

A LETTER TO DEREK

A short monologue for the stage
by Michael Alberstadt

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CHARACTER: JOHN

A fit, bespectacled lad (16) in a disheveled dress shirt and khakis.

AT RISE:

The actor can be on a stool or standing on a bare stage. For added effect, I suggest positioning a beaver mascot outfit in a chair nearby and having a football as a prop. These are not necessary, but will heighten the impact of the story.

FADE IN:

JOHN

You walked into third period English that first day like your shit was the entree at lunch. The pretty people were warm for your form. The nerds feigned disinterest, but they knew a bad-ass when they saw one.

God, I could have built a house on your shoulders. A Frank Lloyd Wright prairie-style: BOOM! Right there.

But I was nobody.

And that was fine with me. I saw you in class and in the lunchroom. Sometimes, after school, I would sit in the stands and watch you practice. And at the football games? What a grade-A stud – you had total command of the gridiron. Great arm, quick on your feet. I was – I was smitten.

As the school mascot, I kept the fans energized. I performed gymnastics, teased the pompom girls – I can imagine you rolling your eyes. But it was tough, especially dressed as a beaver of all things. I like to think I fired up the fans and maybe, inspired the team. No, really.

I did things I would never do. That costume was my armor. It let me totally become someone else.

I watched you from where I changed in the locker room. You were always just filthy, like you brought the field in with you. Grass on your legs, dirt on your face.

And all that protection you removed: helmet, pads, pants... jock. I watched you in the shower. The lather running down your back, between your... remember you asked once why I never showered with the team? I mean, with you in there? No way in hell.

JOHN

Traveling with the team was an education in young jock culture. I kept to myself but your asshole teammates still razed me hard. You didn't – but you never defended me either. I think they call that plausible deniability.

And then there was that trip when the team bus broke down – in Mecosta, remember? We had to stay overnight in that fleabag motel? Coach divided us into quads, and no one wanted to sleep with "The Beaver." You volunteered outta the blue. Just – volunteered. I couldn't imagine why.

Butch and Moose were big-ass linebackers so you gave them the big-ass bed. We got the "cozy" pullout sofa. It was so small that we couldn't really get away from each other and, well... we didn't.

Thank God, they snored.

You had your butts handed to you by Brother Rice in the play-offs so, post-season arrived. The other guys ignored me. I thought – well, that stuff we did – it musta been a fluke.

Then one night you tapped on my second floor window. You had climbed the drain pipe but did I wonder why you were hanging there? Hell, no – you were THERE, I let you in. And you didn't say anything. Not a word. You just – led me to my bed and, and we just...

I started leaving the window unlocked. You'd slip in and, and strip off your clothes and climb into my bed and we'd – dear God, would we. And in those moments, you were tender and giving and funny – a Derek nobody saw but me.

But we never spoke in school, or went on a date, or shared a banana split. I met Vanessa in Spanish Club and we started... she wanted to date someone, so...

You had every pair of boobs in school chasing you, of course. "Big football stud plays the field." Recruiters want manly men with manly exploits – I get that, I'm not an idiot. But when I saw you banging that cougar in your Wrangler after the homecoming game? Look, timing and influence are everything and I know you were desperate for that scholarship so... I just, it hurt. It really hurt. I didn't know where we stood.

At least, until that stupid student council "Secret Santa" thing: where someone can send a secret gift to someone else? God, what were you thinking?

A box of rubbers? Trojan Magnums – ribbed, no less.

JOHN

Then someone started a rumor that it was the football team "givin' it to the Beaver." Well, they were almost right.

But it wasn't flowers or a night at the multiplex. It was condoms when I wanted words. When we were alone, you kissed me and gave yourself to me completely, and that seemed like enough.

Then, Valentine's Day. You sat behind me in algebra that day, remember? Student council did that thing where you sent your valentine a rose. So I sent one – red, your favorite.

You sat so close behind me. If I leaned back in my chair, and you leaned forward, I could feel the safe, comforting heat of your body. You said you needed a pencil, so I turned to give you one and – and you smiled at me, and I knew at that moment that you loved me. My heart just leapt.

I heard the classroom door open and you looked past me. I thought the roses were being delivered but – but your smile vanished. I saw your game face.

You stood suddenly and ran. Right at – some guy in the doorway. Then I heard the gunshots.

(John picks up the football)

JOHN

They said you were dead before you hit the floor. But your momentum knocked him over. It was enough time for others to jump on him.

He would have killed dozens. I was in the front row and, and you ran right at him – no pads, no helmet, no protection – who does that?! Who runs at a shooter without... anything?

So today – the day of your memorial service – I wanted to write it all down. Before it fades. Before it's taken away from me.

Vanessa has been great – very high school girlfriend. Very empathetic, though she didn't seem to like you very much. She thought you were too full of yourself. She's an idiot.

She gave this football to me out of the blue. Your mom found it in your closet, sitting alone on a shelf, and knew she'd get it to me.

You wrote a note on the damn thing, a note to me! "JOHN: A GAME BALL FOR THE BEAVER. DEREK, #5." And then you put an "XO" under it? Were you ever going to give it to me – or couldn't you get past the manly man, just-got-the-football-scholarship stud image?

You saved my life...

JOHN

Vanessa said I should wear a suit because that's what you wear when you memorialize a hero.

(John climbs into the mascot outfit)

I can't do it.

I can't be that shattered kid, sobbing in his chair, because of the horror of it all – that kid who ends up on the evening news.

I need the armor. I need to be that nobody on the sidelines, embracing the crowd, showing them that we survived. That we will go on with Derek in our memory. Our leader, our quarterback. Our Savior.

Our Derek.

I need my armor. So when I cry for MY Derek, nobody will know.

(John puts on the mascot head)

FADE OUT: