

The Voicemail

Written by
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BLACK SCREEN / FADE IN:

1 EXT/INT. - CONTINUOUS

All we see is BLACK as CALEB MOORE, 21, begins his voiceover, intercut with:

- Caleb walking on a college campus alone, unhappy.
- The life of JOHN MOORE and JOSEPH MOORE at the family business.
- Caleb officially dropping out of college.
- Caleb painting a canvas.
- YOUNG CALEB and YOUNG JOSEPH with their mother in joyful past memories.

CALEB (V.O)

My name is Caleb Moore, and I'm an artist.
Or, at least, that's what I want to be.
My dad wants me to become a business man
like him and join the family business, just
like my older brother Joseph did after he
graduated from business school.
But that's not who I am.
You see, my dad and I don't exactly see
eye-to-eye, especially since my mom died.
And it got worse after I dropped out of
college. Which is what led to-

CUT TO:

2 INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A door slams. Caleb storms toward the door with his backpack slung over his shoulder. He and JOHN, 40s, are mid-argument.

CALEB

(unraveling)

How many times do I have to tell you?
I'm not like you and Joseph.
I'm an artist, and I don't want to work for
your stupid company!

JOHN

(also unraveling)

That "stupid company" kept a roof over
your head and food in your mouth. I busted
my butt for years so you could go to college

and have a future, and I'm not going to let you throw it all away just because you want to chase some hopeless dream.

CALEB

Dad, you're not listening to me. You never listen. You just don't seem to understand that I wasn't made to do what you do. And ever since mom died, you've been shutting me out. And I'm sick of it—I'm sick of you pushing me to be something I'm not.

(Adjusts his backpack, starts toward the door.)

CALEB (CONT'D)

So I'm leaving. And I'm never coming back.

Caleb storms past John toward the door.

JOHN

(starting to break)

Caleb. Caleb!

The door SLAMS. John collapses into his chair, processing what just happened. He sighs, running his hands through his hair.

CUT TO: BLACK

TIME CUT: 3 YEARS LATER

3 INT. OFFICE BUILDING - EVENING

John sits at his desk, eyes glazed as he stares at his computer.

Flashes of young Caleb play in his mind. He shakes himself out of it, still unsettled. He reaches for the BIBLE on his desk, opens it, and reads.

The door creaks open. JOSEPH MOORE, 25, pokes his head in.

JOSEPH

Hey, Dad. Did you want me to schedule that meeting with the owner of Sage Financial?

John doesn't respond.

JOSEPH

Dad?

John finally blinks back to the present.

JOHN

Oh, sorry, Joseph. What did you say?

JOSEPH

I asked if you wanted me to schedule that meeting with Sage Financial?

JOHN

Oh, yes, please go ahead. I'm free on Wednesday.

JOSEPH

Perfect. I'll get it on the schedule.

(He starts to leave, notices his father's expression—and the Bible.)

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

(nodding toward the Bible)

Is something wrong?

John gently closes the Bible, sliding it back into his desk.

JOHN

(lying)

Oh, I'm fine.

JOSEPH

You were thinking about him again, weren't you?

(beat as John looks sad)

Dad, he's not coming home.

JOHN

Oh, I know. But I still miss him.

JOSEPH

Dad, he was so ungrateful. I don't understand why you—

JOHN

That's enough.

(Beat. Joseph falls silent.)

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Why don't you head home early?
 I'll finish up here.

JOSEPH
 Alright. I'll see you later.

Joseph exits. John stares at his computer, lost in thought.

CUT TO:

4 EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

John walks toward his car after work. He tosses his briefcase in the backseat, pulls off his jacket and tie, and slumps into the driver's seat.

He checks his phone. A missed call. A voicemail from a strange number. He presses play.

For a moment, silence. Then:

CALEB (V.O.)
 Hey, Dad. It's me, Caleb.

John freezes, his face softening in shock.

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I know I'm probably the last person you want to talk to, and I don't even know if you'll listen. But... after selling my art didn't work, I took the college money. I wasted it on things I don't even remember.

INTERCUT - FLASHES OF CALEB: partying, drinking, gambling, flirting with women.

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I'm ashamed of what I did. I hurt people, and I hurt myself. I didn't realize how empty I was... until the money ran out and I hit rock bottom.

INTERCUT - CALEB sits alone in a messy apartment, drink in hand.

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So I got a job. In the dump.

INTERCUT - Caleb rides the back of a garbage truck, emptying trash, filthy and drenched in sweat.

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But then... something happened.

INTERCUT - A homeless man hands Caleb a Bible.

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Something I didn't expect.

INTERCUT - Caleb emerges from baptismal waters, smiling with joy.

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The faith that Mom had... I have it now too.
She's alive, Dad, and she's home now.
And I want to come home too.

INTERCUT - Their MOTHER, alive in memory, reading the Bible to her boys, playing joyfully in the yard.

4 INT. CAR - NIGHT

John sits frozen, hand over his mouth, breaking as he listens.

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry I left the way I did.
I'm sorry I stole the money. I hope you can
forgive me.

John trembles, tears welling.

CALEB (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(voice breaking)
I miss you, and I want to let you know
that I forgive you too.
(beat)
Please, call me back.
(beat, breathes)
Please—let me come home.

The voicemail ends. Silence.

John lowers the phone slowly, tears in his eyes. He sobs quietly, as he remembers how badly he wants a restored relationship with his son.

He stares into the night, and after a moment, begins to pray silently, realizing that he had also done wrong.

He covers his mouth, staring at his phone screen, debating whether he should call his son back or not. His thumb hovers over the call back button.

Finally, he sighs, throwing his phone into the passenger seat. He leans over his steering wheel, torn and reverent.

CUT TO:

5 INT. MOORE HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

John and Joseph sit in the living room, one on the couch, and one in a recliner. Joseph sits with his laptop open, focused on his work. John, however, is staring off into the distance, unaware of the papers that still sit in his lap.

Joseph says something, but John doesn't hear him because he's thinking about the night before. Caleb's voicemail echoes in his mind. Joseph tries to get his attention.

JOSEPH

Dad. Dad!

John snaps out of it, giving Joseph his attention.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

(suspicious)

Are you okay? You've been so distracted lately.
What's going on?

(John avoids eye contact with Joseph)

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

You're still thinking about Caleb, aren't you?

(John looks down, guilt in his eyes)

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

(irritated)

Dad, how many times do I have to tell you?
He's *not* coming home. So stop praying he will.

John has had enough. Suddenly, he jumps up from his seat and lets Joseph have it.

JOHN

I can't, Joseph, I can't! Not when he left because of me.

JOSEPH

(slamming his laptop shut)
But you didn't do anything wrong—

JOHN

(unraveling)

Yes, I did. I pushed him to be something he wasn't. I pushed him to be like me—like you. Instead of encouraging him, I belittled him and drove him away, all because he reminded me too much of his mother. And I couldn't stand it. That's why he left. Because I was a horrible father.

JOSEPH

(standing)

Dad, he blew all your money. I don't see how you—

JOHN

(breaking)

I don't care about the money!
I just want my son back.

Beat. The men stand in silence. Until:

JOSEPH

You know, I'm your son too.

(gathers his things)

And I never left. I stuck around, even when things were hard. Caleb didn't. He doesn't deserve your forgiveness.

John opens his mouth to respond, but is cut off when a KNOCK sounds at the door. He sends Joseph a scowl, then goes to the door.

6 EXT. MOORE HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - DAY

The camera stays on him as he opens the door. All we see is his shocked face as the PERSON begins speaking.

CALEB

Hi, dad.

The camera reveals Caleb, who stands at the threshold, a cross hanging from his neck and a sad smile on his face.

CALEB (CONT'D)

I thought I'd come home anyway.

John stands dumbfounded, eyes watering.

CALEB (CONT'D)

I don't know what else to say except...
I'm sorry. I—I never should have left.
I know that now. And—and the money, I—

JOHN

(stepping toward him, breaking)

Caleb, I don't care about that money.

Caleb's face falls. Then John, nearly in tears, embraces his son, welcoming him back home.

Caleb hesitates to react, then wraps his arms around his father, crying into his shoulder. It's emotional, real, and heartfelt.

JOHN
(whispering)
I'm sorry, son.
I love you. And I'm so proud of you.

Caleb pulls away and sniffs. Then he smiles sadly, unable to process what's happening.

JOSEPH (O.S.)
(coming to door)
Dad, what's—
(sees Caleb, freezes, fuming)

JOHN
Joseph...

Joseph's cheeks turn red. He brushes past them, hitting Caleb in the shoulder.

CALEB
Joseph—

He does not stop, but instead gets in his car, slamming the door and driving away quickly.

Caleb watches, heartbroken. John sees, then places a hand on his shoulder.

A beat. John then welcomes Caleb back into his house. They start talking, laughing, and catching up.

CUT TO:

7 INT. OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

Joseph sits at his desk, eyes glazed as he stares at his computer, deeply involved in his work. Then, John knocks on his open door. He doesn't look up.

JOHN

Hey, look, I know your probably not very happy with me. But I just wanted to let you know that I'm proud of you.

Joseph's eyes flick up in intrigue.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(genuine)

I love you too, you know. And I'm so grateful you stayed. I couldn't have done any of this without you.

(Gestures around him)

Joseph's facial expression begins to soften.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I don't tell you that more often.

(Beat. Joseph remains silent, contemplative)

Well, I'll leave you to it.

Beat. John is almost out the door when Joseph calls after him.

JOSEPH

Hey, dad?

(John turns back around)

I love you too.

John smiles and nods, then leaves the office.

Joseph stares off into the distance, thinking. He then pulls out a picture from his desk—one of him and Caleb as kids.

Memories flood him, and he smiles, then looks up, wondering if he can forgive his brother, knowing that his mother would want him to.

FADE OUT

THE END