

"A Life Once Lived"

By

Christopher Woodcock

Writer's Note: The difference in the Formal/Informal way of the main characters speaking is an intentional choice, with Albert being more Informal, and the younger man speaking in a much more formal way, with little to no contractions in his speech pattern.

FADE IN:

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

Two men sit on wooden benches at a chess table in an empty public park, engaged in a sombre game. Neither one speaks at first, they just mull over their next moves. The first man is Albert, an elderly gentleman in his late eighties wearing plain, well-worn clothes, while the other is an unnamed younger man, appearing to be in his mid-thirties, wearing a business suit with the jacket folded neatly on top of his briefcase, which sits next to him on the bench.

The chess board & benches look to have been erected in the park for public games, and the only sounds that can be heard are the whistle of wind through the trees & leaves, and the double-faced chess clock ticking rhythmically as their game plays out. Each time they make a move they press a button on their side of the clock, stopping it with a heavy clunking sound as the hands come to a standstill.

Albert places his fingers on a White piece and hesitates, his eyes sweeping over the board as he contemplates his next move. He moves the piece to capture one of the younger man's Black pieces.

YOUNG MAN

(Eyebrow raised)

You play an interesting game, Albert. You always do.

The young man reaches down without hesitation and captures one of Albert's White pieces in practiced retaliation, before looking up with a small yet kindly smile on his face.

YOUNG MAN

I enjoy interesting games. It has been so long since anyone put up this much of a struggle.

Albert lets out a short chuckle while looking over the board at his opponent. He strokes his chin before moving one of his pieces into an empty space on the board.

ALBERT

A struggle? Is that what it is?

YOUNG MAN
A fight, perhaps? Call it what you will.

ALBERT
(a small sigh, but smiling)
How about just a simple game? Between... old friends?

YOUNG MAN
(smiling broadly)
I like the sound of that! Not many people call me "friend" these days. Not in my line of business, anyway.

The young man looks down at the board, reaches out, and places his fingers upon a piece. He contemplates for a moment before looking back up to Albert.

YOUNG MAN
Do you remember when we first met? We played Chess then, didn't we?

ALBERT
That we did. It was a nail-biter of a game, and no mistake.

YOUNG MAN
Yes, yes it was. I almost had you, yet you hung in there! Turned it right around on me and snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, as it were.

The young man lifts his piece and captures the one Albert moved a short time earlier. Without missing a beat Albert strikes back and captures that piece in return.

YOUNG MAN
(nodding at the move)
I have come to enjoy these games, my friend. To appreciate our "friendly competition". I will miss them.

ALBERT
Miss them? It's not like you to be getting all sentimental. Old age finally catching up to you, ay?

YOUNG MAN
(laughs softly yet jovially)
You could say that my old friend, you could say that. But yes, I will miss them.

The young man moves his Black Queen into line with the Albert's White King.

YOUNG MAN
Check. And you?

Both a statement and a question. Albert moves his King behind one of his remaining Pawns so that its protected. The young man moves a piece so that the White King is once again in Check.

ALBERT

I don't think I will, you know? Miss these games, I mean. I led a full life; surrounded by my family, good friends, and I've made my peace with the world.

INSERT FLASHBACK OF ALBERT'S HAPPY MEMORIES BEFORE THE YOUNG MAN'S REACTION.

YOUNG MAN

You "did" live a full life, Albert. A good, long, happy life. It was a privilege to have shared this final game, and an honour to have met you.

With quiet resignation, Albert moves his remaining Pawn, giving the young man no further opposition on-route to his King. He smiles at the young man, looking saddened, yet with no signs of regret in his eyes. The young man closes his own eyes, takes a deep breath, and when he releases it the sound of the wind and everything else around them suddenly & sharply cuts off into absolute silence.

YOUNG MAN

(opens his eyes, and with a slight reverberation in his voice)
Checkmate... Albert Wood.

The young man presses the middle button on the clock to signify the end of the game; the sound echoing like a thunderclap all around them as he reaches across the board and gently knocks over the White King, and the ever-present ticking of the clock finally comes to an end. They both stand and exchange a firm lingering handshake.

Albert picks up his coat from the bench beside him and slips it on, the young man doing the same with his suit-jacket before lifting his briefcase onto the Chess table and opening it up.

From the briefcase he withdraws a plain white envelope with the words ALBERT. P. WOOD in Gothic-script on the front, and a black-wax seal on the back with the impression of an empty hourglass. He holds it out to Albert, who takes it with a slightly trembling hand. As they both have their hands on the envelope, Albert visibly begins to fade, along with the envelope, tears running from the corners of his age-lined eyes.

ALBERT

(voice starting to crack as he disappears)
She's there, right? Waiting for me? Like you promised?

YOUNG MAN

(his voice compassionate & reassuring)
Yes Albert, she is. Elsie is waiting for you, and you must not keep her. You know she hates to be kept waiting.

Albert and the envelope completely fade away, tears of relief rolling down his cheeks, leaving the young man with his hand outstretched holding nothing but air. He pulls his hand back and lets out a deep sighing breath as he closes his briefcase, the sound of the world returning. He looks towards the darkening sky, a slight look of sorrow on his face.

ZOOM TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

THE SHOT ZOOMS OUT FROM THE YOUNG MAN IN THE PARK AS THE SKY DARKENS, UP THROUGH THE DARK CLOUDS AND THROUGH THE CLOSING BLUE EYES OF ALBERT WOOD, FALLING INTO HIS FINAL REST IN A STERILE LOOKING NURSING HOME BEDROOM.

Around Albert's bedside stands Doctor Hill and a Nurse, the Heart Monitor displaying a flat green line. Doctor Hill, finishing chest-compressions, checks Albert's pulse and shakes his head in resignation, used to seeing such things on a regular basis. The nurse holds her clipboard & pen up as Doctor Hill confirms the event.

DOCTOR HILL

Time of death, 2PM June the 5th 2019; heart failure.

Doctor Hill picks up the bedside phone, placing a call to the orderly station.

DOCTOR HILL

Doctor Hill here. Yes, we're going to need a removal from room seven, and...

Just as Doctor Hill is about to continue, he looks from Albert to see the same young man who was in the park, stood on the opposite side of Albert's bed with his hand on the dead man's shoulder. He could have sworn nobody else was present besides the nurse.

DOCTOR HILL

(in a practiced professional voice)
Oh, I'm terribly sorry, I didn't see you there.
Are you Albert's... Son?

YOUNG MAN

No. Albert never had any children, sadly. Just a friend. A very... old friend. You could say that I was all he had left.

DOCTOR HILL

(with the reassuring smile of a practiced professional)
I see. I'm sure he appreciated you being here with him at the end. Would you like some time alone with him before we...?

YOUNG MAN

(with a hint of sadness in his voice)
No, thank you doctor. We already said our goodbyes. Thank you for making him comfortable in

his final days. His truly was... a very full life
once lived.

Doctor Hill nods, a little puzzled at the whole exchange, and the young man's choice of words. He and the nurse then leave the room, turning right and disappearing down the corridor. The young man follows a few moments after; closing the door and walking in the opposite direction, his footsteps echoing in the corridor before they fade away into silence.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END