

The Reader (a short)

By

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FADE IN

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT - DAY

ALEX, 25, leans over his printer that sits on a small desk. The printer hums as it spits out printed paper. He pulls a cell phone from his pocket as he picks up the paper and looking at the page dials.

DOUG O.S.
(on the phone)
Gotcha Scripts, this is Doug.

ALEX
Doug, this is Alex Backman. I just wanted to say how much I appreciated your service. You gave me some great tips on my script.

DOUG O.S.
That's what we're here for.

ALEX
I just had a couple of questions.

DOUG O.S.
No problem.

ALEX
Did you write the coverage? I really want to talk to somebody about this. I'm just starting out and--

DOUG O.S.
Y'know, I remember your address on the form you filled out. You're only a couple of blocks from me in La Mirada. Normally we don't encourage this type of contact but you're close so do you want to swing by?

ALEX
Yeah, if it's not too much trouble. What's your address?

Alex takes a pen from his desk and writes as he listens on the cell phone.

ALEX
 (loud enough for Doug to hear)
 Does anyone still write those? Do
 you have any Dr. Pepper?

DOUG O.S.
 You bet.

Doug enters carrying two plastic cups and hands one to Alex.

ALEX
 Your feedback made me think about
 where to start with a re-write.

DOUG
 You understand that pass really
 means--

ALEX
 Yeah. I know it's not, y'know, good
 yet.

Alex takes a drink and sets the cup on an end table next to
 the sofa.

DOUG
 You're close, though. You need to
 provide a better word picture for
 the action you write. You do have a
 real gift for dialogue.

ALEX
 Really?

ALEX'S P.O.V. - The room is blurry and starts to tilt
 sideways. Doug leans forward toward Alex.

DOUG
 Are you okay?

Alex collapses face first on to the light brown carpeted
 floor.

INT. DOUG'S BASEMENT - TIME UNKNOWN

Alex is in an office chair sleeping with his head tilted
 back. He is in front of a desk with a computer monitor and a
 keyboard. Alex flinches as he awakes.

He looks down to see his left ankle shackled with a chain
 attached to a metal ring embedded in the concrete floor.

He looks to his right and sees a pile of papers on the floor and above it appears to be the bottom end of a laundry chute. To his left is what looks like a clothes hamper and next to it against the wall is a toilet.

ALEX
(looking up)
Hello! Hey! What's going on!

DOUG O.S.
I'm here Alex.

Alex sees a speaker mounted in the corner of the ceiling where Doug's voice came from.

DOUG O.S. (cont'd)
There is a pile of scripts on your right. Read a script and write coverage for it on the computer on your desk. The template is already set up for you.

ALEX
What? No way!

DOUG O.S.
Write them and I'll let you go when you've finished with the pile. Put each one in that bin next to you when you've finished it.

ALEX
No! Are you kidding? You're not going to get away with this! Somebody's going to notice that I'm missing!
(beat)
Eventually! Then the police are gonna come!

Alex sighs. He stares at the floor then looks at the pile of scripts. He looks at the pile for several seconds then picks one up and places it on the desk.

Alex looks around the room. There's a stairway on the right side of the room leading up to a door. He pulls his leg up against the chain. The ring in the floor doesn't budge. He pulls again, then yanks. It holds.

He picks up the script and turns past the cover page.

Alex smirks, then chuckles as he continues to read.

INT. DOUG'S BASEMENT - HOURS LATER

Alex is typing at the computer, then reaches up with his right hand and bangs the Enter key. He takes the script from the desk and tosses it into the hamper.

Alex is startled as scripts by the hundreds come down the laundry chute and pile on the floor.

ALEX

Come on!

The deluge of scripts keeps coming down the chute and continues until there is a pile of them, knee-high on the floor.

ALEX (cont'd)

That's not fair!

(beat)

You're bound to run out of brass
brads eventually! What then? Just
let me go!

INT. DOUG'S BASEMENT - TIME UNKNOWN

Alex is asleep with his head on the desk. The pile of scripts is now waist-deep.

Alex lifts his head and groans as he arches his back and stretches. His face is now darkened by a five o'clock shadow...make that a ten o'clock shadow.

Alex sees a tray on his desk with a sandwich, apple and a bottle of water. He picks up the apple, then reaches for another script. Alex reads the cover page and looks up at the ceiling.

ALEX

Doug! No more zombie scripts! Can
you hear me? Enough already!

Alex flings the script over his head behind him. He puts the apple back on the tray, picks up another script from the pile and reads the cover page.

ALEX

(muttering to himself as he
reads)

Zombies Take Tokyo.

Alex flings that script over his head, then reaches for another.

ALEX (cont'd)
The Zombie King.

Alex gives that script the same treatment as the previous two. He pulls out another.

ALEX
World War Z, the re-boot. They'll never do that again.

He flings that one behind him and takes picks up three at once.

ALEX (cont'd)
The Zombie Prince. The Zombie Queen. Wait...The Unstoppable 49ers? Logline...The San Francisco 49ers turn their season around after their offensive line...turns in to Zombies!?
(to the ceiling)
Seriously?!

Alex flings each of the three scripts over his head one at a time with added distance on the third one. He picks up another script from the pile.

ALEX
The Zombie Princess.
(to the ceiling)
Okay! Fine!
(beat)
You better give a recommend on the next thing I send you!

INT. DOUG'S BASEMENT - TIME UNKNOWN

Alex is sleeping with his head on the desk. He slowly lifts his head and looks around.

Alex's hair is shaggier and he now has a full beard.

He looks to his right and sees the pile of scripts. The mountain of paper is still waist high.

His weary eyes squint as he leans toward the pile.

ALEX'S P.O.V. - Partially buried on the back end of the pile is what looks like the DreamWorks logo on the cover of one of the scripts.

Alex reaches for it and has to stretch across the piles of paper. It is just beyond his reach. He leans forward falls out of his chair and ends up face down on the pile of scripts.

He reaches his prize, rolls on his back and lies across the pile of paper. The script in his hands shows the DreamWorks logo on letterhead that has been paper-clipped to the script.

Alex reads from his bed of scripts.

ALEX

The prequel to Lincoln. Harrison:
the epic story of the thirty-two
day presidency of William Henry
Harrison. By Tony Kushner. Based on
the forthcoming book by Doris
Kearns Goodwin.

Alex flips through the pages of the thick script and looks at the last page.

ALEX

179 pages?!

Alex holds the script to his chest and tries to move back to his chair but the papers slide beneath him and he somersaults backwards away from the desk.

He looks up astonished as his chain has come free from the ring on the floor. He stands and drops the script.

Alex picks up the chain walks quietly toward the stairs.

As he reaches the stairs and sees a key on the floor. He picks it up and inserts it into the shackle on his ankle. The key turns and he removes the metal cuff.

Alex stands still listening for movement. He takes one step up the stairs and pauses, then takes the second step. He stops again and looks back across the room.

Alex steps down from the stairs and quickly scampers back to the pile of scripts.

He sifts through the pile, picks up the copy of "Harrison," tucks it under his arm and scrambles back to stairs.

Alex quietly moves up the stairs. He reaches the top and slowly turns the doorknob. It is not locked. The door opens and he moves through the doorway.

INT. DOUG'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex steps in. He holds his breath listening for any sound. None is heard.

Alex takes one step toward the front door when the doorbell rings.

Wide-eyed, Alex looks around the room. There is no movement. The doorbell rings again.

Alex is still frozen in place. He takes a breath, moves to the door and opens it.

Standing in the doorway is BRIAN NIXON, 22. He looks at Alex and smiles.

BRIAN

Hi, I'm Brian Nixon. I wrote Wildfire and I think you wrote my coverage for it.

ALEX

Yeah! Hey that was great. Come on in. Seriously that was one of the best things I've read in...I don't know how long.

Brian enters the room.

BRIAN

Well I appreciate that. I just have some questions.

(beat)

Hey, um, are you okay?

ALEX

What? Oh. I've been sort of pulling an all-nighter. More like an all-weekender, actually.

BRIAN

Yeah, I've done that. You do know it's Wednesday, right?

ALEX

Yes. Wait, it is? Hey, have a seat. You want a Dr. Pepper?

FADE OUT