

American Letters

By

Kevin Keck

EXT. LAKE- DAY

NICK (45) a well-built African American man, sits on a worn down LAWN CHAIR with a FISHING POLE cast into the water.

All he has with him is a tackle box, a thermos, and an EMPTY LAWN CHAIR that is opened up right next to him.

There isn't a soul around.

He checks his watch, packs up his tackle box and pole, and starts to head back to his car.

EXT. POST OFFICE- MORNING

Nick pulls an empty mail cart down a long line of mail trucks. He is wearing a worn blue postal uniform.

The parking lot is empty and dead quiet.

INT. POST OFFICE MAIL CASES- MORNING

Nick sorts through the mail in his case. The case he's in is similar to a cubicle with small holes lining the inside.

A radio plays faintly in the distance but otherwise there is silence.

Nick takes the mail he has sorted and loads it into the mail cart. He looks up from the cart to find:

ROBIN (32) jamming out to an IPOD. She waves before taking her spot in the cubicle.

Nick tries to continue working but the music gets louder. He sighs, annoyed, and turns to say something to Robin but is caught off guard when he sees her workspace.

Robin's cubicle is much more decorated than Nick's. 80's paraphernalia from Robin's childhood capture every formerly blank space.

As Nick peeks over he can see how in contrast, his work space seems so empty.

EXT. MAIL ROUTE COUNTRY ROAD- DAY

Nick's hand reaches from his idling truck to a mailbox on a small gravel road.

He struggles to fit the package in the box.

EXT. MAIL ROUTE FARM HOUSE- DAY

Nick knocks on the door. No answer. He reads a small red note that has been taped to the door.

It reads: "Out back if you need me"

EXT. MAIL ROUTE BACK YARD- DAY

Nick walks into the backyard, package and mail in hand.

DONNA (50) , is feeding her CHICKENS in their pen when she notices Nick approaching.

DONNA

Nick! What a nice surprise.

NICK

Hey, Donna.

Donna walks towards Nick to grab her package.

DONNA

Thank goodness. I've been waiting on this for a while. Sorry you had to come around back. If I don't tend to the girls they get loud.

NICK

The girls?

Donna signs for the package and begins to open it.

DONNA

My chicks.

Nick takes notice of the small animals, chirping about.

NICK

I brought your mail too.

Nick holds out the mail. There's a fishing magazine buried in the mix.

NICK (CONT'D)

Say, I didn't know that you fished.

Donna is still busy with the package.

DONNA

What?

NICK

The magazine. You fish?

DONNA

Oh, right. I don't yet...but I'm trying to. I try to find a new hobby every once in a while. One day I'm a chicken farmer next day I'm a fisherman...fisher-person? Whatever the term is.

NICK

I see.

Nick smiles as Donna finally peels back the top of the package.

DONNA

I bought the essentials. Lures, rod, a big floppy hat. But what I needed the most was inspiration. So I bought this.

Donna holds up a SINGING FISH mounted on a plaque. She holds it up and presses a button. The fish flops and plays music.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Isn't it something?

Donna and Nick both laugh at the absurdity.

NICK

Yeah, yeah it's something alright.

Donna is still intrigued by her new decoration.

DONNA

I could use some fishing pointers if you ever have the time. I can always pay you back in a nice, home cooked meal.

Donna looks back at her chicken, smirking.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Don't tell the girls over there but I make a mean roasted chicken.

Nick chuckles, amused.

NICK

I'll think about it. Let you know.

He hands Donna her mail before heading back to work.

EXT. POST OFFICE- DAY

Nick packs up his truck for the night.

As he finishes unloading, he looks up from his cart to see Robin arguing with BRYAN (30's) on the far side of the employee lot.

As she pushes away from him, the man angrily gets back into his beat-up pick up truck and drives away.

Nick rolls his cart back inside the building, pretending to not have seen anything.

INT. POST OFFICE MAIL CASES- DAY

Nick stands at his case preparing for the following day.

Robin walks past Nick to find her spot in the cubicle across from Nick. She hesitates but only for a brief moment.

ROBIN

Hey, Nick. Any chance I could grab a ride home from you after work? We can grab a bite to eat, too. My treat.

Nick is taken off guard by the request.

NICK

Uh, Yeah. Sure. Let me just finish packing up.

Robin walks away and Nick looks after her, perplexed.

INT. DINER- AFTERNOON

Several patrons enjoy their meals in a tiny diner filled with the sounds of sizzling food and a slow, old-timey song coming from a jukebox in the corner.

Nick looks unsettled in his seat across from Robin.

A WAITRESS drops off a slice of KEY LIME PIE to the table.

ROBIN

Now that's a sight for sore eyes.

The waitress leaves and Robin takes a bite. She smiles and pushes the plate towards Nick.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
Try some. It's pretty good.

NICK
No, thank you. Trying to lay off
sugar.

ROBIN
Oh, come on. Live a little.

Nick reluctantly takes a bite of pie. He smiles.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
Good, huh? Maybe not the best for
you, but it doesn't hurt to have a
little bit of sweetness in your
life sometimes.

Robin's phone buzzes. She looks down at the screen.

1 Missed Call from Bryan.

Robin shoves her phone in her purse and for a moment, all
that can be heard throughout the diner is the sad, slow song.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
I love this little diner. Reminds
me of the one I worked for back in
Georgia. Not a fan of the music
though...too slow.

NICK
What brought you to Tennessee?
Work?

ROBIN
Not exactly. I wanted to move to
LA. Be a dancer on the big screen
and all that jazz. But uh...I met
Brian and things kind of, you know,
changed.

NICK
Dancer, huh?

Robin nods, nostalgic.

Suddenly, she digs through her purse to grab a QUARTER.

Nick watches as she walks over to the jukebox.

After a few moments, a faster, livelier song fills the diner.

Robin begins to dance to the music. She motions for Nick to join her.

Nick looks around at the other people in the diner who are turning to watch the spectacle. He shakes his head.

Robin begins to do a couple of cheesy disco moves in his direction but Nick just smiles and laughs, his fingers tapping to the beat of the song.

Robin bows to her "audience" and a few people around her clap.

ROBIN

Thank you, thank you.

Nick smiles and takes another bite of pie.

EXT. ROBIN'S HOUSE- DUSK

Nick's car pulls up into the driveway as Robin turns the music down and begins to pack up her things.

ROBIN

I really appreciate the ride.

NICK

Anytime.

Nick glances over to the porch where Bryan sits, waiting. Robin looks over as well and she hesitates, clearly stalling.

NICK (CONT'D)

Thank you for the company. It's been a while since I've been out

ROBIN

You owe me a dance next time, old man.

NICK

I'm not that old.

ROBIN

Then stop acting like it.

Robin laughs and closes the door behind her.

Nick watches as she approaches Bryan. The two of them immediately begin to argue as Nick pulls out of the driveway

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Nick sits alone in his poorly furnished living room.

He sits distinctly to one side of the couch. On the end table next to him is a stack of open MAIL, a worn DETECTIVE NOVEL, and a small jar of JELLY BEANS.

On the end table on the opposite side of the couch sits a book of CROSSWORD PUZZLES and a bright pink pair of women's READING GLASSES.

Nick uses a spork to dig through a microwave dinner as he barely watches something on his flickering TV set.

INT. ROBIN'S KITCHEN- NIGHT

Robin washes dishes and looks absent mindedly out of her kitchen window.

BRYAN (O.S.)
Where did you put my damn tie!?

Robin puts down her dishes before going into the other room.

INT. POST OFFICE MAIL CASES- MORNING

Robin rolls a cart of mail to her case and she stops when she hears Nick humming.

She pauses and continues to listen. It's the tune from the night before.

Robin looks down to find a RED ENVELOPE on her case.

Robin opens the envelope to find a FLYER for a Farmer's Market and a note that reads: "Let's Live a Little".

INT. FARMERS MARKET- DAY

Nick and Robin walk between stalls at a farmers market.

They stop at a booth and a VENDOR offers them a sample of their food.

Nick shakes his head but Robin accepts and forces Nick to also try some.

They both stand there, happy, enjoying the food & each other.

INT. DINER- NIGHT

Robin and Nick are back in the same booth. Robin sips on some coffee while Nick attacks a slice of pie.

They're laughing, having a good ol' time.

A loud vibration can be heard and Robin glances at her phone that's been left forgotten at the end of the table.

Several Missed Calls and texts from Bryan.

Robin sighs and shoves her phone deep into her purse.

She picks up her spoon and starts to stir her coffee.

NICK
Everything okay?

ROBIN
Just peachy.

A heavy silence hangs between them.

NICK
Every couple fights, you know.

ROBIN
Of course I know that.

NICK
Mary and I would just always make sure we never went to bed mad at each other. No matter how angry we were.

More buzzing can be heard and after a moment, she pulls out her phone.

The screen lights up. Bryan is calling again.

NICK (CONT'D)
Maybe you should take that.

Robin answers the phone and slips out of the booth.

ROBIN
Hey babe...no, everything's okay with me I'm just at dinner, sorry.

Her voice trails off as she heads away from the booth.

Nick watches after her and takes another bite of pie.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Nick sits down on his couch, the TV still flickering.

He keeps glancing over at Mary's end of the couch and after a few moments, he reaches over to turn on a lamp.

Nick reaches underneath Mary's table and pulls out a piece of PAPER and a RED ENVELOPE from a stationary set.

He begins to write a letter.

EXT. LAKE- DAY

Nick sits in his lawn chair as Robin stands on the bank, casting out her line. They're both bundled up in jackets.

Nick sips something out of a thermos.

ROBIN
What is that?

NICK
Apple cider. Mary's recipe. Wanna try?

Nick walks over to the bank and hands her the thermos.

Robin takes a sip and crunches up her face.

NICK (CONT'D)
It's an acquired taste, I know.

ROBIN
Was her food at least any better?

Nick takes a long sip from the thermos.

NICK
Nope.

Robin and Nick share a laugh.

Robin pauses to check her phone. She struggles to find service.

Nick slips another red ENVELOPE into Robin's purse while she's distracted.

ROBIN
So what was she like, anyway?
Sweeter than her cider, I hope?

NICK

Very much so. But stubborn, too.
Tough. I liked that about her.

ROBIN

You miss her?

NICK

Every damn day.

A beat.

NICK (CONT'D)

What about Bryan? What's he like?

ROBIN

Ambitious. Smart. Really into
sports. (Pause) He's been a
bit...intense since he lost his job
but things have been getting a bit
easier now that we moved into a
smaller place and I can support him
until he figures some stuff out.

NICK

And what about you? Do you feel
supported?

Robin hesitates. Her expression says it all.

ROBIN

Why wouldn't I?

NICK

Sorry. It was a dumb question. I
just care about you, that's all.

Robin puts down her rod and stares into the lake.

ROBIN

Me and Bryan are fine, okay? I
don't need anyone to worry about
me.

Robin looks at her cellphone again.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

I should get going

NICK

Okay.

They start to pack up.

INT. ROBIN'S KITCHEN- NIGHT

Robin stands in her kitchen, washing dishes. Distracted.

Her purse is on the counter with the envelope facing away from her.

NICK (V.O.)

Dear Robin: Before this past week I couldn't remember the last time I had listened to music...or ate dessert..or even just had someone to talk to.

Bryan's headlights cast light through the kitchen window as he pulls in.

NICK (CONT'D)

I even forgot what it felt like to have a true friend. And I have you to thank for all of this.

She snaps back to reality and washes more dishes in the sink.

Bryan walks in and without a word heads to the refrigerator for a beer.

NICK (CONT'D)

I hope Bryan knows how lucky he is. Because even when things get hard, at the end of the day he has you. And music. And dessert. And that should be enough.

As he pops open the top he notices the letter sticking out of Robins purse. He snatches it and begins to read.

He looks up at Robin. His stare is ice cold.

NICK (CONT'D)

You should be enough.

INT. POST OFFICE- AFTERNOON

Nick loads mail into a cart in his mail case. As he pushes the mail cart past Robin's case he sees it is vacant.

There is a SUPERVISOR with a clip board making notes in the empty mail case.

NICK

Where's Robin?

SUPERVISOR

Oh hey Nick. Yeah, Robin... well
she's not going to be working here
anymore apparently. She just called
today.

NICK

I see.

Nick continues to push the mail cart but this time he is lost
in his thoughts.

EXT. POST OFFICE- AFTERNOON

Nick climbs into his truck. He hesitates only briefly before
putting his keys in his ignition.

He turns on the car and backs out of his spot.

EXT. ROBIN'S HOUSE-AFTERNOON

Nick knocks on Robin's front door. He takes notice of an old
American flag hanging on the porch.

Bryan opens the door.

BRYAN

This isn't a good time.

NICK

Robin didn't come into work. I just
wanted to make sure she was okay.

BRYAN

She's fine.

The back screen door shuts on Nick's face.

After a moment, he steps off the porch and starts walks back
towards the driveway, defeated.

Robin is loading boxes from the house into her car. Her eye
is bruised.

She looks up and is surprised to see Nick approaching.

ROBIN

Your letter was very sweet.

Robin tosses the box into the back seat of her car and goes
back inside before Nick can react.

Nick takes a moment to gather his thoughts, frozen in the driveway.

BRYAN (O.S.)
I said you shouldn't be here right now.

Nick turns around to see Bryan approaching him from behind.

NICK
Give me one good reason why I shouldn't call the cops on you.

BRYAN
We are just having some casual marriage trouble. You understand, don'tcha?

Nick takes a step towards Bryan who towers over him.

Bryan steps closer to Nick and grabs his arm.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
Now come on, get out of my driveway old man.

Nick tries to throw a punch but is thrown off balance.

Bryan uses this to push Nick to the ground and throws a punch of his own straight at Nick's nose.

ROBIN
What are you doing!?

Bryan looks up to see Robin watching from the doorway.

She looks down at Nick and runs to help him up.

BRYAN
Babe, wait.

ROBIN
Back off, Bryan! I mean it!

Bryan stands there in disbelief.

Robin looks at Nick whose nose is starting to bleed.

In a fury, Robin turns around and slaps Bryan.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
Get out of my house.

Bryan looks between Robin and Nick, bewildered and infuriated.

His eyes rest on Robin's. They hold each other's gaze.

Robin's stoic expression says it all.

Bryan starts to head to his truck.

He pulls out of the driveway and leaves while Robin helps Nick into the house.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
You okay?

Nick hobble up the steps, still unbalanced.

NICK
I'm so sorry about all this. I-

ROBIN
You have nothing to be sorry for.

Robin and Nick disappear into the house.

INT. DINER- NIGHT

Nick sits alone in the nearly empty diner eating a piece of pie.

He puts his fork down and looks out the window.

INT. POST OFFICE MAIL CASES- DAY

Nick stands at his case, sorting mail.

A new mail CARRIER unpacks a box of personal items into Robin's old cubicle.

Nick waits for them to leave before peeking around the corner to look at the items they have unpacked.

Where Robin once had left her own personal touch in each part of the cubicle, the new carrier has left everything plain except for a small blue lunch cooler.

Nick turns around and returns to his work.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Nick sorts through his own mail. There's nothing special until he sees it: a RED ENVELOPE sticking out.

He opens it up and begins to read.

ROBIN (V.O.)

Dear Nick: I wanted to let you know
I'm okay and that I'm sorry for not
saying goodbye. I've never been
good at those.

Nick sits on the couch, eyes locked on the letter.

EXT. LAKE - EARLY MORNING

The two familiar lawn chairs are seated next to one another on the bank, both completely empty.

ROBIN (V.O.)

I just needed to start over...and I
have you to thank for this new
beginning.

Turns out, Nick and Donna are yards away, fishing on the dock.

ROBIN (V.O.)

I'll never forget you and the time
we together. Always, Robin.

They're laughing, enjoying each other's company.

Nick puts his arm around Donna as we...

CUT TO BLACK