

Success

By

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FADE IN

INT. KEVIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

KEVIN, aged 36, half-dressed in wrinkled clothes, clutches his knees, rocking back and forth on his bed in a dark bedroom, suffocated with clutter. His vacant eyes stare past the empty coffee mugs and pills in front of him.

KEVIN

I know this is going to work. It's
going to work this time.

INT. KEVIN'S BEDROOM - DAY - 6 MONTHS EARLIER

The sun is streaming onto the bed where Jen, 35, with long, silky hair and a soft eyes, lounges in shorts and a T-shirt alongside Kevin, wearing a blue bathrobe, as he looks over a notebook.

KEVIN

This is tedious. You sure you don't
want to skip D&D? We can roleplay
all we want right here.

JEN

Graydor the Brave does not forsake
his companions. Let's go already.

Kevin lifts a pencil and makes a correction. Jen's fingers play with Kevin's hair.

JEN

Your hair is still wet.

KEVIN

You're making Graydor angry.

Jen smirks with an eye roll and crosses her arms.

INT. TAVERN - EVENING

A hand rolls a 20-sided die, stopping on a 2.

Vivian, 35, with her wild, short hair, peeks over the edge of a trifolded cardboard barrier.

James, 40, with dark-framed, boxy glasses, abruptly breaks his gaze from the lowly number, waiting, slack-jawed, for Vivian to explain.

VIVIAN
Graydor the Brave slips and falls
on Jeznal's familiar... and it
died.

JAMES
(turning toward Kevin)
Nooo!!!

Jen rolls backward, guffawing.

KEVIN
Sorry about your turtle.

JAMES
(fuming)
It was a tortoise! Jen, you said
that symbol you painted on its
shell would protect it!

JEN
Ask Vivian why it didn't work.
She's the DM.

Vivian starts cleaning up her papers and books, then grabs
the 20-sider.

VIVIAN
That spell is only for deflecting
arrows and small knives. A half-orc
in full armor fell on him. He
rolled a 2 on a bull rush in the
rain. The die don't lie, James!

JAMES
(weakly)
But he wasn't just my familiar. He
was my friend.

Kevin seems lost in thought. Fingers snap at him.

JEN
Kevin, are you still with us?

KEVIN
Oh, sorry. I've just been thinking
about my latest project.

VIVIAN
You making another film?

JAMES

Just put the camera down and keep your day job, dude. Your last film about Jen's cat was painful.

VIVIAN

It was better than his used car lot commercial. That's for sure.

James and Vivian start to giggle.

KEVIN

Enough about the commercial already.

JEN

It's just a bad economy.

VIVIAN

Oh, and that travel vlog?

JAMES

But he left Jen all alone!

Jen scoffs at James's feigned sympathy.

Vivian returns to her beer, struggling to recompose herself.

KEVIN

Okay, okay, I get it, but this is different. I will finally write a success story of my own. You know that documentary series "Humans of New York?"

James nods.

JEN

I love Humans of New York!

KEVIN

Every video he posts has millions, MILLIONS of views and thousands of comments! I want to make a documentary where, instead, I interview successful people, and ask them how they got to where they are.

Vivian looks thoughtful.

JAMES

Okay.

KEVIN

Who wouldn't want to see a documentary that lays out recipes for success, from real people?

(turns to Jen)

Hey, remember when I told you about that actor I met when I was vlogging? Guess who's up for being interviewed?

JEN

No way! Seriously?

Kevin nods.

JAMES

Which actor?

KEVIN

This could be my big break. I can feel it.

Kevin lights up with manic energy, and Jen raises her beer to him.

JEN

To Kev's big break!

James and Vivian glance at each other, before clinking glasses.

NT. LARGE OFFICE- EVENING

Kevin sits across from DANIEL, aged 32, in a neutral-colored office space, engaged in conversation, with a camera recording.

DANIEL

I wanted to make it big, but I was kidding myself. I kept playing tennis every weekend, cookin' myself fancy meals, goin' out for beers. All distractions. To get to the next level, I had to give it all up. You really need that kind of focus if you want to rise to the top.

KEVIN

This sounds like a serious commitment. What was it like, to let go of so much?

DANIEL

Well, do you have any idea how hard it is to succeed in the restaurant business? Trying to get that second Michelin star? The short answer is, yeah, I felt like I was giving up a lot, but it was all worth it in the end.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Allison, 60, carefully sprinkles salsa over the meats of a carefully arranged assortment of tacos. The door opens behind her and she rushes to clean her hands.

ALLISON

Kevin!

Allison lights up and rushes to kiss her son on the cheek. Kevin laughs.

KEVIN

Tacos!

ALLISON

Lamb tacos! New recipe!

Allison holds a plate bearing a single taco and holds the taco up. Kevin obliges.

KEVIN

This is so good. Lamb tacos! I had no idea!

Allison brushes Kevin's mouth with a napkin as he gets his food down. An older man in a business suit, with peppered hair and a stoic face walks out.

KEVIN

Hi Dad.

DAVID

Good to see you, son.

KEVIN

I'm working on a film. A documentary!

DAVID
Filmmaking? That's great, Kevin.
Good luck with it.
(checks his watch)
Sorry, I have a meeting.

David kisses Allison on the cheek, then gives a token nod to Kevin and turns to leave.

KEVIN
It's about successful people--

A door shuts.

KEVIN
Like you.

Allison remembers the plate in her hands and heads to the sink to wash it.

ALLISON
So Jen's busy?

KEVIN
Sushi night with the girls or something.

ALLISON
When ya gonna finally propose to her? I want grandkids!

Kevin rolls his eyes as his mother rejoins him.

KEVIN
Mom! I'm still trying to become a success first. I just finished the first interview of my documentary. This guy gave up so much for his restaurant, but he made it. I wish I could be that dedicated.

ALLISON
Nonsense. Hey, we can start our own taco restaurant!

Allison and Kevin share a laugh.

KEVIN
You think I have it in me? I want this documentary to succeed so much. Even Dad will be impressed.

ALLISON

Your don't need to prove anything to your father, honey. Hey, I still have a lot of phone calls to make for my 60th birthday party.

KEVIN

You really want to do something that big?

ALLISON

You know me and birthday parties. I've been telling all my friends about how talented and smart you are! They can't wait to meet you! Hey, guess what I'll be serving?

Kevin glances over at the tacos and then back incredulously at his squealing mother.

INT. TAVERN - EVENING

Jen and James sit silently, nursing their beers, looking sympathetically at the stack of gaming materials in front of Vivian. Vivian glances at the door behind her.

JAMES

Where is he?

JEN

Something must have come up...

JAMES

Maybe we can play without him?

VIVIAN

I really need the whole gang for this.

Vivian starts collecting empty glasses.

JAMES

Come on Kevin! It's the third time already!

VIVIAN

I guess I'll just rewrite the quest for two players.

(beat)

Umm, who wants another round?

Jen glances again at the door, biting her lip, then back toward Vivian with sincerity.

INT. LARGE OFFICE - EVENING

Kevin converses at a table with MELANIE, aged 35, again with a camera recording.

MELANIE

You know, I didn't think I'd make it. It took so much discipline and dedication and sacrifice.

KEVIN

You mentioned that it had taken you a few tries to get there. How did you finally make your novel a reality?

MELANIE

It was kind of like an obsession. I knew I had it in me, but something was not clicking. I could not find enough time to think, and even less time to write. It was driving me crazy. Then...

(leans in)

I decided to take a risk. I quit my job. I gave myself half a year to write that novel. No going back. Do or die.

KEVIN

So you got rid of the safety net and really dedicated yourself, huh? What were your days like after that?

MELANIE

It was scary, but I focused on my routine. I would wake up, have coffee, and get to work. I would sometimes stay up all night. No phone, no internet, no TV. Just work. And a lot of coffee.

Kevin nods his head.

MELANIE

(cont'd)

And I did it. It's hard to put into words what it feels like to have your novel on the New York Times Best Sellers list.

INT. KEVIN'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Kevin sits at his computer desk in his orderly apartment, taking another sip from a large mug of coffee. He takes notes while reviewing the recording of his interview with Melanie.

MELANIE'S VOICE

It was kind of like an obsession...
I quit my job... Do or die. No
phone, no internet, no TV. Just
work... And a lot of coffee

INT. FRONT OFFICE

Chairs and tables with brochures lean against the walls of a reception area. Jen peeks over a receptionist busy on his phone, at a clock.

She hears fast-approaching footsteps and looks up to see Kevin, a box in hand, with a woman in her 50's dressed for business, chasing after, wearing a look of exasperation.

BOSS

You have to give me some notice.
Come on!

KEVIN

I'm sorry! I just need to focus on
my project.

The boss's phone starts ringing and she speaks over the ringing.

BOSS

What project? I have to take this.
Just call me tomorrow. We can work
something out.

The boss answers her phone, rushing away. Kevin shakes his head then notices Jen and does a double-take.

KEVIN

Oh, hey! Umm... Dinner! Right!

JEN

(shocked)

Did you just quit your job?

Kevin motions with his head toward the door and continues walking

KEVIN

Yep. I've just been trying to streamline my life more. I need to be able to just wake up, have coffee, and get to work on my film.

JEN

Is that why you stopped showing up to the gaming nights? Vivian's really upset.

KEVIN

I know...

(rakes his hair)

I'll call her. But this project has become an obsession of mine. I should have time for pizza?

JEN

I'm worried about you.

KEVIN

(upping his pace)

Don't be. It's do or die now!

INT. LARGE OFFICE - DAY

Jason tucks his phone away and looks back up.

JASON

Right, so where was I?

KEVIN

I asked about your preparation for the bar exam.

JASON

Oh, yeah. Well, it became my life. I wasn't going to be pulled away by some paramedic on day 2. I cut myself off from the world, and worked until I couldn't, every single day, and then kept pushing, and pushing.

KEVIN

Did you have coffee in your IV or something?

Kevin chuckles.

JASON
Not just coffee.

KEVIN
Something stronger, huh?

JASON
(glancing at the camera)
And you want to record me saying
what, exactly? Let's just say I
wasn't screwin' around. I did what
I had to. But look at me now.
(spreads arms)
I'm the youngest partner in the
history of the firm.

KEVIN
It sounds like you made their
choice easy, with all that hard
work and sacrifice.

JASON
Exactly. There's a reason why
makin' it big is so difficult. Most
people? They lack commitment.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Empty coffee cups and some pills are strewn over the night
stand in a motel room. A smartphone rings. Kevin is trying
to get a tie right, but gives up and answers the phone.

ALLISON
How are you, Kevin?

KEVIN
Hey Mom, what's up?

A pause. Kevin starts to privately motion for her to "get on
with it" with his hand.

INTERCUT WITH ALLISON'S KITCHEN:

ALLISON
Hey, can you pick up some tomatoes
and come a little early? I used
them all up in the salsa and it'd
be great to have more for the
tacos.

Kevin's eyes close as he claws his hair and mouths the word
"Fuck".

KEVIN
Mom, I'm in Ohio.

ALLISON
But my birthday...

David stands at the kitchen doorway.

FATHER
He's busy with that film, isn't he?
Good for him.

END INTERCUT

KEVIN
I know Mom, I'm sorry. I'm
preparing for another interview. A
good one.

Another long pause.

ALLISON
(weakly)
Okay, Kevin.

KEVIN
I'm really sorry, Mom. I've just
been so focused and it slipped my
mind. Trust me, you and... even Dad
are going to be so proud of me.

ALLISON
We are proud of you, Kevin.

KEVIN
I'll talk to you later, okay? Bye
Mom.

Kevin hangs up and gets back to his tie.

INT. DARK ROOM - EVENING

Kevin listens intently to ALYSSA in a quiet, dark space
streaked with light from a single window.

ALYSSA
And I just knew... Journalism was
too important to me. Just a little
bit more to make all the sacrifices
worth it. I just had to take a
break. We were together for so
long...
(beat)

ALYSSA

I loved him. But I was so damn close to success. You can't be a successful journalist if you feel tied down. And now, I'm busier than ever, traveling the world, covering the top stories. They're even talking about giving me my own time slot now. I'm on cloud nine.

KEVIN

You sound really happy. All those sacrifices obviously paid off.

INT. KEVIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jen approaches a door of an apartment and knocks. No answer. She tries the doorbell. Eventually she tries the knob, and it opens. She enters cautiously.

JEN

Hello? Kevin?

Jen hears movement and follows it.

Jen approaches a partially open door leading to a dark room, where the noise of key clattering is coming from. She peeks in.

In his bedroom, Kevin sits in front of his computer, in his pajamas, with headphones on, watching one of his interviews. The room is littered with coffee cups, fast food packaging, and clothes.

Jen walks in a bit and speaks louder.

JEN

Kevin?

No response. Kevin takes out a bottle of pills from a drawer and washes one down with coffee. He catches sight of Jen in his peripheral vision and freaks.

KEVIN

Ahhh!!!

The coffee goes flying, splashing on his keyboard.

KEVIN

Shit!

Kevin looks up, agitated. Jen backs away.

KEVIN

Don't sneak up on me like that.

JEN

I didn't mean to. I was worried.
You're not answering your phone at
all.

KEVIN

I can't have any distractions.

Kevin looks around, then shakes his head and grabs a t-shirt
to start mopping up his keyboard.

JEN

What are those pills you're taking?

KEVIN

(irritated)

Jen, look, it's none of your
business.

JEN

You don't look well.

KEVIN

I think we need to take a break.

Jen's eyes widen, her mouth agape. Kevin's eyes connect.

KEVIN

Jen... I can't be distracted right
now...

JEN

I'm just a distraction? Kevin, I
love you.

KEVIN

It'll be just for a little while.
Just until I get this done.

JEN

Wrong answer. I'm done.

Jen stares Kevin down, fresh tears streaming down her face.

JEN

(voice cracking, but with
resolve)

We're done.

Jen storms out the door. Kevin chases but stops at the door.

KEVIN
Jen! Wait! Shit!

Kevin's shoulders slump, but his eyes go cold with resolve.

KEVIN
This will all be worth it.

INT. LOUNGE/RESTAURANT - EVENING

Kevin, sweaty and unshaven, sits at the bar at the usual restaurant, finishing a burger. A bill is placed in front of him by a waiter.

The waiter ducks away discreetly. Kevin flips through his wallet, only finding twenties. He shakes his head, then slaps one on the counter and turns to leap off his stool. Vivian and James loom right over him.

JAMES
Hey, look who climbed out of the sewer. Dude, you're kinda rank.

Vivian glares at James.

VIVIAN
You really hurt Jen. You've been together for how long? To end it all over some movie?

KEVIN
You don't understand. I don't have a choice. The film is coming together so well, but I need to stay committed.

JAMES
Don't be such an ass, man. It doesn't have to be all or nothing.

Kevin stands up, his eyes wild, staring James and Vivian down angrily.

KEVIN
YES IT DOES! You don't get it! I can't be on top if I do anything less!

Vivian and James back away.

VIVIAN
Hey, calm down!

KEVIN
Just leave me alone!

Kevin storms out, leaving exasperated friends in his wake.

INT. KEVIN'S BEDROOM - EARLY EVENING

A catastrophic mess of equipment, clothes, papers, trash, and more coffee cups and pill bottles have successfully besieged Kevin's bedroom.

Beep.

VIVIAN'S VOICE
Hey Kevin, how are you? James told me he had also tried calling you before, but no luck. You looked in bad shape last time we saw you. Call me, please?

Beep.

ALLISON'S VOICE
Kevin, are you okay? You haven't called me for months. I don't know what is going on with you. I know you don't have time for your mother, but I'm so worried about you. Can we talk?

Kevin, in wrinkled clothes on his bed, holds his knees, rocking, midst a sprawl of coffee cups and pill bottles. His eyes are void of emotion.

VOICES
To get to the next level, I had to give it all up.
(louder)
It took so much discipline and dedication and sacrifice.
(louder)
Most people? They lack commitment.
(louder)
Just a little bit more to make all the sacrifices worth it.
(louder)
You really need that kind of focus if you want to rise to the top.

Silence.

KEVIN

(under his breath)

I know this is going to work. It's going to work this time. I just want it all to be perfect. I will not give up this time. I need this to work. It's almost there, it has to be almost there. It will be a huge success. Nothing else matters. Sacrifices have to be made.

INT. THEATER LOBBY - AFTERNOON

A young, perky man smiles at an approaching Kevin from behind a table, in front of a sign advertising the Solar Flare Film Festival.

PERKY MAN

Welcome to the Solar Flare Film Festival! Our admission costs are suggested donations...

KEVIN

I'm one of the filmmakers.

Kevin spots his name on a clipboard on the table.
That's me.

PERKY MAN

Oh, congratulations!

The man opens a box and pulls out a badge.

PERKY MAN

And how many have you brought with you?

KEVIN

Umm, just me, thanks.

Kevin wears his badge as he walks past.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - EVENING

Kevin is on stage with three film festival committee members as one presents him with a certificate for "Best Picture". Black clothes do little to mask Kevin's gaunt figure, with shadows pooling in the pockets of his tired, emotionless face.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 1

Congratulations, Kevin, your highly critically-claimed documentary, Success, is quite a success!

(chuckles)
 Your own rise to success was very rapid. Naturally, we all are very interested in hearing your thoughts about this. To what do YOU owe your success, Kevin?

The committee member cheerfully shakes hands with Kevin and congratulates him again, contrasting sharply with Kevin's somber disposition.

KEVIN
 Success...

Kevin's lips move as he stoically mouths silent answers. The words of Kevin's interviewees echo louder and louder. One question manages to be heard.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 2
 I'm sure it's all worth it in the end, isn't it? Is there anyone in the audience who you would like to acknowledge? I'm sure your loved ones are very proud of you!

Kevin grimaces and wordlessly replies as his gaze drifts over the audience:

MONTAGE

- Vivian shakes her head, pointing at him, then James glances over and shrugs in response. They vanish, leaving behind empty chairs.
- Kevin continuing his answer.
- Jen leans against the wall, her eyes full of earnest pain. She slumps to the floor and disappears.
- Allison howls mournfully in the front row then fades away.

END MONTAGE

Kevin's eye sheds a tear as he silently finishes.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 1
 Kevin, you are such an inspiration. Please, everyone, give Kevin a huge round of applause.

A man, sitting alone in the shadows of the back rows, picks up his coat and makes his way out.

Kevin passively allows a festival volunteer to guide him away.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 1
And now, let's move on to Best
Comedy...

INT. THEATER LOBBY - EVENING

Kevin walks out of the theater and squints his eyes.

KEVIN
Dad?

David retracts his hand from the door and turns around, pauses for a moment, then smiles widely and backtracks toward Kevin.

DAVID
Kevin! Congratulations!

KEVIN
I didn't know you were here!

DAVID
I... wasn't sure I could make it. I
just wanted to see the ceremony.

Kevin brightens.

KEVIN
I worked so hard for this, Dad.

An excited committee member pops up beside David and puts his hand on his shoulder.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 2
Thank you so much, Sir, for your
... generous donation.

David's eyes glance nervously at Kevin.

DAVID
Yes, well, it was a small offering.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 2
(laughing, incredulous)
That's what you call small?

The committee member turns toward Kevin, who looks confused.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 2

I hope you enjoy that win! I think
it'll be great for you!

Kevin glances back and forth between the committee member
and his father, with pain flooding his eyes.

FADE OUT