

SEVEN WORDS THAT SAVED MY LIFE

Written by

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INT. GREEN ROOM-LIKE AREA- DAY

VOICE FROM THE DARKNESS
Ahh... the fleeting beauty of
youth.

From a black screen we hear voices, laughing and
introductions.

VOICE 1
Thank you so much for taking some
time to talk to us before you go
out there.

VOICE 2
Yeah man no problem... I've got a
few minutes. So this is for...?

VOICE 1
Rock and Roll Magazine. It's for
our top ten coolest Rock stars.

FADE IN:

We see ANDREW CLARK 48, an aging rock star with shoulder
length dark hair with traces of grey. He has a pronounced
scar over his right eye. His beard is weeks old and dressed
in denim jeans fitting loosely.

The interviewer sits off camera as Andrew takes a seat,
people milling about adjusting cameras and fitting him with a
microphone. The pretty audio girl adjusts his lapel mic and
walks off.

ANDREW
Thank you darlin. (to
interviewer)Top ten coolest...?

She walks off, enamoured with his whole presence.

INTERVIEWER
Right, Rock stars. So... how does
it feel to be home?

Andrew seems to be a bit annoyed by the whole "top ten
coolest" thing.

ANDREW
Good... weird. It's been a very
long while.

INTERVIEWER

Have you been back here since you graduated?

ANDREW

I can't believe how long ago this was... and to tell you the truth I haven't really thought about it much. But I guess that's what you do when they ask you to do this... talk to the graduating class... you end up reliving your high school memories all over.

INTERVIEWER

Nervous?

ANDREW

No, but you only have a short time up there so... you know, you wanna make it count.

INTERVIEWER

So...? What do you want to say?

Andrew pauses as he smiles at the interviewer.

ANDREW

Seven words saved my life.

INTERVIEWER

(intrigued)Really? What were they?

Andrew settles back in his chair like he's an elder passing on stories around a campfire. He fingers the ice in a glass of water.

ANDREW

It was 1986.

MAIN TITLE SEQUENCE

Classic 80's metal song plays. We see a teenager's room, littered with Metallica posters. Ride the Lightning, Master of Puppets, and magazine clippings of Cliff Burton rocking out on bass. CAMERA passes by dozens of vinyl albums. Anthrax's Among the Living, Iron Maiden's Live After Death, Dio's Holy Diver etc. We see an old beaten up bass and amplifier with cords and effects pedals.

EXT. CHICAGO SUBURB CITY STREETS- MORNING

Titles: Northbrook Illinois- Spring 1986

We follow ANDREW, a lone teenage boy, 17- dressed in jeans and a denim jacket covered with drawings and patches... metallica, Megadeth, Iron Maiden.

He opens the door to a record store. A hole in the wall mom and pop shop tucked away between two other tiny stores.

The store is empty with the exception of Andrew and another teen.(JOE, 17, RUGGED BUILD, NATIVE HERITAGE) He is leafing through some old Black Sabbath albums. Andrew's hair is past his shoulders. Andrew is quiet as he leafs through the racks of vinyl. He speaks quietly.

ANDREW

Anything new this week?

The dude (KYLE) behind the counter looks around to see if someone said something. He's around 250 pounds, bad skin, wearing a Slayer concert shirt. Late 20's.

KYLE

What's that?

ANDREW

Anything new?

Kyle looks at a list on a clip board that's laying on the glass counter/display in front of him. He motions to a rack to his right.

KYLE

Yeah we got some pre-release copies of Poison.

Andrew takes a copy of "Look what the Cat Dragged In" and surveys the cover. The four guys made up to look like women stare blankly back at him.

ANDREW

That's weird.

The other guy (JOE)snickers as he pulls out an album and looks at it. KYLE glances over at him.

JOE

He's not wrong.

KYLE

I just sell the stuff man, I don't know what to tell you.

ANDREW

Is it any good? What's it sound like?

Kyle seems annoyed by his questions.

KYLE

I haven't heard it. Brad calls it "glam metal". The chicks seem into it.

ANDREW

(confused) Girls like them and they look like girls? That's confusing.

KYLE

(absently) Like I said man... I just sell it.

Andrew looks at the back cover, debating whether he wants to waste money on something like this.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Oh, we did finally get the new Metallica. Just a few copies.

Kyle hands him a copy and Andrew stands there with one in each hand, surveying both.

OLD ANDREW (V.O.)

There are moments in your life that when you look back at them you realize how a seemingly insignificant choice could lead you down a very different path.

Andrew puts the Poison album back in the rack and lays the Metallica album on the counter.

ANDREW

I'll go with the Metallica one.

KYLE

Wonderful. Eleven bucks.

Andrew empties his pockets with a mix of bills and change onto the counter. The change clangs on the glass and some roll onto the floor. Kyle counts the bills and doesn't look at Andrew.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Keep the coins.

Andrew gathers up the coins and stuffs the album into his backpack between two binders and quickly heads out the door.

EXT. NORTHBROOK STREETS- MORNING

Chilled, Misty and cool, Andrew pulls his hood up over his head.

INT. GLENBROOK NORTH HIGH SCHOOL - DAY
TITLE: Glenbrook North High School

Andrew weaves in and out of a crowded hallway. To the left, the jocks all dressed in game jerseys. Metal heads, gear heads. The nerds and rappers, all doing their own thing, all oblivious to their surroundings.

OLDER ANDREW (V.O.)
You don't notice it while you're there but there is an absolute absurdity to high school. So many different personalities, all thrown together. Hormones raging... brains still developing. It's no wonder high school can be the worst, most confusing and complicated years of your life.

Andrew is bumped into hard by a guy in a football jersey sending him sideways hitting into the lockers to his right. He doesn't look back and keeps walking.

OLDER ANDREW (V.O.)
I fucking hated high school.

INT. GROUP OF LOCKERS- DAY

Andrew approaches a group a lockers where we meet PAM. (heavy set girl, shoulder length brown hair, bangs teased into a weird rats nest on her forehead).

ANDREW
Hey Pam... How was your weekend?

Andrew seems very interested in what she has to say. She smiles when she sees Andrew in a friendly but stand-offish sort of way.

PAM
Hey Andrew. Yeah it was good.

ANDREW
Did you guys end up doing anything?

Pam is searching for a way to hide the fact that they did something fun but didn't invite him.

PAM
Umm... no not really.

As she is talking she is picked up from behind by her boyfriend STEVE. (Tall, black, athletic and loud).

STEVE
BABY, BABY!

He spins her around and puts her down. She's a bit embarrassed by this.

ANDREW
Hey Steve. Good weekend?

Steve glances at him and ignores the question.

STEVE
(To Pam) C'mon let's get going.

The bell sounds and people start shuffling things into their lockers and quickly start heading to their classes. Andrew shifts awkwardly and throws his bag into his locker and gives Pam a half-smile and walks down the hall.

STEVE (CONT'D)
What a fuckin weirdo. Why do you keep inviting him to hang out with us?

PAM
He's not that bad... he's just quiet.

STEVE
No... he's fuckin weird.

PAM
C'mon... give him a break. He's going through a lot.

STEVE
He should find his own friends.

Pam closes her locker and they rush down the hall as students dart into classrooms.

EXT. PARKING AREA OUTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL- AFTERNOON

The bell rings and hundreds of students flood out of the school doors and people file onto buses or into cars. Andrew walks home.

He pulls a walkman out of his backpack puts on the headphones with the orange foam things pushing his hair out of his face like a headband. He presses play on the cassette and the Ozzy Osborne song blares into his ears.

Walking along the side walk he sees Steven's car with Pam in the passenger seat fly by. They're shouting and messing around blasting RUN DMC. His eyes meet with Pam's and he looks away, turns his music up even more and keeps walking.

EXT. ANDREW'S STREET- AFTERNOON

Andrew is walking at a high pace, he's angry. As he walks up the driveway he sees his father PETER (35 kind of thin and scrawny) is mowing the lawn. Seeing Andrew he shuts off the lawnmower.

PETER

Hey bud, how was school?

Andrew barely breaks stride and doesn't even look up.

ANDREW

School is school.

He opens the front door and slams it behind him. Peter gives a sigh and turns back to the lawnmower.

PETER

Great talk.

Peter's neighbour Marcy (35, dark skinned, ambiguous ethnicity)

MARCY

Nice job Pete. I can't believe you asked him how school was.

PETE

Mistake?

MARCY

Big time rookie mistake.

PETE

Shit.

MARCY

Don't worry about it. He's going to be mad anyways. It's their default setting at this age.

PETE
Mara was always the one who was
better at this.

MARCY
Naturally.

There is an awkward pause as she's not sure what to say.

PETE
Should I go in and talk to him?

Marcy looks at him with a look of sympathy as she walks back to her yard.

MARCY
(smiling) Not unless you want to
make things worse.

Pete shakes his head and pulls the cord on the lawnmower and keeps mowing.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM- AFTERNOON

Andrew's room is a disaster. He throws his backpack on the bed and pulls out the new album. Setting it on the bed he removes his jacket. He doesn't look well... pale and clammy, feverish.

He pulls the cellophane off and gingerly pulls the vinyl out of it's sleeve by the edges. He pulls the Whitesnake album off the turntable (an old Band and Olufsen) and gently places it in its place. Lifting the needle, it starts turning and lowers the needle onto the record. Static fills the speakers.

The acoustic guitar sounds reverberate from the speakers almost like a mexican mariachi band.

ANDREW (V.O.)
I remember thinking "what the hell
is this?" Maybe I should have
gotten the Poison album.

Suddenly the sonic assault begins. Andrew is hypnotized.

ANDREW (V.O.)
I sat there listening to the album
that changed the direction of my
musical tastes and by osmosis the
trajectory of my life. Little did I
know just where it would bring
me... or how soon.

EXT. LARGE OPEN FIELD- NIGHT

In a large open field with a few trees and rocks in the middle we see a large gathering of teens. A fire near the middle, everyone is drinking. One smaller group has an acoustic guitar playing some old classic rock song while drunken revelry goes on around them.

Steven and Pam arrive and greet ERIC (Tall, thin, wearing jeans and a Polo shirt with the collar turned up) and JAMIE (shorter red-headed guy, athletic build) They welcome Pam and Steven and hand them drinks.

INT. ANDREW'S HOUSE- NIGHT

Peter sits alone at the kitchen table, barely visible from the light over the kitchen sink. He's drinking coffee and seems lost in thought. Andrew enters, stopping short and surprised when he sees his father sitting alone in the dark.

ANDREW

Oh... hey.

Outside the open window you can see the faint light from the fire in the field behind their house. Andrew turns the light on to the kitchen and rifles through the cabinet.

PETER

You feel ok? You don't look so good.

ANDREW

I'm fine. Just a sore throat. Where is the Tylenol?

PETER

It's in there.

Andrew finds the bottle and puts two pills in his mouth and tries to swallow some water with great difficulty.

ANDREW

I'm going out for a while.

PETER

Can we talk for a minute first.

Andrew stops in the doorway, visibly annoyed.

ANDREW

Why?

PETER

Nothing SPECIFIC. I just feel like we don't even talk anymore. What's going on in your life?

ANDREW

Nothing... I gotta go. My friends are waiting for me.

PETER looks at him, knowing he's lying, yet doesn't know what to say.

PETER

I'm not your enemy Andrew.

ANDREW

Then stop acting like one.

Andrew walks out the door without turning back.

EXT. LARGE OPEN FIELD- NIGHT

Andrew walks up the path towards the field, visibly upset and not feeling well. He reaches the rocks and scans the people that are there. No one looks at him. Seeing Pam he walks over to their group.

ANDREW

Hey guys.

They look at him but don't respond. Pam feels awkward again,

PAM

Hi Andrew.

She notices he looks all sweaty.

PAM (CONT'D)

You feeling ok?

ANDREW

Yeah... just a sore throat I think.

Some arguing with a couple of other guys turns into and all out fist fight. Everyone jumps up and cheers, Andrew stays sitting by the rocks. The fight breaks up and Steven, Jamie and Eric walk back to where Pam and Andrew are.

STEVEN

C'mon Pam, we're gonna hit that party at Greg's house.

PAM
Ohh... (turning to Andrew) You up for
a party at...

STEVEN
(interrupting) We don't have room
for him.

Andrew's eyes shift towards the ground.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Let's go.

Pam feels bad for Andrew but doesn't force the issue.

PAM
(to Andrew) I'll see you around.

ANDREW
Yeah.. ok. I should probably get
some rest anyway.

They all take off quickly down the path away from the Rocks.
Andrew sits for a few seconds looking around, slowly
realizing he's alone. He slowly gets up and walks back
towards his house, his dark silhouette disappears into the
night.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM- NIGHT

Andrew is startled awake, sitting up suddenly. Confused,
sweating and panic stricken. Turning the night stand light on
he reaches for the glass of water. His hands are weak and
shaking. He takes a sip of water, chokes and spits it out.
Holding his throat he coughs painfully.

Trying to calm down he closes his eyes and breathes slowly.
Opening his eyes he sees a spider on the wall behind his
dresser. The one spider multiplies and pour out like water
from behind the dresser onto the floor and ceiling and start
crawling up the bed towards him and onto his legs and arms.
He freaks out.

Peter flings the door open, turning on the light and sees
Andrew flailing on his bed. Rushing to his bed he grabs
Andrew by the arms. Andrew stares at him. Wide-eyed he seems
to look right through him.

EXT. PETER'S CAR- NIGHT

Andrew is in the back of Peter's car as they drive quickly
down the road.

OLD ANDREW (V.O.)

It felt like a fevered dream.
 Racing to that hospital it was like
 all of a sudden the fever unlocked
 a memory buried deep in my
 subconscious. I was an infant. I
 remembered that feeling of cool air
 rushing over my sweat soaked hot
 skin. The way that it cooled me... it
 was comfortable. I was... safe.

Cut scenes from Andrew as a teen in the back of his father's Oldsmobile rushing to the hospital back to him as an infant in the back of his parents' car. Street lights glow and pass over him over and over. His mother and father are in the front seat.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM- NIGHT

Peter carries Andrew into the ER. Nurses and doctors rush over to take him from his arms. He is limp and semiconscious. Total chaos.

They bring him into a small room and sit him down while the doctors examine him. Andrew is semi-sitting on a bed, a nurse trying to hold him in a sitting position. The doctor tips Andrew's head back to look in his throat while the nurse inserts an IV in the back of his hand and an oxygen sensor on his finger. Seeing his throat he turns to Peter.

DOC

How long has he been sick?

PETER

I- I'm not sure. He just mentioned it this afternoon.

DOC

He's got what looks like a large abscess on his tonsils and it's blocking the back of his throat. And from the looks of his oxygen levels he's starting to not get enough air.

Peter is shocked.

PETER

Ok- umm I mean.. What do we do?

DOC

We're going to admit him and get him on some pretty strong antibiotics... which will address the infection.

PETER

Ok...

DOC

But- the immediate issue of the abscess... we are going to have to open it up so he can swallow and breathe better.

PETER

Open it? What does that mean?

Andrew is slumping over now. The doctor turns to an orderly.

DOC

Help hold him up.

The orderly grabs one side of Andrew and a nurse has the other side. Another nurse holds his head which has gone limp and the doctor takes a scalpel from a tray of stainless tools. Peter is freaking out now.

DOC (CONT'D)

(to the orderly) Hold him steady.

The doctor holds Andrew's mouth open with one hand and with the other makes a small incision in the abscess with the scalpel. Andrew gags and spits a small amount of puss and blood out. He comes to a bit.

ANDREW

What the fuck!

The doctor takes what looks like tweezers from the tray.

DOC

Listen to me Andrew, I am going to open up that abscess in your throat so you are going to want to spit out anything you can.

Andrew is flailing now.

DOC (CONT'D)

Dad... come help hold him!

Peter tentatively moves towards Andrew wrapping his arms around him and squeezing.

The doctor inserts a plastic device in Andrew's mouth so he can't close it and inserts the tweezers in the slit in the abscess and pulls it open. Instantly a huge glob of yellowish/green puss mixed with blood is expelled along with the plastic piece.

The doctor backs up and the nurses let go as Andrew begins to breathe more freely and has a look of relief. The crisis is over.

DOC (CONT'D)

Let's start him on a drip of 500 mg of Cephalexin. And get him some rinse so he can gargle all that out of his mouth.

The doctor motions for Peter to follow him out of the room and into the hallway.

DOC

He's going to be in here for at least a week... probably 10 days.

PETER

A week?

Peter looks at his son on the hospital bed rinsing and spitting out the remains into a plastic bucket.

DOC

We need to make sure we hammer this thing with some very strong antibiotics. We can't afford to let it get into his bloodstream. I don't want sepsis setting in.

Peter nods in agreement. The whole thing has left Peter in shock.

DOC (CONT'D)

Dad...

The doctor puts his hand on Peter's shoulder.

DOC (CONT'D)

You both did great. He's going to be ok.

Andrew is now laying on his side in the bed, the nurse laying a cold compress on his head.

PETER

Let's hope so.

The drugs are taking effect. Andrew's starts to relax and fall asleep. His eyes are glassy but clearer as they close and it goes dark.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM- NIGHT

Andrew's room is dark except for a dim light above his bed. He groggily wakes from sleep, confused as to his surroundings. Letting out a groan, he lifts his hand to his view. It's wet, covered in blood and the size of a softball. He tries to call the nurse but comes out as a faint inaudible gurgle. He tries again.

ANDREW
(louder) Hello?

His hand searches the bed which is also soaked. He finds a button attached to a long cord. Pushing it he can hear a beeping alarm coming from out in the hall. Eventually a nurse enters.

NURSE
Well, Mr. Clark. You are awake.

ANDREW
My hand hurts... (his voice is a whisper) and I think the bed is wet.

She walks over and turns the light up all the way above the bed revealing that the bed is soaked with blood and IV fluid.

NURSE
Oh my!

Andrew's hand is so swollen it has pushed the I.V. out. She leans out the door calling the on call doctor who comes in quickly.

DOC
Yup... no worries dear. This happens some times.

She places some gauze around his hand and applies some pressure and tapes it in place and applies an ice pack.

DOC (CONT'D)
The antibiotics are pretty strong and can irritate the tissue around the I.V. We will just have to move it to the other hand.

The nurse starts cleaning up the sheets and prepping his other hand for the I.V.

NURSE

(To Andrew) Guess that just means
you are sensitive, right?

Andrew manages a slight smile and slips back into sleep.

INT. CHICAGO HOSPITAL RECOVERY FLOOR- MORNING

TITLES: 5 Days later

Peter comes off the elevator and through the heavy double doors and down the hall towards the nurses station. There are several gathered exchanging information at the changing of shifts. Peter approaches carrying a large backpack.

NURSE

Hello Peter!

PETER

Hi there... How is he doing?

NURSE

About the same... he looks a lot
better.

PETER

Any visitors?

NURSE

No... I'm afraid not.

Peter looks discouraged.

PETER

Ok.

He walks to Andrew's room and hesitates as he gathers himself.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM- MORNING

Peter enters Andrew's room. It's bright with morning sunlight and Andrew is sitting in a large chair by the window. His arms have several bandages. There is a tray of breakfast food that hasn't been touched on a table by the bed. Andrew looks better, color has returned to his skin.

PETER

Hey sport.

Andrew doesn't turn but is vacantly staring at the uneventful scenery out on the downtown Chicago streets.

PETER (CONT'D)
I stopped by the school and got
some of the work you've been
missing.

Peter is trying his best to keep a happy attitude even though Andrew isn't responding to anything.

PETER (CONT'D)
All your teachers said to tell you
they hope you come back soon.

After a few uncomfortable moments Peter sits on Andrew's bed.

PETER (CONT'D)
So- your doctor said that you can
come home tomorrow. You'll have to
continue some oral antibiotics but
he's pretty happy with your
progress.

No reaction.

PETER (CONT'D)
Look... I know you're upset that none
of your friends came to visit.
Maybe they just couldn't get here...
it's not the easiest place to get
to unless you have a car.

ANDREW
I don't care.

PETER
Ok... I'm just saying

ANDREW
Just stop.

PETER
(Softlly) Ok.

Peter looks around the room, unsure of what to say or do.

PETER (CONT'D)
Well... I guess I'll head to work
then. Try to get outside if you
can... it's beautiful out.

He opens the door timidly.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'll see you tomorrow.

Andrew briefly takes his gaze off the window and watches the door close and then back to the window. He has the blank eyes of someone that has already checked out.

OLDER ANDREW (V.O.)

If it's true what they say about
when things are always darkest...
then this was almost dawn. Cuz I
couldn't see two fucking inches in
front of my face.

FADE OUT

EXT. ANDREW'S HOUSE- MORNING

Peter's car pulls into the driveway of their home. Andrew gets out and goes right in to the house. Peter sits behind the wheel for a second resting his head on the steering wheel. He gets out and sees Marcy at her window who gives him a reassuring smile. He gives a half hearted smile and eye roll as he walks up the walkway to the house.

INT. ANDREW'S ROOM- MORNING

Andrew enters his room and tosses his backpack onto the floor amongst all the piles and clothes. In one fluid motion he flings the curtain across the window to block out the sun and falls to the bed.

A couple of seconds pass and he hears a knock at his door. Peter opens the door and comes in holding an old beat up Fender electric bass. It is worn and dusty. Peter opens the curtain letting the light back in.

PETER

Hey...

ANDREW

What.

Andrew sits up and sees the bass in Peter's hand. His eyes seem to light up a bit.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

What's that?

PETER

This... is my old bass. It's like the one John Paul Jones played in Zeppelin.

Andrew looks at it with interest.

PETER (CONT'D)

I thought since you're stuck here for a while that maybe you'd like to try your hand at it.

ANDREW

You used to play?

PETER

I did... a lifetime ago.

ANDREW

Like, in a band?

PETER

Yes, like a band.

Peter hands him the bass and Andrew awkwardly holds it unsure what to do with it. Peter sets it on his lap so it's the right way.

PETER

Here... like this. Top string is the "E" string, next one is "A"... "D" and "G". Top string is the lowest sound... the further you move your left hand up the fret board the higher the pitch.

Andrew runs his hand along the strings.

PETER

Here... you have to pluck the string with your right hand.

He plucks the string for Andrew and moves his left hand up the fret board, changing the sound. Andrew's eyes light up again... like he's finally understood something. He clunkily makes noises with it.

ANDREW

Don't you use a pick?

Peter looks at him intensely but obviously kidding.

PETER

I will punch you in the mouth... you
DON'T use a pick on a bass.

Andrew side eyes his dad... realizing he's kidding. Peter hands Andrew a couple of what look like music sheet books.

PETER

I noticed you liked that band
Metallica... so I picked up some
tablature books for you.

Andrew takes them and looks through them, seeing the music sheets... notes that are like foreign symbols in some ancient language.

ANDREW

How do you read this? I don't know
what all that stuff means.

Taking the "Master Of Puppets" book Peter opens it to the first song. He follows the music notes on the lines and then down to the tablature below

PETER

THESE are the musical notes... but
THESE below are the tablature. Four
lines for four strings on your
bass. Imagine you lay your bass
down and look at it. E, A, D, G...
Each number is the number fret on
the fret board.

He takes the bass from Andrew and plays "Smoke on the Water." Andrew's eyes are fixed on the bass and the movements.

PETER (CONT'D)

Or... Iron Man by Sabbath?

He plucks the notes to Iron Man and hands it back to Andrew. He hits some right notes and messes up a bit. Peter watches him start to get it. There is a little light in Andrew's eyes. Peter stands up and starts walking away.

PETER (CONT'D)

Give it a try. Listen to the album
and follow along with the
numbers... you'll start to see it
makes sense. It's hard to hear
because it's meant to be plugged
into an amplifier... but you can
still feel the notes when they're
right.

Andrew leafs through the booklets and starts plunking away. He moves over to the edge of his bed closest to the stereo and starts playing "Ride The Lightning" and following it in the booklet.

OLDER ANDREW (V.O.)

I can still remember the way those first bass strings felt in my hands. The way the smell of metal lingered on your finger tips. The way that they felt after those first few days of playing before the callouses formed. Time seemed to disappear... figuring out every part of the song until you could play it perfectly from beginning to end- and then move on to another one, and another. It was like stepping into a new world... one where I wasn't a loser. I was Cliff Burton, thrashing on stage... and I was hooked.