

Friday Drop-off

ALEX is walking his kid toward school. They are on the sidewalk, except for when they aren't because another family is taking up the whole sidewalk. ALEX sees RUDY approaching sans kid.

ALEX (Somehow both staccato and drawn out) H-heeee-y.

RUDY (Normal) Hey.

ALEX and RUDY are now passing each other and quickly moving towards the point of having passed each other. Normally, ALEX would be content with this limited interaction, but he's been trying to put himself out there more.

ALEX (Squeezing it out) Ha-have a goooood one.

RUDY must turn to respond, tripping on uneven sidewalk.

RUDY Th- whoa -Thanks, you too!

ALEX
You too!

ALEX scrunches up his face in mild embarrassment brought on by feeling responsible for RUDY's half-trip and then responding with that vestigial "You too!". His physical reaction to the mortifying snafu has to be shoved down quickly as he approaches further Dads walking towards him.

ALEX alternates between nods and smiles. Some Dads he knows by name and others by distinguishing physical features like CHRIS the guy with a good beard or JJ 80's cartoon shirt guy. In one situation, an open-faced smiler named CAMERON, he isn't sure how their ritual exchange started but is now too afraid to stop the greetings.

ALEX finally reaches the school, and his kid runs off, leaving him with some Dads that are milling about. These Dads seem to be waiting for something. ALEX makes accidental eye contact with SEAN, who seems perfectly fine with this engagement.

SEAN (Effervescent) Mornin'!

ALEX ("Normal") Hi, Sean. Great, thanks. You?

KENNY, BRIAN, and MARTIN are also present. The latter is in a constant state of movement attributed to the roller skates he employs to travel. ALEX clocks that they are looking at him.

SEAN- I'm great.

ALEX- That's great.

SEAN- Yeah.

MARTIN swivels between them, his skates an organic extension of his hips. ALEX makes unintentional eye contact with the rest of the group. He feels this is a moment for change. For growth.

ALEX- Hey, so...this is weird, but, like, it's hard to make friends as an adult.

SEAN- Yeah.

KENNY- Yep.

ALEX- Right, exactly. Thanks. So...do you guys want to be friends?

BRIAN- Wow. You know, the rest of us, excluding you of course because you're clearly new to this dynamic, we've been parallel Dadding for a few years now, but never really made it official. We *should* be friends.

MARTIN (Hearing a song only for him)- I'd like that.

SEAN- Me too.

Despite the positivity of this agreement, no one knows how to move forward.

KENNY (Thinks he has it)- Do you like sport?

ALEX- Not really.

KENNY- Same.

SEAN- What kind of music do you guys like?

Everyone names artists from vastly different genres. MARTIN's is baffling.

BRIAN- Aren't wives the worst?

ALEX- What?

KENNY- No way.

MARTIN- Yeah, jeez, I love my wife.

BRIAN- Me too! Sorry, I thought that's what guys said.

SEAN- It's okay, I thought other Dads talked like that, too. My wife is the best. My whole world. Besides, she's always listening.

ALEX (Excited to have a quip)- Like the NSA.

MARTIN- Or Amazon.

KENNY- Yeah, or a malevolent spirit that lives just outside our perception.

SEAN looks at ALEX as if to say, "this guy, amiright?" ALEX can't parse the complexity of the facial expression.

ALEX- If we can't friend, that's okay. Forget I brought it up.

SEAN- No! We can figure this out. Besides, being a Dad means seeing a problem and stubbornly working at it until you succeed or pay someone else to fix it.

BRIAN- It seems about time. We've been meeting outside the school for months now.

KENNY- Let's get coffee so we have something to do with our hands and I'm sure we'll find common ground.

RANDOM DAD approaches.

RANDOM DAD- You guys starting a friend group?

BRIAN- Yep.

RANDOM DAD- Is enrollment still open?

KENNY- Nope.

RANDOM DAD- Cool.

ALEX- Cool.

MARTIN- Cool.

RANDOM DAD- You guys hear about the-

BRIAN- Alright, until next time, fellas!

MARTIN starts to warble away.

KENNY- Good-BYE Martin!

MARTIN waves over his silky shoulder. KENNY looks at ALEX as if to say "this guy, amiright?" ALEX wishes Dads would stop trying to silently convey opinions to him. RANDOM DAD takes the hint and sulks away. The other Dads peel off without further comment, eventually leaving ALEX and SEAN still scrambling for common ground.

ALEX- (Trying to maintain the vibe) So, you think squirrels are getting bigger?

They aren't.

Scholastic Book Fair

BRIAN and MARTIN are wandering the school library, periodically helping kids find a book, poster, or pencil topper.

BRIAN- Do you read?

MARTIN- Uhh, yeah. I mean, yeah. You know, I read the news.

BRIAN- Me neither.

They watch the LIBRARIAN walk by and think about how she represents their intellectual insecurities. They'd love to impress her, not because she's a woman in the romantic sense, but because feeling powerful through the attention of women is something they can't separate from their little boy egos. They hold that feeling a little longer and then revert to the comfort of pop culture references.

MARTIN- Remember Garfield? They should sell those here.

MARTIN offers a sweeping gesture to indicate the mentioned "here".

BRIAN- Of course. Mondays.

MARTIN- Hah, yeah. He's always eating lasagna and drinking coffee.

BRIAN- And kicking Odie off the table.

MARTIN (forced #woke)- Oh! Probably couldn't do that today. People love their dogs.

BRIAN- But it's a cat kicking a dog. I think that's different -

BRIAN stops to patiently explain to a kid for 7th time today how taxes work.

BRIAN- because, that's a rivalry as old as time.

MARTIN- Good point, it actually reminds me of something Marcel Proust said...that...hang on I want to get it right.

The LIBRARIAN finishes walking by again.

BRIAN- Do you do those daily puzzles on your phone? I feel like they keep me sharp. Try to do them first thing in the morning.

MARTIN- Oh yea, same. That mental exercise, ya know, great for the mind. What time did you get on the crossword today?

BRIAN- Eh, I was a couple answers away but then I got a notification of a new reel and then suddenly it was lunchtime and I had been sitting on the toilet so long I still have the red ring on my under cheeks. Didn't finish.

MARTIN- I got a minute forty-seven. Faster than cutting my toenails.

BRIAN- That gets harder every year.

MARTIN- Hate it. They keep getting thicker and sometimes they hurt for no reason. One sec.

BRIAN- Yep.

MARTIN dodges a 3rd grader's question about the plot of Jane Eyre.

MARTIN- It's like my toes are getting back at me for treating them like servants all these years.

BRIAN (looks over both shoulders)- I gotta be honest. I haven't cut my toenails in nine months.

MARTIN smacks his palm down on a table. A kid is badly started. The kid next to the scared kid has no reaction. One of them will be a CEO.

MARTIN- How do you put your shoes on?

BRIAN- I flat iron the nails so they bend under my feet. It's like skiing.

MARTIN- Snow or water?

BRIAN- Shoot, good question. Can I circle back on that?

MARTIN- Yeah man, take a lap.

BRIAN walks away with palpable attention being paid to the soles of his feet. This concentration causes him to overturn a stack of middle grade chapter books written as diaries from the perspective of a relatable but quirky kid with one great friend and another that needs growth.

MARTIN (to the kids)- Okay, let's wrap it up! Just grab the first book you lay a slimy paw on. Yea, that's perfect.

Car Line

Many, many cars are parked outside the school on a rainy day. Thrums and booms echo through the sky, coupled with the occasional flash of smothered lightning. SEAN, hunkered down in a Igor-shaped posture as if that would help him get less wet, knocks on ALEX's car window. ALEX, absorbed in nonsense on his phone, looks up with a start and fumbles for the door. SEAN opens the door full wide and leans down, letting the downpour cover the recently wet-wiped plastic interior.

ALEX (Trying to end this interaction fast)- Heywassup?

SEAN- You mind if I chill here? There was lightning so they gotta hold the kids for thirty minutes.

ALEX takes stock of SEAN. He's dripping wet and has accumulated more than the average amount of mud, assuming you take precautions to not step directly in the goop.

SEAN- Yeah?

ALEX (Shoves down his concerns and pops off a nod)- Oh. Yea of course.

SEAN plops onto the passenger seat and slams the door, sending flecks of rain water all over the radio and stick shift. ALEX realizes stick shift isn't the right word when the car is an automatic. Transmission stick?

SEAN- I'm not interrupting?

ALEX- No, (gestures to phone resting upside down in cup holder) self-loathing-based-doom-scrolling.

SEAN- Been there. I'm almost exclusively connected with people doing better than me as a way to pretend I'm trying to improve myself by considering them peers while actually I compare my adequate accomplishments to their carefully constructed virtual success.

SEAN punctuates this thought with a petulant double foot stomp, flecking mud. ALEX's chest gets tight and his b-hole clenches a tad.

ALEX- Yeah, uh, same.

They share a forced chuckle and lapse into silence.

SEAN- Your kid finish their diorama about sea life, yet?

ALEX (with friendly sarcasm)- You mean, did I and my wife finish it?

SEAN- What do they expect? Six-year-olds can't negotiate a hot glue gun.

ALEX- I spent an hour molding an orca out of clay.

SEAN- I fringed tissue paper to make seaweed.

SEAN reclines his seat. ALEX calculates how long it will take to get it back to the desired angle. He doesn't often sit in the passenger seat of his car, but when he does, he does it right.

SEAN (Picking up on the very obvious vibe here)- Hey man-

SEAN re-elevates the seat, but not all the way.

SEAN- I don't mean to bug you.

ALEX (caught)- *What?*

SEAN rises the seat another click.

SEAN- I can't help thinking you don't want me in the car.

ALEX- Naw, I want you. You're cool. It's cool.

SEAN- You sure?

ALEX (Not making eye contact)- You're good.

SEAN searches ALEX's face. ALEX buries any sign of emotion. SEAN grimaces. ALEX wonders if SEAN saw something or is finally noticing that his socks are soaked through, because that's awful.

SEAN- Still rainin'.

ALEX (distracted)- You're good.

SEAN- Huh?

ALEX (painfully present)- What?

SEAN- Do you want me to get out?

ALEX- No!

SEAN- I'll get out.

ALEX- Naw, man. Here, I'll put on the radio.

It's a commercial about car seat covers. ALEX slams the tuning dial to the right until static gives way to early 2000's alt rock. The singer whines through vaguely poetic lyrics.

I would swallow my pride, I would choke on the rinds.

SEAN- That's it!

ALEX- Eve 6?

SEAN- No, great band tho.

ALEX- Legends. Saw them give a free concert in the parking lot of a Guitar Center.

SEAN- Free, are they nuts?

ALEX- I know, they played acoustic, it was...hard to hear.

Find nothin' but faith in nothin'

SEAN- Wait, no. I mean, that's it. The car seat. The mud, everything. You don't like that I'm wet in your car but you're swallowing your pride and choking on the rinds.

ALEX- You kiddin'? I love it.

Rendezvous, then I'm through with you.

ALEX- I hate it. Sorry.

SEAN- It's cool.

ALEX- It is?

SEAN- Of course, boundaries are healthy. I'll get out.

SEAN makes a theatrical reach for the door.

ALEX- No, stay.

SEAN- Are you sure?

ALEX- It's not you, it's me. I get so nutty about my car staying clean and could use some chill.

SEAN- I could help you with that.

ALEX (savoring this new lease on life with a leased car)- Please.

SEAN flips open the glove box and ruffles the carefully stacked papers.

SEAN- You can organize these all you want, but the one time you're desperately looking for your updated registration while the cop stands there with his thumbs hooked into his belt, this is gonna happen anyway.

SEAN jams the center console lid back and burrows deeper than a badger about the give birth.

SEAN- Lost chapstick. Looking for a pen with some juice left. Receipts for things you think you'll return but really won't. Pack it carefully, but life finds a way. Now, the floor mats.

SEAN gives another muddy foot stomp.

SEAN- We vacuum. We shake them out over the grass. We might even get the heavy duty plastic covers that make us feel like manly men. But the illusion of keeping them clean is just that. Floor mats are the universe's repository for all the gross stuff that comes out of our gross selves.

SEAN mimes biting his finger nails and picking boogs.

ALEX- Thanks for not really picking boogs.

SEAN- I'm a mentor, not a monster.

ALEX wipes his dry brow.

ALEX- Thanks for this. I was holding so tight to the idea that, despite it all, I could keep my car clean. I'm seeing now that being a Dad means letting things get boogy.

SEAN- Of course. Do you want to get to the back seat?

ALEX's back seat is full of loose cereal, crayons, toys, shoes, shoelaces from other shoes, boogs, barrettes, a Barbasol shaving cream can full of Dino DNA , and a steaming pile of fresh kid vomit.

ALEX (sing songy)- *NNNNootttttt MY problemmm.*