

Center for Hope

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. STREETS OF QUEENS, NEW YORK CITY. NIGHT - MONTAGE

Overhead shot of a bridge. The glowing lights of cars streak across the bridge like fireflies, a river shimmering below.

A handball court. A tight group of players smack the ball against a graffiti-covered wall. The hollow "thwack" echoes into the night.

A sidewalk. A person strolls under flickering streetlights, a small dog trotting beside them. Shadows stretch and dance as they pass.

A final wide shot. The city hums softly beneath a purple-tinted sky, Queens is alive with quiet energy.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Through the exterior of a window, we fade into an apartment building. Laying down on his bed, cuddling a pillow, we see ALEX, a twenty-two year old kid of average build and dark features.

Alex is silently holding back tears. Over his shoulder, it is revealed what he's looking: the last message from his mother, reading: "On our way home now. See you soon."

It is dated the night of the accident. Just then, the phone begins to ring. It is his GRANDMOTHER. Alex turns the phone off. Through some rubbing of his eyes, he turns his bedside lamp off and rolls over into bed.

CUT TO:

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. - DAY

TIANA, a 45ish-year old therapist is sitting up right on her chair. Her patient is Alex. Tiana stares at Alex as he avoids her eye. They sit in silence.

TIANA

What is it now? What's on your mind?

ALEX

Nothing.

TIANA

What do you think you'd be doing right now if they were here?

ALEX

I can't know that unless they were.

TIANA

Maybe. But you know what they'd wish for you.

ALEX

I always wished they were green. My eyes. My moms were green, but my dads were brown. I guess his genes won. But then again I got his height, so I guess that's good.

Alex puts his head in his hands. He finally looks up.

ALEX

It's hurtful when I see everyone else move on. Or not move on, but continue living their lives... just going about their days, their routines. Buying coffee and rushing off to work. There is no darkness in their minds when they do this. They just exist. Unburdened.

TIANA

Nobody is unburdened. It's been seven months, Alex. Three months of these sessions. I know you want to move forward. I know you want to take care of yourself. You just need a little push.

She gets up and walks over to her desk. In her drawers, she pulls out a pile of pamphlets. She hands them to Alex.

TIANA

Some volunteer opportunities. Organized by the city. They're always looking for people to help out. Some of them are paid, too.

Alex draws his attention to one pamphlet in particular, titled *Project Smiles*. Tiana notices.

TIANA

It's a children's hospital. All types of sick kids there. Maybe choose something more uplifting.

ALEX

I'll think about it.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK OF SOME STREET IN QUEENS - DAY.

Alex is walking home. His eyes remain fixed on the floor, not noticing anything or anyone around him. He is playing music at full blast in his earphones. Suddenly, he bumps into something and one earphone pops out onto the ground.

He picks it up and puts his earphones away. He looks around him and can't help but notice the energy of the scene around him: kids running around, eating ice cream at the park. A couple flirting on a park bench. Some people waiting for the bus.

He can't help but feel outside himself, out of place. He puts his earphones back on and walks faster.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Alex is sitting up right on his bed, eating cereal for dinner. The room is dimly lit and cluttered. He is too distracted to keep eating. He walks over to his desk and sees his pile of mail, including an outstanding bill.

We watch Alex check his mobile banking app, and his balance is low. He contemplates, and ultimately picks up the pamphlet from *Project Smiles*.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - DAY.

Alex awakens to the sound of the doorbell. He walks out to the hallway and peaks out the window to see who it is. It is his cousin, NATALIE, around 25, with light hair and a positive energy, holding a grocery bag for him.

ALEX

Hey.

NATALIE

Hey, did I wake you?

ALEX
No, no, I was up.

NATALIE
I brought you some groceries. The feta
was on sale.

ALEX
Thanks.

Alex takes the bag. Natalie waits for him to invite her in,
but he doesn't. Natalie stares at Alex while he waits for her
to leave.

NATALIE
I'm worried about you.

ALEX
What's there to worry about?

They stare at each other a moment. Natalie knows her cousin
well.

NATALIE
Let's get coffee.

ALEX
(deep exhale)
Five minutes.

CUT TO:

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A Passing car quickly flashed by the outside of "Coffee
Maniac" with a decorated exterior of prosthetic ivy vines and
twinkle lights.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE MANIAC - DAY

Alex and Natalie are drinking coffee at a table. Alex's drink
is hot and black. Natalie's is iced and light.

NATALIE
Grandma asked about you.

ALEX
Mmm.

NATALIE

She wants you to stop by and see her.

ALEX

Sure.

NATALIE

Would you stop? She's an old woman and wants to see her grandchild. Her daughter is dead and she's by herself, so I don't give a fuck if you feel sorry for yourself, you're gonna go see her.

ALEX

I know, yes...you're right. I'll make time to see her this week.

NATALIE

What time is there to make? You're home all day. And im not trying to make you feel bad by saying that, Im just being honest. You're home and you're not leaving your home. Look, I can't imagine what's going on in your head, really, I'm sure it's horrible, but no one's gonna help you beside yourself. Not your therapist, not your parents, no one. You're on your own. So pull yourself out of this already.

ALEX

I want to.

Natalie grabs his hand.

NATALIE

You can.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - DAY.

Alex takes a seat in his desk chair, leans back, and lets out a big sigh. He goes on his phone and mindlessly scrolls Instagram, but ultimately is distracted. He puts his phone down.

He looks around his desk and once again sees the pamphlet for *Project Smiles*. He takes a look at the address on the paper, contemplates, and ultimately grabs his keys as he heads out.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT DESK AT 'PROJECT SMILES' CHILDREN HOSPITAL - DAY

Alex walks up to the front desk of Project Smiles. Sitting up there is a RECEPTIONIST, a woman of about seventy years old.

ALEX

Hello.

RECEPTIONIST

Hi, what can I do for you today?

ALEX

Um, I was given this pamphlet, and I was interested in doing some volunteer work.

RECEPTIONIST

Great! Well, I can have you speak to one of our supervisors and they can sit with you and go over what opportunities we have going on.

ALEX

Okay, thank you.

RECEPTIONIST

Just have a seat and they'll be right with you.

ALEX

Thanks.

Alex has a seat in the waiting area. There are a couple magazines laid out on the table next to him. He glances over but does not pick one up.

He looks over to his left and observes who else is sitting in the waiting room. A few seats down is a LITTLE BOY with a bandage wrapped around his head.

He is holding tight onto his MOTHER and sitting on her lap. The mother is rubbing her sons back and catches Alexs eyes watching her. He quickly looks away.

The SUPERVISOR, a man just a few years older than Alex, walks up to the waiting room and approaches Alex. He is handsome, and has light eyes.

SUPERVISOR
Hello, you're interested in
volunteering?

ALEX
Yes.

SUPERVISOR
Great, you can follow me this way.

The Supervisor leads Alex into his office, just down the hallway.

On the walk, Alex looks around. The walls are decorated with paintings clearly made by young children. and he hears the echoes of children crying out, in pain.

The duo arrives in the office.

SUPERVISOR
Have a seat. Would you like some
water?

ALEX
No, I'm okay, thank you.

SUPERVISOR
Sure, you can call me John by the way.
And your name?

ALEX.
Alex.

JOHN
Nice to meet you, Alex. You didn't
happen to bring a resume with you, did
you?

ALEX
No, sorry. Should I have?

JOHN
No, no, that's alright, it's just for
me to get some information. Of course,
volunteering is open to everyone. We
appreciate anyone interested. The kids
appreciate it too...So, are you
currently in school?

ALEX
No, actually I'm taking a little time

off, that's why I was interested in volunteer work.

JOHN

Okay! I understand, I took a little time off during college myself.

ALEX

Oh, really? That makes me feel better because so many people look at you sideways when you tell them that.

JOHN

Not at all. Everyone acts like they have it all together. They don't, trust me. I think it makes people feel better about themselves when they tell you you're doing something wrong, just because you're not doing it the same way as them.

ALEX

It's like you took the words out of my mouth.

John smiles at Alex.

JOHN

Well, let's see what sort of role we can find for you.

John browses through the computer on his desk.

JOHN

We need someone in our arts and crafts center, our literacy center, and our nursery. Do any of those sound of interest? Keep in mind, if you complete three months of volunteer work, there is opportunity for potential employment.

ALEX

Oh, that sounds good. I think Arts and crafts maybe?

JOHN

Great, Great. Well, I will have to give you some paperwork to fill out, which I can email to you if you just write your email here.

John hands Alex a piece of paper to write his email down.
Alex writes and hands the paper back.john

Great, we'll be in touch!

ALEX
Thanks so much.

CUT TO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK, MANHATTAN - DAY.

Alex is walking around the middle of the park and finds an empty spot on one of the rocks to sit on. He has a diet soda in one hand and is eating a souvlaki stick in the other. He looks around the scene of the park.

CUT TO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK, MANHATTAN - DAY. ALEX'S FLASHBACK

A 5 year old Alex is full of joy at the park while he is eating a vanilla ice cream cone. His MOTHER has bent down, ready to clean his face. His FATHER is watching the both of them with a camera in his hands.

MOTHER
Oh my gosh, what are we gonna do with you!?

FATHER
Wait! Don't wipe yet!

Alex's father takes a picture of his son and wife.

ALEX
Thank you for the ice cream, Mommy.

Alex gives his mother a kiss, rubbing his ice-cream filled face on her cheeks.

MOTHER
Oh my goodness!

Alex's father takes another photo.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. CENTRAL PARK/GRANDMA'S LIVING ROOM. PRESENT DAY.
INTERCUT

Alex smiles to himself and takes a deep breath. Suddenly his phone starts buzzing from his pocket. He takes it out, his Grandma is calling. Alex pauses before picking up the phone.

ALEX
(into phone)
Hello?

GRANDMA
(into phone)
Hi sweetie. You picked up this time.
(then)
I'm glad to hear your voice.

ALEX
(into phone)
I'm glad to hear your voice too,
Grandma.

GRANDMA
(into phone)
How have you been?

ALEX
(into phone)
I'm alright. How are you?

GRANDMA
(into phone)
I'm alright, too. I miss you.

ALEX
(into phone)
I know. I know.

GRANDMA
(into phone)
Maybe you can come over soon. I'll
cook.

ALEX
(into phone)
Yeah, grandma, maybe, maybe. Listen,
it's actually not a good time because
I'm in the city and I'm about to board
the train, so I gotta go.

GRANDMA
Call me soon. Okay?

ALEX
I will. Alright, bye.

GRANDMA
Bye, sweetie.

Grandma hangs up the phone and takes a deep exhale.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROJECT SMILES - DAY

Alex parks his car in the parking lot of Project Smiles. He hesitates before ultimately getting out of the car and shutting the door behind him.

CUT TO:

INT. PROJECT SMILES- JOHN'S OFFICE - DAY.

John is sitting at his desk looking at his computer. He looks up at the door upon hearing it knock. It is Alex.

ALEX
Hi.

JOHN
Hey Alex! Good to see you, how you doing?

John shakes Alex's hand.

JOHN
So, how are you feeling about starting today?

ALEX
I'm really looking forward to it.

JOHN
Good, good. That's great. Let's start to head over to the Arts and Crafts center.

John gets up out of his seat and Alex does the same. They begin to walk side by side out of the room and toward the hallway.

JOHN

So, this is gonna be a learning experience for everyone- you and the kids. I just want you to be prepared. Some of these kids have a lot of issues. Some come from violent homes, some were born with disabilities. They really need someone who will be patient with them.

ALEX

Absolutely. I understand.

JOHN

Okay, so let's meet some of them now.

They make it to the arts and crafts center of the building. Upon walking through the doors, Alex is overwhelmed to see CHILDREN, wearing nasal masks, headbands, and casts as they are coloring in coloring books, splatting paint on blank canvas's, and playing with blocks.

CUT TO:

INT. PROJECT SMILES: ARTS AND CRAFTS ROOM - DAY.

John walks Alex into the room. Some of the children begin to look up and notice them walk in.

JOHN

Hi Guys. How is everyone doing today?

CHILDREN

(in unison)

Good, Mr. John.

JOHN

What was that?!

CHILDREN

(in unison, louder)

Good, Mr John!

JOHN

Well that's what I like to hear, because I have someone I'd like you to meet. This here is Mr. Alex, and we're gonna hang out with you guys today. Does that sound good?

CHILDREN
(in unison)

Yes!

JOHN

Alright!

John and Alex approach some of the kids.

CUT TO:

INT. PROJECT SMILES: ARTS AND CRAFTS ROOM - LATER.

John and Alex walk up to a group, each working on their own coloring book. Among them are ANGEL, a five year old boy with dark features, and MICHELLE, a 7 year old cancer patient wearing a tutu and a purple fedora.

JOHN

Hi Angel, Hi Michelle. What are you guys coloring?

ANGEL

A jungle.

MICHELLE

A unicorn.

JOHN

Wow it's coming along nicely! And Angel, nice job spelling your name at the top of your paper.

ANGEL

Thank you.

MICHELLE

Mr John, is Mr. Alex going to be your new boss?

John and Alex laugh.

JOHN

No, no. Mr. Alex is going to help me out and hangout with you guys.

ANGEL

Why would he do that? Does he has no family?

John and Alex exchange an awkward glance, not expecting to

have heard this question.

ALEX

Well, actually, I did a family before.
I had a mom and a dad, but now they
passed away.

ANGEL

Are they in Heaven?

ALEX

I hope they are.
(tearing up)
Sorry. I need to use the bathroom.

Alex excuses himself to the hallway. John quickly follows him out.

JOHN

Hey, I'm sorry. I didn't think he
would ask that. Are you okay?

ALEX

Yes, I'm sorry, I didn't mean for
that.

JOHN

No, are you kidding?! Don't apologize.
Like I said, this is gonna be a work-
in-progress.

ALEX

I just need to be able to be fine, ya
know? Can't let a child upset me.

JOHN

Hey, you've been through a tough time,
you're allowed to be upset.

(then)

You know, some of these kids, they've
lost everything. That kid, Angel, he
was born with half a heart. He
probably won't make it to twenty,
unless some medical advancement
happens between then and now. The more
time you spend with them, you won't
feel so bad.

ALEX

Wow. I'm lucky.

Alex smiles to John.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT- QUEENS, NY. DAY

Natalie and Alex are sitting at a Mexican grill drinking lemonade and eating chips with guac. Alex has just recapped his first day of work.

NATALIE

Well, at least he didn't ask if they went to Hell.

Alex laughs.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

I'm glad to see you laughing again.

Alex smiles to Natalie and plays with his straw.

ALEX

Have you seen grandma?

NATALIE

Yeah, she's good. I took her to the doctor yesterday.

ALEX

Is everything alright?

NATALIE

Yeah, just a check up from the surgery. She just needs to drink more water, but she's fine.

ALEX

Maybe we can go one night this week.

NATALIE

Yeah, I can take us.

ALEX

Okay. Thanks...So how are you? How's Stephen?

NATALIE

I don't know. He's pissing me off.

Natalie smiles a little to Alex. He is surprised at what she said but finds it funny, too.

ALEX

What?! I thought it was going well.

NATALIE

It's not not going well, it's just, he's getting under my skin, not remembering stuff I told him.

ALEX

Really? Like what stuff?

NATALIE

I told him three times now that my Mom is from Cyprus. Then the other day he asked which island in Greece she's from. And then I said, "You don't recall when I told you she's from Cyprus?"

ALEX

You actually said it like that?

NATALIE

Of course I did. Why ask a question if you won't listen to the answer?

ALEX

Well I guess that's strike one for Stephen.

NATALIE

Its strike four. He doesn't know about strikes one to three.

Alex chuckles and Natalie reaches for the chips.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY- PROJECT SMILES - DAY.

John and Alex are walking down the hallway on their way to the arts and crafts center.

JOHN

So today, try to focus on learning some of the kids names. Go around to each group and alternate your time with each of them. You have the list that I gave you and you can ask any of us for help. Okay?

ALEX
Got it, thanks.

JOHN
I'll be in my office if you need
anything, and the other volunteers are
there too.

ALEX
Okay.

Alex walks into the Arts and Crafts room.

CUT TO:

INT. ARTS AND CRAFTS ROOM - LATER.

One of the students, TOMMY, is throwing a tantrum over
breaking his crayon. VOLUNTEER #1 AND #2 and Alex are trying
to calm him down.

TOMMY
WHAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

ALEX
But this one's still blue!

TOMMY
IT'S NOT THE SAME BLUE!

ALEX
But the light blue looks more like the
sky color than the other blue.

TOMMY
I STILL WANT THE OTHER ONE!

ALEX
But you can still use it!

TOMMY
BUT IT'S BROKEN!

ALEX
But it still colors! If you want to
use it, you'll have to use half of it
or get a different color, and if you
keep yelling, you're gonna go to time
out with Ms. Vanessa.

Tommy begins to settle down. Alex takes a sigh of relief.

ALEX

Thank you.

Alex begins to walk away but before he can get too far, Tommy starts screaming again and now he's ripping his whole paper into pieces.

Alex buries his head in his hands out of frustration. Volunteer #1 takes Tommy out the room for a time-out. Alex is relieved again.

ALEX

(to himself)

Well, I won't forget the name Tommy.

Just then, he feels a tugging in his shirt. He looks down, it's Angel, with a piece of paper in his hand.

ANGEL

Mr. Alex, I drew you something.

Angel hands the drawing to Alex. It's of three people before a sunset. A boy in the middle and a woman and man with angel wings on either side of him.

Alex is speechless.

ANGEL

It's you, and your mommy, and your daddy.

ALEX

Wow, this is... Thank you so much, Angel.

Angel smiles and walks away. Alex watches him.

VOLUNTEER #2

Okay, friends. It's time for clean up now! Let's start putting our things away!

(singing now)

clean up, clean up! Everybody Everywhere....!

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S GRANDMOTHERS HOUSE - NIGHT.

Alex is in the kitchen with his Grandmother. The rest of the family are sitting at the table.

ALEX

I love you, and I'm sorry I haven't been around.

GRANDMA

Alex, my sweet boy. I love you more than you know. I know how you feel. Trust me, I do. We have to be there for each other.

The pair hug

GRANDMA

Now, go sit down.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S GRANDMOTHERS HOUSE - LATER.

Alex and Natalie are sitting at a dinner table. Their grandma is laying out food in front of them. Natalies mother, KATERINA and father, JONATHAN, are there as well.

JONATHAN

Natalie, did you bring dessert?

NATALIE

Yeah, there's cake in the fridge.

JONATHAN

Is it from Nana's or Linda's?

NATALIE

I made it.

JONATHAN

Oh okay.

(sarcastically)

And then what do we eat when it's so good that we finish it all?

The rest of the table laughs. Grandma finds her seat.

NATALIE

Maybe you can eat the rest of the salad since you always forget to finish yours.

GRANDMA

Alright guys, how about we just focus on eating this dinner?

KATERINA

Amen.

The characters begin filling their plates.

KATERINA

Alex, How's the new job?

ALEX

It's not really a job, it's like volunteer work...but I do get paid. I guess it is a job. But I kinda get to work around my own time.

JONATHAN

Good for you, Alex.

KATERINA

So it's at a Children's Hospital?

ALEX

Yeah.

KATERINA

Aww. You know your mother volunteered at a Children's Hospital when we were in college.

ALEX

She did?!

KATERINA

Yeah, definitely. She used to go twice a week on Northern Blvd.

ALEX

What?? I work on Northern.

KATERINA

Was it the same one? Hers was on 150th Street by the McDonalds.

ALEX

Yes! How did I not know that!?

JONATHAN

Even I forgot about that. It was years ago.

The characters continue eating.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT DESK AT 'PROJECT SMILES' CHILDREN HOSPITAL - DAY

Walking in, Alex approaches the receptionist, SAMMY, a seventy year old woman with glasses, at the front desk. She is reading a magazine.

ALEX

Hi Sammy, good morning.

SAMMY

Sup, kid.

ALEX

Could I ask you a question? Is there a way to check records of past volunteers or anyone who used to work here?

SAMMY

Well, there are logs but I don't know where they are. We would have to have a reason to look for those.

ALEX

My dead mom used to work here.

SAMMY

Oh, dear.

Sammy takes out a post-it from her desk along with a pen.

SAMMY

Well, why don't you write her name down here and I'll try to take a look.

A smirk grins across Alex's face.

CUT TO:

INT. PROJECT SMILES: ARTS AND CRAFTS ROOM - DAY.

Alex is doing a children's puzzle on the floor with Angel.

ALEX

(moving a piece)

Angel, I think this one goes there.

ANGEL

Oh right, I was just gonna put that

there!

Alex laughs. Just then, John walks in.

JOHN

Hey, guys. How's it going?

ANGEL

Good, we're just doing an Ocean puzzle.

JOHN

Wow, Angel, that looks amazing. Mr Alex, I need to speak with you for just one second.

ALEX

Sure.

Alex and John walk off to the side so they can speak in private.

JOHN

I just spoke with Angel's doctor.

Alex immediately tenses up with concern.

JOHN

(cont'd)

Angel needs Open Heart. Soon.

ALEX

How soon?

JOHN

Really soon. Or he's gonna get worse.

ALEX

Ok, so is anything scheduled??

JOHN

We need \$40,000.

ALEX

What? Can't the hospital cover that?

JOHN

The hospital and donors are covering the rest. The total is \$250,000. We need \$40,000 more.

Alex stares at John and then looks away.

ALEX
We'll get it.

CUT TO:

INT. PROJECT SMILES JOHN'S OFFICE - DAY.

Alex and John are sitting in John's office. Alex is on his phone.

ALEX
Okay, read it and tell me what else I should say.

Alex hands John his phone. John reads. It is a GoFundMe account that Alex has made for Angel.

JOHN
Okay, I'm gonna add his age and birthday too.

John adds the change and hands the phone back to Alex.

ALEX
Okay, I'm posting it. Now for the Instagram.

JOHN
By the way, Sammy came by. She gave me the record of your mom when she used to work here.

John hands over to Alex a folder with a small stack of paper.

Alex looks through it and pulls her personal record out. It includes her physical features as well as a photo.

ALEX
Wow. She looks beautiful.

JOHN
I think you were meant to work here, Alex.

ALEX
I guess I was.

CUT TO:

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE - DAY.

Alex and Tiana are at their usual appointment, in their usual seats.

ALEX

It's just horrible. He's six. Nobody deserves that.

TIANA

I know. It's one of those things we can't make sense of. Even I don't have an explanation. I think you were meant to be in this situation. Especially finding out about your mom. You're doing great work. You will help save this child, I know you will.

ALEX

I hope so.

CUT TO:

INT. PROJECT SMILES: ARTS AND CRAFTS ROOM - DAY.

Angel and the other kids are making paper mache projects. Alex is supervising. Angel is sitting with Tommy.

TOMMY

(showing Alex up his artwork)

I made a rocket because I am going to fly to the moon.

ALEX

Wow, Tommy, that's so cool!

ANGEL

(holding up his artwork)

I made a heart, because I am going to get a new one!

Alex freezes for a moment, a bit shocked.

ALEX

Yes, you certainly are.

The children continue making their project and Alex appears tense.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - BROOKLYN, NY - NIGHT.

John and Alex are getting drinks together at a hip bar. The lights are dim and the music is a bit loud. The scene is mostly young people in their 20's. They are sitting at the bar and drinking, clearly having fun.

JOHN

We already raised \$18,000 in just two days. I think we can totally do this.

ALEX

I know we can.

They both sip their drinks.

JOHN

Thank you, Alex.

ALEX

For what?

JOHN

Just, all your help. You've done so much for us, and the kids, and Angel.

Alex blushes. John and Alex are facing each other now.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You've come a really long way. You should be really proud of yourself. Really.

Alex looks up at John, a bit surprised. John looks especially handsome tonight. Alex shocks himself by leaning a little closer toward John, and the two share a kiss.

They pull apart.

ALEX

Sorry.

JOHN

There's nothing to be sorry for.

Alex smiles, and takes another sip from his drink. The two compose themselves again.

JOHN

So, what are you thinking of doing after the summer? Do you think you'll

find another job?

ALEX

I'm not sure, yet. I think I'm going to just keep doing this for now and just work on myself and then see how I feel and what I want to do.

JOHN

That's really great. I really meant it when I said you should be proud of yourself.

ALEX

I haven't done much. Angel still needs another \$20,000. Then, I'll feel better.

JOHN

It's a big operation. Really big. But we'll make it happen.

ALEX

Let's drink to that.

They both take another sip.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROJECT SMILES CAR WASH - DAY.

Alex, John, Natalie, and some other *Project Smiles* volunteers are coordinating a Car Wash to raise money.

There is a line of cars waiting to be cleaned.

John and some other volunteers are washing a car while Natalie and Alex dry the car in front of that one.

NATALIE

(to the driver of the car)

You're all set.

The driver hands her a tip.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

She puts the tip in the nearby tip jar.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROJECT SMILES CAR WASH - LATER.

At sundown, Natalie, John, and Alex are the only ones left after a long day of car washes. The last car pulls away and the group reconvenes to count the money.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR WASH OFFICE - NIGHT.

The group are in the office of the Car Wash Owner, Mike, counting cash together as well as card payments. Mike is Natalie's uncle. Around 50, bald.

MIKE

Total was \$8,482.

The group look at each other, excitedly. It's enough money to cover the last of the costs.

JOHN

How much after your cut?

MIKE

I'm not taking a cut this time. I want you guys to have all of it. For the boy.

NATALIE

Are you sure?

CAR WAS OWNER

Positive. Trust me.

ALEX

Thank you so much, Mike. This will save a child's life.

MIKE

Let me know what goes on with the surgery, alright?

ALEX

We will, of course.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL OPERATING ROOM - DAY.

It is finally the day of Angels surgery. While preparing to get started, Alex and John visit Angel in the operating room,

while the DOCTOR is finalizing things before surgery.

ALEX
(to Angel)
I'm so excited for you! You're going
to feel so much better after this,
Angel.

Angel looks down, looking sad.

ALEX (CONT'D)
What's the matter?

ANGEL
I'm scared.

Alex's heart sinks. He thinks of what to say to make Angel feel better, but ultimately, he is scared too.

ALEX
Well, I was gonna tell you this after
you finished but maybe I'll tell you
now so you don't have a reason to be
scared.

Alex pulls out a big box of M&M's from his bag, that he brought just for Alex. Angel's mood completely shifts to excitement.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I know they're your favorite. You
can't eat them until you're finished.
So now, you can feel excited, not
scared.

The Doctor interrupts.

DOCTOR
(to Angel)
Okay Angel, we are ready to start now
okay? You're gonna say your goodbyes
now to Mr. Alex and Mr John.

ANGEL
(to Alex)
Mr Alex, I love you.

ALEX
I love you too, Angel.

The two embrace and hug. John also hugs Angel.

JOHN

We're gonna be right here once you finish, Angel, with all your M&M's too.

John reassures Angel with a smile.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(to Doctor)

Thanks, Doctor.

Angel holds Alex's hands while the Doctor prepares to put him to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY.

Alex and John are drinking coffee and sitting next to each other.

ALEX

What do you think will happen?

JOHN

Angel will be fine. He'll be so much better after this.

ALEX

Once this ends, then it'll be the next issue, and then the next. What kind of life is that?

Silence.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go back to school. In the Fall.

JOHN

Really? What made you decide?

ALEX

This. I want to do what you do, I think. Health Administration.

JOHN

You would be so good at it.

They smile at each other. Alex rests his head on John's shoulder as they wait some more.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - LATER.

John and Alex are both asleep in the waiting room. The Doctor comes in to announce the outcome of the operation.

DOCTOR

Excuse me.

Alex wakes up in a rut and shakes John too.

ALEX

What happened? Is everything alright??

Silence. John looks to Alex, understanding what's going on.

DOCTOR

Angel's... his body couldn't...his
body couldn't take it. I'm so sorry.

Alex gasps and his eyes widen. He begins hyperventilating. He latches onto John and sobs into his arms. John holds him tight and the two fall back onto the seats in shock.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX AND JOHN'S APARTMENT. - DAY. FIVE YEARS LATER.

Alex and John are in their kitchen, preparing breakfast. Their apartment is decorated to the nines for Christmas.

JOHN

I picked these up at the market, for
your parents.

John holds up a bouquet of flowers.

ALEX

Thank you. Those are nice. We'll go
after we eat.

John holds up another bouquet of flowers.

JOHN

I got these too, for Angel.

Alex smiles at the flowers. He leans in and kisses John.

ALEX

I love you.

They kiss again.

JOHN
Merry Christmas.

The pair bring their breakfast to the table. They prepared a stack of pancakes, some fruit and coffee. Panning out, we see the pile of gifts prepared for *Project Smiles* children under their Christmas tree.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.