

Success

By

Aliona Tsypes and Scott Danzig

sneakyghostfilms@gmail.com

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 amphetamine 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, mirthful eyes, lounges alongside Kevin, in casual but stylish attire. Jen's arms encircle Kevin about his belly, with her chin on his shoulder, daring to wiggle her fingers. Kevin shifts and swats lightly at Jen's fingers.

JEN

(feigning betrayal)

Hey!

KEVIN

Cut that out.

Kevin looks back down at a notebook and pencil in his lap.

JEN

I don't want to be a healer. I want
to be a warrior like you.

KEVIN

Vivian said we could use a healer
though.

JEN

I'm sure Vivian will figure it out.
She's probably planned for
everything.

KEVIN

So, how's work?

JEN

It's a pretty cool VR game, but
they told me specifically not to
tell you about it after you blabbed
about the last one.

Kevin rolls his eyes.

JEN
 Sorry, babe. So did you think
 you'll get that promotion?

KEVIN
 I don't see why I wouldn't. I'm
 already handling most of their
 clients.

Jen massages Kevin's shoulders.

JEN
 Well, it's the weekend. How about a
 little roleplaying tonight,
 warrior?

Kevin grins and kisses Jen, pulling her downward.

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
 It's squished.

JAMES
 (turning toward Kevin)
 You clumsy ogre!

Jen rolls backward, guffawing.

Kevin shrugs placatingly.

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

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

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

VIVIAN
The die don't lie, James!

JAMES
I can't believe you stepped on my
tortoise.

KEVIN
Bring it.

JEN
Thanks for putting so much work
into creating this game.

JAMES
Yeah, lots of surprises!

VIVIAN
Just wait until you see what
happens next. It's going to be so
much fun!

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

The travel vlogging was a fun idea
at least.

JAMES

But he left Jen all alone!

Jen scoffs at James's feigned sympathy.

KEVIN

That vlogging is how I met the guy
I'm talking about, Rick. He liked
my idea and says he'll get a studio
to fund my next film if I can make
this one happen.

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

Interesting.

KEVIN

Who wouldn't want to see a
documentary that lays out recipes
for success, from real people? Rick
even offered to pull some strings,
to help me get started.

JEN
That's wonderful!

KEVIN
Yeah, this could be my big break. I
can feel it.

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

James and Vivian glance at each other, before joining the
toast.

KEVIN
Cheers to a new beginning!

VIVIAN
Gotta follow your dreams.

JAMES
Yeah, good luck, man. Cheers.

INT. 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.

KEVIN

This is such an inspiring story.
You knew what you wanted and did
whatever it took to get there.
Congratulations, and thank you for
agreeing to be my first
interviewee.

DANIEL

Thank you for inviting me. I hope
my story will help others.

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

New recipe! You remember we were
thinking of making lamb tacos?

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

KEVIN

This is so good. Why did we never
make lamb tacos?

Allison brushes Kevin's mouth with a napkin as he gets his
food down.

ALLISON

So where's Jen? Why didn't you
bring her?

KEVIN

Jen's fine, Mom. She's got things
to do too. Hey, I just finished the
first interview of my documentary.

ALLISON

Why didn't you bring her? When ya
gonna finally propose to her?

KEVIN

What! Mom, I'm still trying to become a success first. This guy I interviewed 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

You 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. Hey, guess what I'll be serving?

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

INT. TAVERN - EVENING

Vivian glances at the door behind her.

VIVIAN

I'm not sure when the next chance I'll have to finish this quest.

JAMES

Where is he?

JEN

Something must have come up...

JAMES

Maybe we can play without him?

Vivian starts collecting empty glasses.

VIVIAN

No, I don't want to think about it.
Hey, 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 thought I would not 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

Jen paces in front of a front desk in a front office, picking up and idly flipping through a brochure from one of the chairs lining the walls, with a receptionist busy on his phone.

Jen hears fast-approaching footsteps and looks up to see Kevin, a box in hand, with a woman in her 50's dressed for business, following him frantically.

BOSS

You have to give me some notice, come on.

KEVIN

(pleadingly)

I'm sorry. I just need to focus on my project. Maybe I can help you find a replacement?

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!

JEN

I was thinking maybe you'd be up for dinner. Did you just quit your job?

Kevin motions with his head toward the door and continues walking

KEVIN

Not officially, but I'll call her and tell her tomorrow. 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 didn't show up to the gaming night? Vivian honestly seemed upset.

KEVIN

I know, and I'll call her to apologize. This project has become an obsession of mine. I should have time for pizza though?

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 work

JASON
until I couldn't, every single day,
and then kept pushing, and pushing.

KEVIN
Like the Energizer Bunny! Did you
have coffee in your IV or
something?

Kevin chuckles.

JASON
Not just coffee -- It had to be a
lot stronger than that, if you know
what I mean. I wasn't fuckin'
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 is in an hour.

END INTERCUT

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

DEEP MALE VOICE
(over the phone, distant)
That good for nothing kid isn't
showing up, is he?

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
I already am 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)
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

Look, just until I get this done.

JEN

I've given you so much space.

KEVIN

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

JEN

I'm just a distraction? Look, I
can't do this anymore. I deserve
better.

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

KEVIN

Jen! Wait!

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.

WAITER

Thank you, and we hope to see you again.

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. FILM FESTIVAL AWARDS CEREMONY - 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.

- 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, clawing at her face helplessly, then fades away.

END MONTAGE

Kevin's eye sheds a tear, continuing to silently speak.

MALE VOICE

Oh come on, son!

(laughs)

You, a success story?

(laughs)

Is this supposed to give your life
some sort of bullshit meaning? You
might not have figured it out, but
you're a goddamn worthless nobody!

Kevin finishes his answer, still emotionless.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 1

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

Kevin passively allows a festival volunteer to guide him away.

COMMITTEE MEMBER 1

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