

## Celluloid Writer

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Chapter 1. The beginning of the end.

The prison elevator glides up to the fourth level, and the door sliding open echoes throughout the prison as two guards escort the warden down the balcony. An inmate pops his head out of one of the cells and warns his cell-block mates, “Warden’s comin.”

Alone inside a cell, an inmate, dressed in simple prison garments, writes intensely on a notepad and does not notice the footsteps approaching and stopping at his cell door.

The Warden barks, “Alex Sullivan.”

Startled, Alex drops his pen, “What?” and spins to face them.

Alex watches as the warden, and the guards unlock and slide open the gate, which again echoes throughout the prison.

“It’s time.”

Alex stands up quickly and nervously attempts to organize his papers as the guards move in to handcuff him. He stops them for a minute to look in the mirror, pale white skin, brown hair, green eyes, medium height. He flashes white teeth to check for cleanliness, “Do I need to be cuffed?”

“Regulations.”

The guards escort Alex out of the cell and to the elevator, as other inmates hoot and holler, “Go, Hollywood.” “Win an Oscar, man!”

Moving into the elevator, they turn to face out as the door shuts, and they start down. The warden speaks in a much friendlier voice, “The director and the actor await.”

Alex stands in front of the guards with the Warden at his side. “Yes, I know. I just lost track of time.”

The Warden says, "I would like ... I mean, my daughter would like ... um, would it be all right to ask for the actor's autograph?"

Alex and the Warden exit the elevator followed by the guards, and as they walk down the corridor, Alex answers, "Sure. He's very talented."

The Warden says, "It's for my daughter, of course." The guards make eye contact and roll their eyes. "She's very excited, her old man meetin' real movie stars."

They pass through a security checkpoint and walk into the prison projection room outfitted with a large screen and fold out chairs. A few men mingle about within wearing guest badges. The Warden remembers the handcuffs on Alex, and hisses at the guards, "Get those cuffs off." They slip behind Alex and remove the cuffs.

"Great movie," one of the men steps forward.

Alex compliments him, "Mark, with your directing talents," and then addresses the other man, "and Paul's acting abilities, how could it not be?"

Paul returns the compliment, "And the great story you wrote."

Alex downplays his talent, "The easiest thing to write: a personal history. Did you add on those newsreels we talked about?"

Mark answers, "Yes, they worked. A real dramatic touch. Have you been keeping busy?"

Alex nods, "Real busy. I'm working on an incredible story a con told me about his life."

The actor and director sit on either side of Alex while the Warden and the guards take seats behind them.

Paul leans in, "I've seen the documentaries you've written about these con's lives. They're fantastic."

The lights dim.

Mark adds, "We've got some great news for you after the screening."

The movie starts.

FADE IN.

A bird's eye view of a graduation ceremony taking place on a football field green at Montana State University, reveals Alex, being acted by Paul, dressed in a graduation robe, and filming the scene below while precariously perched on a light pole above the gathering. The graduates in their caps and gowns below appear like keys on a giant keyboard. The master of ceremonies at the podium speaks, "Ladies and gentlemen, fellow graduates. I am pleased to introduce our guest ..."

Alex interrupts the speech when he loses his balance, and the crowd, hearing the commotion, looks up.

Above the crowd, Alex struggles to regain his position on the light pole. Holding onto his camera with one hand, he desperately tries to hang on with the other. He regains his footing and hugs the post.

The crowd below sighs in relief and their laughter reflects a familiarity with the cameraman and his antics.

The speaker recovers from the interruption, and says, "... if our illustrious fellow graduate, Alex Sullivan, upon whom we have bestowed the title 'most likely to succeed in Hollywood' ... if he lives, that is ...will come down, we will continue."

Alex, embarrassed, starts down.

The opening credits roll over the visuals, including the title: Hollywood Dream, Busted.

The speaker notes that Alex has started down, "Now, without further delay, our esteemed guest, Dr. Alridge, has a few departing words for us."

The crowd gives the speaker a standing ovation as Alex comes down from the light post. A campus policeman scolds him as he alights on the ground.

Doctor Aldridge approaches the podium, receives the applause and signals the crowd to sit. The graduates take their seats and quiet down. “Dear ladies, gentlemen, and graduates, you have tasted the freedom to engage in the studies of your choice ...”

Dr. Aldridge’s speaks over the visuals showing Alex moving about documenting the faces of the audience. “... to express your opinions and to pursue new opportunities for self-fulfillment.”

Alex comes upon his three-male co-film-school friends and fellow graduates; long hair sticks out from under the caps, sunglasses hide their eyes, cowboy boots or hiking shoes poke out from under the gowns, and they smoke a joint. They share it with Alex as he records them.

Dr. Aldridge’s voice continues over the visuals Alex records, “Young or old, our founding fathers cherished the concepts of individual freedom and equality. They were fiercely determined to direct their destiny.”

The three grads, seen through Alex’s camera lens, smoke the joint when behind them a campus cop appears.

Dr. Aldridge, continuing his voice over, says, “You are the embodiment of what America can achieve. You are both the strength and the hope of our nation. I send each of you, my very best wishes for success and personal satisfaction in your future lives.”

The crowd rises and applauds loudly as the campus cop escorts Alex and his friends off the grounds. Alex pleads with the security officer, “Come on, man. I was only filming them.”

Cop refuses to let him go, “You’ve disrupted this ceremony enough. Leave.”

FADE OUT.

In the prison screening room, Alex gives the director a thumb up sign.

FADE IN.

Later in the evening, alongside the Gallatin River, an outdoor graduation party disturbs the natural quiet. A large crowd, of college age, gathers around campfires, and a bluegrass band plays on an improvised stage.

In the beer keg line with an empty paper cup in each hand, Alex waits his turn and questions the guy behind him, “Hey, Robert, what’s your plans?”

Robert shrugs his shoulders, “I don’t know, Alex. Thought I’d stay here for the summer, do some backpacking, and then head home in the fall.”

Alex looks around at the scenery, “Yeah, I’m gonna miss these mountains.”

The setting sun begins to slide behind the snow-capped ridges surrounding the valley and illuminates the tops of the fluffy clouds. They glow red. The bottoms of the clouds shadowed a dark gray, renders a Van Gogh-like painting. The aspen trees intertwine with the other vegetation along the riverbank, and the water gurgles and splashes on the rocks.

A girl dressed in blue jean cut-offs, a halter top, western boots and a straw cowboy hat passes by, “Hi, Alex.”

Alex, with his eyes wide, and a big smile, replies, “Hi, ya’, Carol. What ya’ doin’ this summer?”

Carol pauses and turns toward Alex, revealing well-developed feminine charms, “Planting trees for the forest service.”

Alex, breathless, struggles to keep the conversation going, “Wow. Great. Then what?”

Carol, twirls her hair with a finger, “I don’t know. Go home for a while I guess,” her brown eyes dance.

Alex, regrettably, breaks off his flirtation as the line moves forward, and he replies, “Well, good luck.”

Carol makes a sad face and moves on, “Bye, Alex. Have a good time in Los Angeles.”

Alex fills his cups with beer and continues to talk to Robert, “Hated to say goodbye to her, but I gotta’ get this beer back to my girlfriend at the campfire. Sure, am gonna’ miss these ladies.”

Robert expresses, “Hell, Alex. L.A. isn’t going to fall into the sea this summer. Stay here and go in the Fall.”

“Tempting, real tempting, but, I’ve got to go try to get started in the film business.” Alex fills his two cups with beer. “See ya’.” Turning from the kegs, he makes his way through the crowd. People call at him from various campfires, “Hey, Alex, come here, man.”

Carrying the cups of beer, Alex stops by, “How ya’ doing? Can you believe we all made it through?”

“Got a chance to see your student film, really liked it,” one of them says.

“Thanks. I can’t believe it’s over,” Alex replies.

They all agree. Alex moves on. “Catch you later. I have to get this beer back to JoAnn.” Alex doesn’t get very far before being called over by another group, around another fire. “Alex, over here, man.”

“Ya did a great job directing that film, Alex,” one of the group compliments him.

“Thanks, Joe. You all going to stay around this summer?”

“No, I’m headed home.”

His friend, Martin, confirms, “Me, too.”

David, the third in the group, responds, “I’ll probably go home for the summer and come

back to ski in the winter.”

Alex responds, “Well, good luck to all of you, okay?”

Alex works his way through the crowd again. Another group tries to call him over.

“Alex ...”

Alex, yells back over the music, “Can’t. Got to get this beer back to JoAnn before it gets warm. Good luck.”

The bluegrass band strikes up a version of Alma-Mater, which elicits jeering from the crowd and overpowers Alex’s reply.

Alex makes his way to a campfire, around which the three friends from the commencement await. They and several girls drink and smoke pot, and still joke about the scene they caused at the graduation ceremony. Alex hands JoAnn, a pretty blonde, the extra beer.

Alex apologizes, “Sorry. Everyone stopped me.”

“I was getting worried. Thought maybe you were filming another illicit scene.” She wears a long, flowery, light dress, low cut, and her blue eyes sparkle.

“I still can’t believe that cop made me leave. I was only filming these guys.” He indicates his friends.

Alex’s friend Steve replies, “Some people just don’t recognize that filmmakers can flout the law.”

Mike, the other buddy, offers, “Look, guys, we did a real professional job putting together our last film. I don’t see why we can’t stick together and make more. I’m for us staying here and starting a film company of our own.”

Duncan, the third of the group, counters, “Come on, you know what happens to film grads who stay here. They end up driving beer trucks.”

Steve waves his almost empty beer cup in a semi-circle to encompass the surroundings, “I love it here, but what would we do? Local ads?”

“I’ve let Hollywood know I’m coming, and I won’t leave ‘til I’ve swayed every cinematic lover there,” Alex states his determination.

Mike warns, “A lot have tried before you,” as he finishes his cup of beer.

“I’ll find a way; jump a fence, bribe a guard, kidnap a producer’s daughter ... anything that offers a chance to make it.” Alex drinks down his beer.

Joan Ann says, “But, you have a lot of friends here, Alex. You’ve made it your home.” Her blue eyes search for any regrets at leaving her, “Can you give it all up for a job?”

Alex throws his cup in the fire, wraps his arm around her, and offers, “I know. I do have a lot of good friends here, and it has been my home, but don’t you see, my success depends upon setting a goal, sacrificing to achieve it, and overcoming obstacles.”

He grabs her hand and addresses the whole group, “If I didn’t try, I’d be giving up four years of college and a life-long dream.”

Mike recalls, “A cameraman in the Iraq war gave up his life for his job.”

Alex expresses his admiration, “That kind of professionalism ... it’s something to strive for.”

JoAnn breaks off their hand holding, steps alongside the other guys, and turns to face him, “So, when are you leaving for L.A, Alex?”

Alex looks at them all, ‘Soon. Very soon’ The campfire flames leap, and the sparks fly.

FADE OUT.

Watching from the prison screening room, Alex nods his admiration towards the actor.

FADE IN.



The interior of a low-rent studio apartment opens the scene. Drawn shades leak sunlight on the edges and through the pinhole punctured material. Bright beams filled with swirling dust particles illuminate movie industry magazines, books, and newspapers littering the dark pad. Within the hot room, a young man sleeps face down on a small mattress, shirtless, and in dirty jeans. Flies circle lazily as the radio drones on, “KCLA, at high noon, here in Hollywood. It’s another hot, smoggy, summer day. On the world scene, Mexico mobilizes a massive manhunt for an American terrorist sighted there, James Wood. In other news ...”

A loud knocking on the door followed by an angry voice, “Open up. Open up. I’ll bash it open.”

Alex appears thinner, his hair longer, and he sports a gruff beard. He rolls over and bolts up.

“Open up you lazy scum.”

The end for now.

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