

Cheese Toddler

written by

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FADE IN

INT. CHURCH - DAY

ECU of ALEX's (25, blonde, crew cut, average height, slightly overweight) mouth.

His lips move. He is saying something but it cannot be heard.

ZOOM OUT to reveal Alex, dressed in a black button down shirt and kahki pants, is at a podium about to give a eulogy.

He stares at the casket sitting a few feet in front of him, flowers abound around it, the backs of picture frames surrounding it as well.

Then his attention draws to the audience sitting in front of him.

Alex is obviously struck with the weight of the moment.

ALEX
(mumbling)
I'm genuinely curious. The reason,
well because what I think of when I
say...

Alex's mother KAY (mid 50's, dyed hair, glasses, dressed in a tacky black dress) in the front row tries to get Alex's attention.

Quietly, as Alex notices Kay's perturbed nature, Alex whispers...

ALEX (CONT'D)
What?

KAY
(gesturing)
Speak louder.

ALEX
Oh, should I start over?

KAY
Yes.

Alex looks back down at the podium to reference whatever he seems to have written down. When...

His eyes widen.

CONTINUED

Alex has come to some sort of emotional realization.

Wiping fresh tears from his eyes he clears his throat and then...

ALEX
Cheese Toddler! What do you think
of when I say that?

Alex looks around at the perplexed audience. A little disquieted he continues...

ALEX (CONT'D)
A toddler made of cheese? A toddler
with cheese all over them? What?
I'm genuinely curious. The reason,
well... because what I think of
when I say cheese toddler takes me
back to before the wedding this
past weekend.

EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - DAY

ALEX (V.O.)
It takes me to the drive into town.

A green Toyota Sienna drives along the highway in light traffic.

INT. SIENNA - DAY

CU of Alex (shaved head) laying in on the back row of seats in the car.

OS a cell phone begins to ring in the front of the car.

CUT TO:

MS of Kay answering the phone in the driver's seat. She puts it on speaker.

KAY
Hey Kathryn. What's up? How is
Jonathon feeling about his big day
tomorrow?

KATHRYN (early 40's, JONATHON's sister, ALEX's cousin) holds back her sobbing and says...

CONTINUED

KATHRYN

Jonathon is okay. It's just...

Kay turns off speaker phone quickly and brings the phone to her ear.

KAY

Kat what's wrong? What happened?

ALEX

What happened mom?

KAY

Oh my god! Kat... how are Jonathon and Judy doing?

ALEX

Mom! What happened?

Alex, now sitting upright in the back of the van, looks perplexed. He realizes it must be something horrible, but can't possibly know yet how bad it is.

ALEX (V.O.)

At that point everything was chaotic. We barely knew what was going on. All I was told was that Robert had passed in his sleep. But, after mom went to see Aunt Judy...

INT. JUDY AND ROBERT'S HOME - DAY

Kay and JUDY (early 60's, brown hair, glasses) sit on the living room couch. Kay hugs and consoles Judy while she sobs.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

things got a little better.

EXT. RUNZA PARKING LOT - DAY

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

By the time we went to eat that day things were calmer. The wedding was still on and, although this time would always have this bittersweet tinge to it, as a family we were looking forward to a reprieve from the pain of losing Robert. Which, is when I heard it...

CUT TO:

INT. RUNZA - DAY

Alex and Kay sit across from each other at a table eating their Runza's.

Things are quiet in the fast food restaurant except for one almost annoying EMPLOYEE speaking to another EMPLOYEE (#2) as he carries a stack of cheddar cheese into the kitchen.

EMPLOYEE

This stack of cheese is so heavy. I mean really heavy. Like a... a... cheese toddler.

Alex and Kay look at each other and begin to laugh uproariously.

EMPLOYEE #2

You're an idiot. You know that?

The second Employee's comment was no matter to Alex and Kay as they kept laughing.

On and on they went.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

It doesn't seem like much now, but it was as funny as could be to us in the moment. And, then, my mom made the comment that changed everything for me...

KAY

(catching her breath)

You know why that's so funny? I've never heard something like it in my life. And I'm never gonna hear it again.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

That was the comment I needed to set my mind loose...

Alex ponders what his mom just said to him.

MONTAGE

ROBERT (a big burly man, mid-60's, looks like he's constantly about to chortle with laughter, kind, generous) laughing.

The stack of cheese in the Employee's hands.

CONTINUED

Robert joking with Judy

A family BBQ where Robert is cooking.

Judy crying as JONATHON (24, big and burly, the spitting image of his father at 24) tells her he is going to get married.

The whole family's outing to a water park.

Robert doing a belly flop into the pool.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

I saw Robert and all the great things he had done for Judy and Jonathon. The fun family outings we had. All that Robert seemed to be to me from our relationship. Truly Robert was one of a kind. Just like this little phrase cheese toddler, but without the hilariously stupid nature. I couldn't help but see even more...

Families playing together in a park play area.

Business men and women walking up and down the streets of New York City.

Shamans.

People meditating.

People at a huge sporting event.

Each of these people coming home to their families.

More families.

Just... more.

ALEX (CONT'D)

The revelation was something I had to express. At the least I had to write it all down.

MONTAGE ENDS

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Alex sits at the desk of a mediocre hotel room writing something on a sheet of paper.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

All of the people living in this world. Throughout history. Billions. Maybe more. All special and unique in their own ways. Each of them special to a certain number of other people in the world...

Alex continues to scribble on the page of paper in front of him.

He ponders for a moment. Pencil held aloft. Then begins to scribble some more.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Even the most famous of us in this world only known deeply by a small number of people. Every last one of us is somebody that only a few people got to know throughout the history of the human race. Past, present, and future. For those very few though we were these amazing, unique, hopefully wonderful, individuals. Finally I had it all written down. I was ready to make this beautiful statement to Jonathon or Judy since I wouldn't be able to be at Robert's funeral.

Alex puts down his pencil, turns off the light at the desk, and goes over to his bed in the room, lays down, and goes to sleep.

INT. CHURCH ATRIUM - DAY

Alex talks to family members and greets others as they wait to head down to their seats in the pews of the church.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

That next day at the wedding I was hyped. Not "are you ready for some football" type ready, but I was invigorated.

(MORE)

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 I was so ready to say this poignant
 funny comment, cheese toddler, to
 somebody and explain its story and
 what it meant in regards to Robert.
 But, I had to wait.

Alex sits excitedly in the pew of the grand church as he
 waits for the wedding to begin.

He smiles as his cousin Jonathon walks down the aisle.

He does the same as Jonathon's bride walks down with her
 father.

The wedding goes off without a hitch. It is wonderful.

CUT TO:

INT. RECEPTION HALL - EVENING

Alex sits at one table amongst an ocean of them with his
 mother Kay and a few other family members.

He is a little less excited now, but still ready and anxious
 to find time with Jonathon at some point.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)
 Then, at the reception, I found the
 bar.

Alex gets up and walks over to the bar.

BARTENDER
 Can I get you anything?

ALEX
 Well, what's on tap?

BARTENDER
 We've got Blue Moon and Coors
 Light.

ALEX
 I'll take a Coors.

CU of the glass filling with Coors Light.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 And the mistakes continued from
 there.

The wedding party comes in and sits down to eat in the middle
 of the room.

Alex, a tiny bit flustered, gets up to get another drink.

BARTENDER
Can I get you anything?

ALEX
I'll take a Coors.

CU of the glass filling with Coors Light.

CUT TO:

Alex makes faces at the baby at the table he is sitting at.

CUT TO:

Alex standing in line to get the prepared dinner.

Soon he is finished with his meal and...

gets up to go to the bar again.

Looking down at the floor Alex mumbles something we cannot hear as he bumps into a well suited RANDOM GUEST.

Alex looks up ready to apologize when...

RANDOM GUEST
Watch where you're going there,
crazy.

Alex stares blankly at the individual then looks back down and keeps walking towards the bar.

CUT TO:

BARTENDER
Another Coors?

ALEX
Yes.

CU of the glass filling with Coors Light.

CUT TO:

Alex talks with the family at his table for a little while. Still having a little fun playing around with the baby.

Soon though, Alex gets up again and heads to the bar. This time looking around to see if Jonathon has gotten up from eating yet.

BARTENDER

Another?

ALEX

It only seems right.

Alex walks back to the table the long way. Through a series of tight walkways around tables he could have avoided.

Alex sits at the table getting more and more flustered. He plays a good game, but he is flustered none the less.

He drinks some more.

CUT TO:

Alex gets up and goes to the bar, again.

BARTENDER

Moving a little quickly aren't we?

ALEX

What? It's a wedding.

BARTENDER

I know, but still just slow down a little. But... another Coors?

Alex smiles at the bartender.

MONTAGE

CU of the glass filling with Coors Light.

CU of another glass filling with Coors Light.

CU of another glass filling with Coors Light.

Another.

Another.

CUT TO:

At the bar the BARTENDER looks at Alex walking up and fills a cup with water.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

About 18 beers in it was decided for me that it truly was time to slow down a bit.

ALEX grabs the cup and heads back to his table.

CUT TO:

Jonathon walking up to the table. He and Kay begin talking for a little bit.

Alex sits and tries to wait patiently.

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Then, finally, I made my move as my
mom was talking to Jonathon.

JONATHON
Yeah, I loved dad, but if he
could've waited just one more night
to pass in his sleep it would've
been...

ALEX
Cheese Toddler!

Both Jonathon and Kay turn to Alex now standing right next to them in bewilderment.

JONATHON
What?

ALEX
Cheese Toddler! I...

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D) (CONT'D)
I tried to explain to him what
cheese toddler meant, but at first
it came out slurred. Then, it just
wouldn't come out. In fact, there
was only one thing that was ready
to come spewing out of my mouth.

Alex runs to the bathroom.

Jonathon and Kay are left standing there for a while.

Then a while longer.

CUT TO:

Finally Alex reappears from the hallway.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Sorry. He was right.

JONATHON

The bartender? Alex, it's fine. I paid him handsomely to show us a good time. How long has it been?

ALEX

Since I drank like this?

JONATHON

Yeah.

ALEX

Probably before the schizo diagnosis.

JONATHON

Sometimes you just gotta let it out, get loose, and hopefully not throw up at my wedding, but if you need to... spew your guts. Now... what in the hell does cheese toddler mean?

ALEX (V.O. CONT'D)

So, I explained. Halfway decent I guess. But did I get the gist of Cheese Toddler across to my cousin? We are these amazing, unique, complex, and wonderful individuals only a few get to know... I...

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Jonathon stands at the podium where we saw Alex earlier. He has been speaking the whole time.

The camera pans out to reveal Alex in the casket, the pictures around him are of him.

Looking down at the sheet of paper on the podium one last time Jonathon breaks down.

JONATHON

I need them to know.

Jonathon weeps.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

CONTINUED

Alex can be heard throwing up in one of the stalls.

INT. BATHROOM STALL - NIGHT

Alex begins wiping his mouth when he hears...

RANDOM GUEST (O.S.)
That crazy motherfucker should be
locked up in a mental asylum.

Alex turns to go confront the Random Guest when...

GUEST (O.S.)
Dude shut up he's in that stall
right there dude.

RANDOM GUEST (O.S.)
I don't give a fuck. The crazy
motherfucker is schizo. Don't you
know that?

Alex decides he will wait in the stall until these two leave.

GUEST (O.S.)
Yes, I know. That doesn't mean...

RANDOM GUEST (O.S.)
Oh yes it does. Did you hear what
he was saying when he bumped into
me earlier. He was saying that some
crazy asshole should just give up
already. Take a wild guess who the
fuck that is?

Alex opens the stall door he has to explain what was going on
to this man.

Nobody is in the bathroom.

Dejected, Alex walks out of the bathroom his head held low.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Jonathon begins to compose himself again and says...

JONATHON

The next time someone passes who you love, remember this. Remember Cheese Toddler.

Jonathon now has tears streaming down his face again.

JONATHON (CONT'D)

What I just read were the last words written by Alex. For those of us who were close to him there was a little knowledge of his diagnosis. He was schizoaffective bipolar type. We knew the pain he felt, but... We just...

(beat)

We didn't know how deep that pain went. I was always proud of how my cousin dealt with his illness, yet I'm left wondering did I force him into this idea that he had to deal with it. That he couldn't let us know what he felt.

Kay crying in the front row next to JUDY mutters...

KAY

(to Johnathon)

Nobody knew.

JONATHON

What I do know is I got to know that amazing, unique, complex, wonderful bit of stardust that was my cousin Alex.

We see Alex's casket again. The photos of him smiling, laughing.

JONATHON (CONT'D)

Some of that I want to share with the world. I want them to hear of this amazing human being that thought these beautiful things about people and the globe at large.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Alex sneaks up behind Jonathon on the high dive of a swimming pool, jumps to announce his presence, and, when Jonathon turns around, pushes him off the board.

Some of the memories I want to keep to myself because they are so personal and meaningful to me. Whatever you do for however long the person lives who's touched you, cherish them, let them know how unique and special and wonderful they are. Do what I wish I could do now for Alex.

CUT TO:

INT. RECEPTION HALL - NIGHT

Jonathon hugs Alex. Alex sobbing into his cousins shoulder.

JONATHON

And... When they're gone, remember that you got to live with that person. This human being and their ideas, their worldview, and all the things nobody else got to experience except you. When you get down and think of how you miss them remember cheese toddler. That one of a kind individual that never existed before and will never exist again here on this earth that you got to be around.

PAN DOWN to view Alex in his casket.

FADE TO BLACK