)

I just don't want you to overdo it, Alex.

ALEX

(mocking her)

Oh no, the corn! It's too much! Jen, I'll be fine. I've got the map, snacks, water, and my phone. We're set.

Bruce climbs onto Alex's lap, pretending to steer the wheelchair.

BRUCE

Vroom vroom! I'm driving!

ALEX

(laughing)

Hey, easy there, buddy. No driving without a license.

Louis runs up with a toy sword, poking the air.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOUIS
I'll protect us from the corn
monsters!

CHARLES
(confused)
Corn monsters?

EILEEN
He means scarecrows, dear.

Jennifer's torn.

JENNIFER
Maybe I should just come with
you...

ALEX
(teasing)
And miss out on keeping Mom and Dad
company? Come on, Jen. We'll be
fine. Worst case, Claire can always
rescue us.

CLAIRE
(smirking)
Like always.

JENNIFER
(still hesitant)
I just...

ALEX
(serious)
Jen, I appreciate it, really. But
the boys are counting on me. I
promised them.

Bruce gives Jennifer his best puppy-dog eyes.

BRUCE
I wanna go with Uncle Alex.

JENNIFER
(defeated sigh)
Alright, alright. But you call me
if you need anything.

ALEX
(smiling)
Yes, ma'am.

Alex gives a mock salute. Claire hands Alex the packed bag.
Louis clambers onto Alex's lap.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LOUIS

To the maze!

EILEEN

Should we be worried?

CHARLES

(smiling)

Nah. They'll be back before the
corn knows what hit it.

Alex wheels out, Bruce and Louis chattering excitedly.
Jennifer watches them.

JENNIFER

Well, at least I can give you a
lift.

ALEX

Nah, I called a handicap
accessible Uber. Should be here
any minute.

UBER VAN pulls up fast, screeching to a halt. The DRIVER
hops out, smoking a funny cigarette.

UBER DRIVER

Juber at your service!

ALEX

What?

UBER DRIVER

Juber. J Uber. You know, like
Jason Bourne Uber ing. No matter
where I'll get you there like your
life counted on it!

Alex is baffled.

ALEX

On second thought, cancel that. My
sister will take us.

UBER DRIVER

You sure? I've got toys. They make
the kids docile.

ALEX

Uh... We are good. Here.
(Handing the driver
money)

For the trouble. Keep the change.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

UBER DRIVER
 You don't know what you're
 missing!

The driver gets back in his jalopy and peels away.

EXT. CORN MAZE - EVENING

The sun casts long shadows over the tall, swaying cornstalks.
 Louis and Bruce are wearing overalls and T-Rex headlamps.
 Alex glances around for Sara.

LOUIS
 Cool! Looks like a jungle!

ALEX
 (chuckling)
 Hmm... That would be one way of
 looking at it. A corn maze is like
 a big puzzle, but instead of using
 paper and a pencil, we use our
 feet and our brains.

LOUIS
 Yeah!

BRUCE
 Yeah!

ALEX
 Who wants to be the navigator?

LOUIS
 I wanna be the navigator!

BRUCE
 No. Me!

LOUIS
 No!

ALEX
 How about both of you be my
 navigators? Remember, I'm bad at
 directions. And, this thing -
 (indicating his
 wheelchair)
 Isn't exactly a 4x4.

Beat.

ALEX
 We gotta stick together. Work as a
 team because we are one. Cool?
 (Beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)

Come on. Bring it in. We're fist-bumping on it.

BRUCE

What's that?

ALEX

It's what we cool guys do. It's like saying we got each other without actually saying it. Come on, let's try it. Make a fist and stick it out.

They bump.

ALEX

Ka-poof!

Bruce laughs. Louis laughs. Alex's WATCH vibrates with a text message.

CLOSE UP: PHONE SCREEN

The message reads: "Almost there - Sara."

Alex's face lights up with a mixture of relief and excitement. He types his response.

ALEX

Hey guys I have a surprise -

Louis and Bruce have vanished.

ALEX

Fuck.

INT. EILEEN'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

The dining room is warmly decorated for Thanksgiving. Eileen, Claire, Max, and Jennifer are digging in spaghetti and meatballs. Laughter and conversation fill the air, but an underlying tension is evident in Eileen's demeanor.

CLAIRE

(passing the spaghetti)

Becky, this is delicious. You've outdone yourself this year.

ZACH

I've never had spaghetti before Thanksgiving. This is great.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EILEEN

Well, you can thank your Aunt
Linda for that.

AUNT LINDA (O.S.)

What was that, dear?

UNCLE STU (O.S.)

THEY LIKE THE PASTA!

AUNT LINDA

Oh, goodie! Stu, are you still in
the bathroom?! What the hell are
you doing in there?!

UNCLE STU (O.S.)

I'LL BE OUT IN A MINUTE, DARLING!

Eileen smiles weakly, her eyes reflecting a deep sadness.

EILEEN

It's wonderful having everyone
here.

Zach notices Eileen's subdued mood and gives her a concerned
look.

ZACH

Eileen, are you okay? You seem a
bit... off.

Eileen takes a deep breath, glancing at Claire and Zach.

EILEEN

There's something I need to tell
you all. I wanted to wait for the
right moment, but...

AUNT LINDA

Huh?

Claire and Zach exchange worried glances, their attention
fully on Eileen.

CLAIRE

Becky, what is it?

EILEEN

I've been to the doctor recently.
They found something... I have
Meningioma.

Shocked silence stifles the kitchen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Oh my God, Becky. When did you find out?

EILEEN

(teary-eyed)

The results came in on Monday just before everyone arrived .

ZACH

So, you've been keeping it from everyone?

Charles enters from the garage door, overhearing everything. He keeps quiet.

EILEEN

I didn't want to worry anyone. Especially Alex. He's been through more than plenty over the past couple years.

Claire hugs Eileen tightly, tears streaming down her face. Uncle Stu and Aunt Linda put a comforting hand on Eileen's shoulder.

CLAIRE

We love you, Becky. We'll be with you every step of the way. I can help with your appointments. Jennifer will take you to therapy. And, Alex will keep up with -

EILEEN

Alex doesn't know. I don't want him to know. I still need to be there for him.

Surprised, Uncle Stu and Aunt Linda look at Charles.

END OF ACT 2

ACT THREE

EXT. CORN MAZE - LATER

The sun hangs low in the sky, casting long shadows over the towering corn stalks. The rustling of leaves fills the air. Alex, disheveled, calls out.

ALEX

Louis! Bruce! Louis! Come on,
guys! Bruce!

The distant giggles stop Alex in his tracks. Alex listens, then scoots down another path.

CLOSE UP OF ALEX'S WATCH

Text from Sara: "I'm here."

ALEX

Shit!

His desperation growing. He turns a corner and nearly bumps into Sara. She sees he is in a panicked state.

SARA

(concerned)

Alex! What's going on?

ALEX

(relieved, but frantic)

Sara! You gotta help me. My nephews - Louis and Bruce - ran off while I was on the phone. I can't find them anywhere. Jen's gonna kill me!

SARA

Relax. Everything is going to be fine. We'll find them.

ALEX

(nods)

Thank you.

SARA

Let's split up. You go that way, I'll take this path. We'll meet back here in five minutes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX
Sara, it's literally a maze! I
don't want to lose you too!

SARA
What are their names?

ALEX
Louis and Bruce. They're toddlers.
Brown hair, brown eyes. They're
wearing

SARA
Alright, let's just keep going.
They couldn't have gotten that
far.

They continue to call out the boys' names. The sound of
rustling corn and distant giggles grows louder.

ALEX
(Firm, but relieved)
Louis! Bruce! There you are! What
did I say about sticking together?

LOUIS
(sheepishly)
Sorry, Uncle Alex... we just
wanted to play hide and seek.

BRUCE
(climbing on Alex and
hugging him)
We sorry.

ALEX
It's okay. Are you guys okay?

The toddlers nod. Alex checks his watch.

ALEX
Let's go home.

LOUIS
Awwwwwe!

BRUCE
Awwwwwe!

ALEX
Awwe. I know. Tomorrow is another
day. But, since all Uncle Alex's
work is done, he can take you guys
to the aquarium that is inside and
contained.

(CONTINUED)

INT. ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDENS - DAY

The Atlanta Botanical Gardens dazzle under the afternoon sun. Lush greenery and vibrant flowers create a serene atmosphere. Alex and Sara meander down winding paths, their steps slow and contemplative.

SARA

You know, most people wouldn't think of this as a perfect date spot, but it's incredible.

ALEX

I figured you would appreciate it.

They stop near a serene pond adorned with water lilies. Alex gazes at the flowers, lost in thought.

ALEX

I used to come here with my Becky.

SARA

That's sweet. What a wonderful son.

ALEX

(Smirking with a hint of sadness)
Wonderful.... That's not what I call myself now.

SARA

(Concerned)
What? Why?

ALEX

I haven't spoken to either of my parents much. In fact, after the accident and rehab....I wasn't myself.

SARA

After what you went through, I don't think anyone would feel like themselves.

A BUTTERFLY flutters around them and lands gently on Alex's shoulder. Both Alex and Sara notice, the mood lightening slightly.

SARA

(Softly with awe)
Look at that!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

(Grinning)

Yeah. I didn't know butterflies
were attracted to the scent of Old
Spice.

Sara playfully hits Alex's arm, laughing.

SARA

It's not your Old Spice.
Butterflies find things or people
in need of hope.

Sara pulls out her phone and snaps a picture of Alex and
the butterfly, capturing the moment. Just then, a MAN
approaches, his expression stern.

MAN

Excuse me, miss. I don't think you
can take pictures in the
sanctuary.

SARA

(Embarrassed,
lowering her phone)

Oh, okay. Sorry.

The man steps away, leaving Alex and Sara in a slightly
awkward silence.

ALEX

You made us get in trouble.

SARA

(shrugs, smiling)

I didn't see any signs.

ALEX

Yeah, me either. Wanna get out of
here?

SARA

Yeah.

They walk away, their bond subtly strengthened by their
shared moments of vulnerability and humor.

INT. HOME DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Alex and Sara enter. A FOAM FOOTBALL spirals toward
Sara's head. With lightning-fast reflexes, Alex catches
it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JENNIFER (O.S.)

Louis, not so hard!

Louis giggles. Jennifer enters the kitchen.

JENNIFER

Oh! Hello.

SARA

Hey.

Alex nods at the set table.

ALEX

Did you eat without us?

JENNIFER

We were just sitting down.

ALEX

Great.

Alex tosses the football back to Louis.

INT. KITCHEN TABLE - CONTINUOUS

The family, Alex, Sara, are seated around the table. The PASTA LADLE is passed around. Sara pokes at the pasta, uninterested.

EILEEN

Sara, it's lovely to have you over!

SARA

Thank you. It's wonderful to be here. It's so good to meet all of you finally!

ALEX

Don't speak too soon.

AUNT LINDA

Sorry?

UNCLE STU

So, Sara, what do you do?

SARA

I'm a med student at Emory.

CHARLES

Oh? And, how is that going?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SARA

Oh! It's really tough. But, it's very fulfilling. I've always wanted to help people.

CHARLES

But, why did you get into medicine?

SARA

Actually, it was because of Alex. I realized that there are so many people with disabilities. And, there's not enough being done to make their lives better. And, that's what the medical community is all about. To help people get better.

AUNT LINDA

Whadda say?!

Jennifer smirks.

JENNIFER

(Under breath)

Yeah. Wait until you have to pay those loans.

CLAIRE

Sara, have you given thought to alternative medicine?

SARA

Sorry?

ALEX

Claire.

CLAIRE

Alex, this is important. If she's going to be a doctor, she should know.

SARA

Know what?

ALEX

Ugh! Here we go.

CLAIRE

Never been a fan of hospitals. I don't believe in modern pharmaceuticals.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Big pharma is really in it for the money. Sara, have you ever given a thought to alternative medicine?

SARA

Ahhh... What do you mean?

CLAIRE

You know - whole medical systems. Mind-body techniques. Biologically based practices. Manipulative and body-based therapies. Energy therapies. All that modern medicine is just an excuse for big pharmaceutical companies to make a profit.

SARA

Well, I wouldn't know about that. But, I think there's more to be researched on nature-based remedies. The problem is that there's really no evidence to prove -

CLAIRE

Well, Sara, when I came down with the flu, you know what I used? elderberry syrup, garlic. In 24 hours, it was gone!

SARA

Interesting. And you didn't take any Dayquill or anything?

CLAIRE

Nope.

Beat.

ZACH

I did slip her some Nyquil.

ALEX

Ah! See?

CLAIRE

What?! How could you?!

MAX

You know, I had a bad ulcer. You know what helped that? Unicorn tears!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLAIRE

Max, you constantly take ibuprofen. You eat it like candy. Of course you're going to get ulcers!

MAX

Well, I would rather take a proven drug than some hippie sludge home remedy!

Claire stands up and begins shouting. Max sips his wine. Eileen, Jennifer, Uncle Stu step in. Alex turns to Sara.

ALEX

Jee! Look at the time! I'll walk you out.

The wheels get stuck on the tablecloth. Everything tumbles. Dogs lap up the pasta.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Alex walks Sara to her car. Sara plays with her keys.

ALEX

On behalf of my entire dysfunctional family, I apologize for what happened in there. My sisters are...

SARA

Quite opinionated?

ALEX

Umm... Let's go with that.

SARA

But, they're nice. They mean well. It was really good seeing your Becky and dad again. I had a nice time.

Back in the house, Louis and Bruce are watching them, peering through the blinds of Alex's bedroom window. Alex spots the boys' silhouettes looming.

SARA

Maybe next time you should come over to my house. Meet my family.

ALEX

Yeah. Definitely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

SARA
I'll call. Okay?

Alex smiles. Sara backs out of the driveway and waves.

ALEX
Okay.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

A tranquil backyard, illuminated by the soft hues of the sun. Alex eagerly tosses a FOOTBALL to his nephews. Nephews are wearing big smiles. Alex looks at the time.

ALEX
Alright, this is gonna have to be a short game. Uncle Alex needs to get back to work so he can pay next month's rent.

LOUIS
(looking worried)
Uncle Alex, how can you play catch from a wheelchair?

ALEX
Well, I'll show ya!

Louis nods and throws the football gingerly toward Alex. Alex snatches it out of the air. Louis and Bruce break into cheers, their faces light up with delight. Alex gently tosses it back.

ALEX
See? Now, who wants to play offense?

BRUCE
Me!

ALEX
Yeah? Do you wanna play quarterback or receiver?

BRUCE
Quarterback!

ALEX
How about you, Louis? Wanna play linebacker?

LOUIS
What's a linebacker?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

He's like the defense's
quarterback. But, instead of
coming up with ways to score, he
tries to come up with ways to take
the ball away from the
quarterback. Got it?

Cool!

LOUIS

Cool!

BRUCE

ALEX

I take it you both want to be
linebackers?

LOUIS

I'm linebacker! I'm bigger!

Bruce starts crying.

ALEX

Hang on! Who am I gonna throw it
to? I can't play quarterback *and*
be the offense's most valuable
player. The wide receiver!

BRUCE

(grinning)

I can play weciever!

ALEX

You can?! Same goes for you,
Louis, when it's your turn. Okay?

LOUIS

Okay.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

BEGIN MONTAGE

Alex throws the foam football to Bruce.

Louis competitively tags Bruce.

Alex gives Bruce the count who hikes the football to
Alex.

Bruce runs down the yard and catches the ball near the
fence - "The Touchdown" area. They celebrate.

Louis hikes the football and goes long. He catches the TD
pass. The dogs start to play with them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

END MONTAGE

Fart noise. Kids laugh harder. The back door bangs open. Max steps out, sketchpad in hand.

MAX

Ugh. Sports.

LOUIS

Dad! Wanna play?

MAX

Not now. You guys have fun.

LOUIS

Awwwwwe!

ALEX

Party-pooper.

LOUIS

Party pooper! Pooper!
Pooper!

BRUCE

Party pooper! Pooper!
Pooper!

The boys dart around the yard, giggling and squealing with delight, while Alex tosses the ball to them. Zach comes outside and joins in.

ZACH

Hey, what's all the ruckus?

LOUIS

We're playing football with Uncle Alex!

BRUCE

Yeah!

ZACH

Sounds fun! Can I play? I'll give you all a run for your money. You know, I played quarterback in college.

ALEX

Oh, cool!

MAX

Oh, here we go. Are you going down memory lane again? Highlights of time past, reliving yesteryear.

ZACH

At least I've got some highlights.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MAX

Yes! Highlights! Wispy
brushstrokes of yesteryear!

ALEX

Oh my god! Let's just play.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Alex motions for Max to run out, he throws a perfect spiral. Max makes the catch.

LOUIS

Yay, daddy!

BRUCE

Yay, yay!

Max does a celebration dance. Zach throws another, caught again. Louis and Bruce lose interest and start playing "bowling" with an OVERSIZED BALL.

CLAIRE

Alex!

Claire waves him in.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Copies of Alex's new book, "Crip." With a mandolin slicer, Eileen vigorously scallops potatoes. Aunt Linda is stuffing the turkey. Everyone - except Aunt Linda - turns to Alex, disappointment evident in their faces.

JENNIFER

(voice trembling)

How could you, Alex? How could you
write those things about us?

CLAIRE

(accusingly)

You turned us into dysfunctional
idiots. Do you really think we're
that awful?

EILEEN

(sadly)

I never thought you saw us that
way, Alex. I never thought you saw
yourself like this.

Alex clenches his fists, his knuckles turning white. His jaw tightens, and his eyes flicker with a mixture of hurt and anger. He takes a deep breath, but it comes out shaky.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX
 (struggling to remain
 calm)
 You don't understand...

Jennifer steps closer, her voice rising.

JENNIFER
 We don't understand? Alex, you've
 humiliated us!

ALEX
 I didn't write it to hurt you. I
 wrote it because... it's how I
 felt. It's how I've been feeling.

Jennifer takes another step.

JENNIFER
 But, your mocking them, Alex!
 You're mocking us! You don't get
 to pull the disabled card here!
 Don't you understand?! You
 blatantly crossed a line you
 should never!

Alex's frustration bubbles over. He slams his fist on the
 table, startling everyone.

ALEX
 (angrily)
 You think it's easy for me?
 Writing was the only way I could
 deal with everything! I needed to
 make sense of it all. I don't get
 to pull the disabled card?! I have
 every goddamn right to! After the
 accident, I was the one who felt
 isolated. I was the one that
 couldn't walk! I'm the one who
 gets up every fucking day and go
 in fear that I'm not accepted, I
 am not able to go out with
 friends! I'm not able to use my
 body and do yoga or help injured
 patients! I *am* the injured
 patient! And, there are many, many
 more like me out there who need to
 be able to laugh, who need a
 voice, who need acceptance. They
 need to be able to look themselves
 in the mirror and have the
 confidence to say, I am a cripple,
 so what? I still need my day!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALEX (CONT'D)

Of course, none of you understood what I was going through.

EILEEN

At what cost, Alex?!

Eileen slams her hand on the slicer.

EILEEN

Shit!

Blood spews forth. Eileen quickly runs her finger under cold water, grabbing for paper towels. She wraps it gently and holds her arm up.

ALEX

Dad! We need help!

EXT. HOSPITAL - LATER

The family rushes into the emergency room, Alex trailing behind in his wheelchair. It feels surreal.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Alex is with his family. Their glances occasionally, uncomfortably, dart his way. The double doors swing open, and a NURSE approaches.

NURSE HATHAWAY

She's going to be fine. Eileen suffered a small heart attack. She has hypertension, so we are going to put her on beta blockers for now. She can go home.

ALEX

Anything we can do to help her feel comfortable?

NURSE HATHAWAY

Just make sure she gets rest and takes her prescription. She should come back in a couple of weeks for a follow up. Then, we'll get some blood and do an EKG to see how she's doing.

ALEX

Okay. Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The family sighs collectively.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The moonlight seeps through the blinds. Alex sits in his wheelchair, staring blankly at the wall, his mind replaying the evening's events.

He wheels himself over to his desk, where "Crip" stares back at him, his heart heavy with regret.

He throws the manuscript onto the floor, pages scattering everywhere. He wheels himself to the window.

ALEX
(to the night)
Is this who I am now?

He looks down at the scattered pages, each one a testament to his pain and anger, overwhelmed by guilt. The weight of his actions crashing down on him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex finds the home video still in the player. He turns it on.

CUT TO:

ON THE TV:

Young Alex, Young Jennifer, Young Claire are playing in the backyard. Eileen is laughing. Suddenly, Young Alex jumps into Eileen's arms. Eileen picks him up, running with him, pretending he's Superman.

BACK TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex wheels himself into the living room, the house eerily quiet. He looks around at the family photos on the walls, each one a reminder of better times.

He goes to the bookshelf, pulling out photo albums and flipping through them. Pictures of family vacations, birthdays, and holidays fill the pages. He pauses on a photo of himself and Eileen, both smiling, carefree.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX
(speaking to the photo)
I'm so sorry.

He closes the album with an empty feeling. He's hit rock bottom, feeling utterly hopeless.

INT. GYM - DAY

Alex adjusts his position on the handcycle, still awkward. Jamie rolls up beside him, confident, joking with the other athletes.

JAMIE
Not bad, rookie. You keep that up, you might even look like you know what you're doing.

ALEX
(smiles, deflects)
Yeah, maybe. Just don't start thinking I actually belong here. I'm still figuring out this whole chair thing.

JAMIE
(chuckles, unapologetic)
See, that's the difference between us. You call it "a thing." I call it me. My wheels are just as much a part of me as my legs used to be.

ALEX
(shrugs, uneasy)
Maybe. I just don't want people staring at me like I'm some sideshow act.

JAMIE
Let 'em stare. Better than being invisible.

Alex looks away, not ready to admit how much that lands.

EXT. TRACK - EVENING

Alex finishes a sloppy lap, frustrated, sweat dripping. He wheels off to the side, trying to hide his exhaustion. Jamie notices and rolls over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

You keep pulling back every time
you hit a wall.

ALEX

(avoiding eye contact)
I just need more time. Don't want
to look weak in front of everyone.

JAMIE

Weak? Man, every push we make out
here is strength. You're the only
one who doesn't see it.

ALEX

(quietly, frustrated)
I don't want to be defined by this
chair.

JAMIE

And I don't want to be defined
without it. That's the difference.
You hide like it's a scar. I roll
like it's a banner.

Alex sits in silence, chewing on the words, but still not
ready to accept them.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Alex looks at himself in the mirror, seeing a man he
barely recognizes. He splashes water on his face, but the
pain remains.

ALEX

(softly)
I need help.

He wheels himself out of the bathroom.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

The first light of dawn creeps through the windows. Alex
sits in his wheelchair, the manuscript gathered neatly on
the coffee table. He picks up his phone and dials a
number.

ALEX

(on the phone)
Hi, Dr. Thompson. It's Alex. I
need to schedule an appointment...

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Alex, anxious and lost, holds a small bouquet. Sara enters the sterilized room, her presence immediately calming. Alex constantly glances at his watch.

SARA
(concerned)
Hey, how are you holding up?

ALEX
(nervously)
It's been hours. I've got a bad feeling.

Sara places a comforting hand on his shoulder, her touch grounding him.

SARA
(softly)
I know it's hard, but your mom is in good hands. You've done everything you can. Now, you have to trust the doctors.

ALEX
(sighing)
I just feel so helpless. I want to do something, anything.
(Beat)
She saw my novel. I don't think she liked it.

SARA
What do you mean?

ALEX
I mean.... The publisher sent over copies. My mom started reading it. And here we are!

Looking at his phone, his watch vibrating with messages.

ALEX
Great! My PR guy sent it to the AJC. They wanna do an interview..... Ugh!.... So does 11Alive! Great! I didn't expect this when I wrote that nonsense. I just wanted the publisher off my back! I did the wrong thing for the wrong reason. Classic Alex Murray! When am I going to stop? When am I going to stop running?!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)

I was never there when it mattered. Where do I start to make it right?

Sara smiles gently, her eyes filled with understanding.

SARA

You're doing it right now. Being here, waiting for your mom, ready to support her when she needs you the most. That's what matters.

ALEX

(studying Sara)

How do you always know the right thing to say?

Sara looks thoughtful, her own journey reflected in her eyes.

SARA

I've learned a lot from you - seeing you with Louis and Bruce and Jen. It's not about fixing everything; it's about being there, no matter what.

Alex reflects on this for a moment.

ALEX

This entire trip, I've been questioning myself. Thinking about what I've lost. Thinking I'm not Alex they knew. And, I'm not. I could never reconcile the accident, what it turned me into. Why Sean and Kyle died, and I lived. I don't think I could've gotten through this without you.

SARA

(blushing slightly)

I was afraid when I saw you at the trail. I didn't know how to approach you. It had been so long... I wasn't sure how I would feel when I saw you like this. But, at that coffee shop, I realized you were the same old Alex. Despite your wheelchair. It's made me realize how important it is to be there for the people we care about.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALEX
 (reaching for her
 hand)
 I'm not that Alex anymore. I'm
 better. We're all in this
 together.

Sara squeezes his hand, her expression warm.

SARA
 And we're going to get through it,
 one step at a time.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

RATTLING KEYS. Alex stops. A tiny reflection in the
 window. He pivots and sees Bruce standing in the doorway
 with a teddy bear.

ALEX
 Hey there, Bruce. Getting ready
 for bedtime?

BRUCE
 Read me a story.

ALEX
 Come on. Let's find your dad.

EXT. BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Alex sees Max comatose in the hammock.

ALEX
 Alright. Come on, buddy. Uncle
 Alex will read it to you.

BRUCE
 Yay!

INT. BRUCE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex picks a children's book.

ALEX
 This the one?

Bruce nods.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ALEX

Alrighty then. The... End. Huh!
That was short.

BRUCE

Uncle Alex! That's the end! You're
s'posed to start at the beginning!

ALEX

(Feigning ignorance)
Oooohhhh!

Bruce's laughter is infectious. Alex flips to the
beginning.

ALEX

"In the great, green room
There was a telephone and a
picture of - "

Alex flips the page.

ALEX

"a red balloon."
(Flip page)
"And there were three little bears
sitting on chairs...
(Flip page)
"And two little kittens and
mittens...
"And a comb and a brush and a bowl
full of mush."

Alex smiles as Bruce's eyes close. Alex watches a
peaceful sleeping Bruce, contemplating.

ALEX

(Whispers)
Love you, kiddo.

Alex's watch vibrates. Another text - this one from
Laura.

LAURA

(in text)
Big news! Writer's Digest wants to
highlight you! Went ahead and
scheduled an interview via Zoom
tomorrow! They are ECSTATIC!!

INT. ALEX'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

The room is neatly organized, with a bookshelf filled with various books and a few framed photos. A desk lamp casts a warm glow. Alex sits in front of his laptop, dressed smartly in a shirt and blazer. The Zoom interface is open on his screen, showing the name "JANE DOE - WRITER'S DIGEST" on a video call.

ALEX
(almost to himself)
Alright, let's do this.

He clicks to join the meeting. The screen shows JANE DOE, a professional-looking interviewer, 30s, with a friendly smile.

JANE
Hi Alex! Thanks for taking the time to chat with Writer's Digest today.

ALEX
Hi Jane, it's my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

JANE
First of all, congratulations on the release of your new book, "Crip." It's been receiving fantastic reviews. Can you tell us a bit about what inspired you to write it?

ALEX
(smiling)
Thank you! The inspiration came from my own experiences, actually. I wanted to explore themes of resilience and finding strength in adversity, and writing this book was a way to share that journey with others.

JANE
That's wonderful. In the book, your protagonist faces many challenges similar to your own. How much of your personal experience is reflected in the story?

ALEX
There's a lot of me in the protagonist, for sure.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (CONT'D)

I drew from my experiences of dealing with unexpected life changes and learning to adapt. But I also wanted to create a universal story that anyone facing their own struggles could relate to.

JANE

It certainly comes across as very authentic. How did you find the writing process? Was it cathartic or challenging?

ALEX

It was a bit of both, honestly. Writing can be incredibly therapeutic, but -

RINGING.

JANE

Whoop! Looks like we have a fan here on the line!

ALEX

(pleasantly)

Oh!

JANE

You're on the line, caller!

JIMMY (O.S.)

Hi! I just wanted to say that, Alex, you've got some fucking nerve! Who the hell do you think you are?! Making fun of people with special needs! Instead of writing a 300-page slop show you call art, you could have just said people with disabilities are stupid, helpless suckers, sucking on society's teat!

ALEX

Hang on, there, Jimmy. I think you missed the point. See, JJ was discovering himself. And, in his journey, he realized how his cognitive and physical conditions were hurdles, and -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIMMY (O.S.)

Yeah, bullshit! You just had to get off on mocking people with disabilities! You fucking ableist asshole!

ALEX

Jimmy, I am not an ableist! I'm a paraplegic myself. The novel was written from an ironic standpoint because that stereotype you mentioned is blatantly everywhere in entertainment. If anything, it's a satire about the portrayal of the disabled - not a direct mockery!

JIMMY (O.S.)

Yeah whatever. Put piss in a jar and you can call it grandma's apple sider! Your book is -

JANE

Look at that! We're out of time. Thanks, Jimmy for calling. Alex, great having you on the channel.

ALEX

(a little stunned)

Thank you, Jane. It's been a pleasure.

JANE

(to audience)

Okay YouTubers, well, that was interesting. Stay tuned for....

Alex shuts down his computer as crushing embarrassment falls upon him.

INT. ALEX'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Alex shuts down his computer, his face reflecting a mix of frustration and embarrassment. He takes a deep breath, trying to shake off the negative encounter.

CUT TO:

INT. REHABILITATION CENTER - PHYSICAL THERAPY ROOM - DAY

Alex is in the middle of a physical therapy session. He's drenched in sweat. Sara enters quietly, observing him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (V.O.)
At first, it was just pain.
Physical, emotional. But then... it
was fear. Fear of losing everything
I worked for. Fear of being
forgotten.

SARA (V.O.)
And what kept you going?

ALEX (V.O.)
Hope. The hope that maybe, just
maybe, I could find a new path. And
people like you... who didn't give
up on me.

The air is thick with unspoken emotions. Sara leaves.

FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Alex hangs up the phone, feeling a small sense of relief for reaching out. As he sits in the quiet room, his eyes catch a glimpse of a dusty old VHS tape on the shelf labeled "Alex's Races." He hesitates for a moment, then wheels himself over and takes the tape.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Alex inserts the tape into the VCR and turns on the TV. The screen flickers to life, showing grainy footage of Alex in his prime, running marathons and crossing finish lines with a beaming smile. The sound of cheering crowds and the sight of his younger, determined self brings a bittersweet smile to his face.

ON THE TV:

The camera captures Alex pushing himself to the limit, sweat pouring down his face, his eyes filled with fierce determination. The fire that had been extinguished begins to flicker back to life.

BACK TO:

Alex rewinds the tape and watches the races again, absorbing the energy and passion from his past self.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex sits at his desk, writing a heartfelt letter to his family. He pours out his feelings.

ALEX (V.O.)
 I know I've hurt you, and I'm
 deeply sorry. Writing was my way
 of coping, but it shouldn't have
 come at your expense. I'm going to
 make things right, starting with
 myself

The letter is sealed and placed on the coffee table.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - EARLY MORNING

Alex looks up from his laptop at the sun, knowing how to mend his broken family relationship.

FADE TO:

INT. LOEWS HOTEL - DAY

Alex looks at the crowd of readers - their expressions a mix of smiles and puzzling looks. Laura taps Alex's shoulder.

LAURA
 This is exciting, isn't?

ALEX
 It's definitely something.

LAURA
 You've never been to California
 before, have you? I love it here.
 Don't you?

ALEX
 (hesitantly)
 It's my first time. It's nice.
 Real nice.

LAURA
 Haha. Well, think about moving. I
 need you back in New York,
 cranking out those spectacular
 manuscripts!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX

Wait, the contract was just for this one book.

LAURA

Don't worry. I've got others with me you need to sign. But, we'll take care of them after. This is your moment in the sun! Enjoy it! Soak it in! Soak it all in! I presume you have a speech prepared?

ALEX

Yes.

LAURA

I'm sure it's brilliant!

ALEX

Trust me, if you liked the book, my remarks will leave you speechless.

LAURA

Wonderful! I'm going to be in the front row.

ALEX

Perfect.

The bookstore manager, KAREN, 30s, approaches Alex.

KAREN

How are we doing?

ALEX

Fine. Just fine.

KAREN

Can we start? I'll introduce you and then you can take it from there. If you don't mind, limit the speech to five minutes. I have other writers coming in soon.

ALEX

No problem.

(Glancing at Laura)

I'm actually ready now.

KAREN

Okey-dokey. Let me introduce you then.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Karen approaches a MIC.

KAREN

Alright, ladies and gentlemen. We have the pleasure of hearing from Alex Murray, author of *Crip*, which has been nominated for Voices of the Future. This honor is meant to celebrate captivating stories told by diverse voices. Though *Crip* is funny, fascinating and thought-provoking, the man who came up with its inception is ever more intriguing and has his own coming-of-age tale. One year, Alex lost his ability to walk in a car accident that killed his friends. It left Alex paralyzed from the waist down, and was seemingly the end. However, with an inkling of hope, and a creative mind, Alex never gave up on his dreams of being a writer. Inspired by the tragedy, and his own disability, Alex wheeled up to his desk and put pen to paper, forging ahead with his heart and mind, crafting a literary adventure, pouring his own brave soul into a richly endearing mentally handicapped protagonist who experiences his own ambition, love, and pain. Without further ado, Alex Murray!

It's all Alex can do not to roll his eyes. Smiling politely, Alex wheels up to Karen. Shaking hands, they trade places - Karen lowering the mic. The lights shine brightly in his eyes, but Alex suddenly spots Jennifer, Claire, and Sara amid the crowded auditorium.

Alex nods to Karen as she walks off stage, clapping, smiling.

ALEX

Thank you, Karen.
 (to the applauding crowd)
 I'm not that great at speeches,
 that's why I became a writer.

The crowd laughs.

ALEX

So, I'll make this brief.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Alex glances from Laura to Jennifer to Sara.

ALEX

I didn't know what to do after my accident. I was a pretty good track runner who got a scholarship to UGA, where I met the most beautiful woman in the world. I had the whole world at my fingertips, I had my friends, and I was hellbent on becoming a writer. I knew who I was. Then, I thought I had lost everything when that car crash happened. I lost my friends, I lost my identity, I lost everything.

CLOSE UP

The crowd is captivated. Sara listens intently. Jennifer and Claire breathe deeply.

BACK TO ALEX

Alex swallows, thoughtfully studying the framed certificate - his reflection staring back. Then, the words flowed.

ALEX

For a very long time, I didn't feel like myself. I didn't recognize my reflection in the mirror. I hid behind my words. I wrote out of spite. I wrote out of fear of what I had become. I wrote with my emotions rather than my knowledge or experiences, recklessly pandering to the wrongful stereotype of disabled individuals.

(beat)

Stereotypes are an easy reference. That's why we like them. Too often, they are digested and shit out by assholes who think they're doing the disabled community justice. The very thought that there is representation of people with disabilities in art is used for justification for such mockery.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

There's a curious rumble through the crowd.

LAURA

(To herself)

Where the hell is he going with this?

ALEX

I held in my hands the key to fame and fortune, but it came at a hefty price. Even though it went against my values, my beliefs, my personal value, I created this monstrous, humiliating portrait that doesn't deserve an inkling of recognition - except the declaration that it is wrong and immoral.

(beat) Someone called me out on it on a live webcast. Rightfully so. Called me an ableist - among other things. While I believe that we should all have our freedom to speak, to pursue dreams, to create, it shouldn't belittle others - as this novel does. Out of desperation, I threw out all my integrity, prudence, and care as a writer - all for this drivel. My publisher said it was brilliant. I trusted the one person who was close to me, took her advice. In the end, after squeezing me for this book, she fed me to the wolves. She is my publisher - or excuse me, former publisher -

LAURA

Oh fuck!

ALEX

Laura Gaucho. Come on out here, Laura! Everyone, let's give her a great, big round of applause!

Laura ducks into an aisle. The spotlight finds her. She freezes.

ALEX

There you are! You can run, but you can't hide!

JENNIFER

You extorted my brother!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

The crowd boos. Photographers snap pictures. Alex wheels into the hall.

INT. INNER AREA - CONTINUOUS

Panicking, Laura slams the door.

ALEX

This is what happens when you mock people with disabilities.

LAURA

I just requested you finish the obligations of the contract. I never told you to write a book that mocks people with disabilities.

ALEX

You hammered me for months. You dangled my career in front of me! You kicked me when I was down!

LAURA

You knew your career depended on this book. Your contract, your future projects with us...

ALEX

There won't be any more projects! Laura, it's over. I wanted to be a writer to write stories that challenge the status quo, that bring light to our shared humanity. Not stories that degrade and mock.

LAURA

(staring at him,
frustrated)

So what are you going to do?

ALEX

(calmly)

I'll write the story I believe in. And if you can't support that, then maybe it's time I find a publisher who will.

Laura stares at Alex, realizing she's not going to win this argument.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA
(resigned)
Fine. But you'd better hope your
next idea is something we can
market.

ALEX
We? There is no we, Laura.

LAURA
What are you talking about? I was
the only one who accepted your
drivel. Look at yourself. You have
no prospects. No future. You're
just another cripple rolling down
a track toward wellfare!

ALEX
Enough! I may be in a wheelchair,
but I'm not powerless. And I'm
certainly not a failure. Maybe
it's time I remind myself of that.

Laura is taken aback by Alex's sudden outburst, silence
hanging between them.

LAURA
Alex, I didn't mean to imply -

ALEX
Of course you did.

He wheels himself away, leaving Laura standing alone,
conflicted and regretful. Alex slips through the door.
Murmurs of the crowd outside filter into the room as the
door swings shut behind Alex.

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

Alex submits a revised version of his new book to his new
editor.

ALEX (V.O.)
It doesn't matter where you begin,
so long as you just begin.

Alex smiles. His watch alerts him of the time.

FADE TO:

NT. VETERINARY CLINIC - DAY

The clinic is bustling with activity. Jennifer, in her white coat, moves efficiently from one patient to another, exuding confidence and expertise. She finishes examining a golden retriever, patting its head gently.

INT. FAMILY HOME - EVENING

Jennifer enters the home quietly. Eileen is sitting in the living room, a soft blanket over her lap. She looks up and smiles weakly as Jennifer walks in.

EILEEN

Jennifer, you're home. How was work?

JENNIFER

(smiling)

Busy, as usual. How are you feeling today, Mom?

ALEX (V.O.)

It may be overwhelming at times, however, life doesn't stop for anyone. You must keep pushing. But, you can't do it on your own all the time.

Jennifer sets her bag down and sits beside Eileen, gently taking her hand.

ALEX

Hey, thought I'd join the party.

JENNIFER

(Smiling)

Hey, Alex. Mom and I were just catching up.

ALEX

How's she doing?

JENNIFER

Good days and bad days. Today's a good one.

Alex moves closer, placing a comforting hand on Jennifer's shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALEX (V.O.)

We are struck by time, collisions,
and actions unfolding in real-
time. But, what counts is the way
we respond. When we are
blindsided, we have a choice. Do
we lie helpless and broken, hoping
someone will find us or do we seek
help?

INT. HOME OFFICE - DAY

Alex calls Sara - he gets her answering machine.

ALEX (V.O.)

Sometimes, it just doesn't pan
out, but we have to be okay with
it.

Alex throws the phone against the wall.

FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alex helps Charles put up the Christmas tree.

CHARLES

Alright, time for the lights.

ALEX (V.O.)

But, we cling to an inkling of
hope that everything works out in
the end.

Charles pulls out the lights.

JENNIFER

Hey, I have an idea! How about
this year we go to midnight mass.

ALEX

What?

JENNIFER

We haven't been to church since
your last communion.

EILEEN

I would love that!

INT. HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC CHURCH - NIGHT

Alex is next to a sleeping Eileen. The congregation is gathered, singing "Silent Night" softly.

ALEX
(whispers)
You gotta be kidding.

The priest approaches the pulpit, beginning a heartfelt sermon about love, forgiveness, and new beginnings.

PRIEST
...and as we reflect on this holy night, let us remember that love is the greatest gift we can give and receive. It's never too late for forgiveness, for hope, for a new start.

Sara turns to Alex, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

SARA
Alex, I've been thinking a lot about us. About everything we've been through.

Alex quietly listens.

SARA
(Taking his hand)
I care about you, Alex. I always have. But we need to be honest with each other. About what we want, about our future.

ALEX
Yeah. I think we owe it to ourselves to figure that out. Together, if that's what we both want.

SARA
(Smiling through)
I want that. But, as I told you, I'm not ready for a long-term relationship.

Alex thinks for a moment.

ALEX
Then, what do you want?

It's now Sara's turn to ponder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARA

I want us to be in each other's
lives, support each other, and
grow together. But I also need
some space to figure out who I am
and what I want from life.

Alex thinks it over, then smiles bittersweetly. They turn
back, listening to the chorus.

FADE OUT.