

THE SANDY PATH

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GENRE: Drama

LOGLINE:

Broken promises and life choices are the result when the young man lands on his back on the sandy path.

SYNOPSIS:

Here it goes.

I was fourteen, working in a restaurant as a help waiting tables and working behind the bar to serve. The business was run by two men. Michel, who always did the mornings. And Patrick, who always started late and did the nights. I usually worked with Pat, he was more fun and like a laugh and a beer. One late night on a Friday we cleaned and closed up and left for his usual place to have a 'last' drink and gamble some money on cards or dice with the owner of a club in our town. It was still early for that place so Pat could gamble his way into the later hours and I sat bored at the bar with my soda.

In came a familiar face, from the karate club where my two year older brother Sam and I were placed by my parents, whom said that it would be better to lose our energy there, instead of fighting at home all the time. Jef, about the age of my brother, entering the club, was dead drunk already coming in. Saw me at the bar and stumbled his way to me, asking if I would go back training in the club after the summer holiday. I replied I will and looked forward seeing him there again. He, ordering a full long drink of Bacardi Rum, no ice no lime, replied that I would not see him there any more and that I will never see him there ever again. I watched him drinking the full long drink of white rum like it was water. Shocked by his behaviour and getting annoyed as no normal conversation seemed to be possible with him, I tried to fix my attention to Pat and the owner of the club playing poker with dice for money. Again Jef, ordered the same drink grabbing my arm to get my attention. His other hand went in the pocket of his jacket where he pulled out a rolled up rope, the kind that you use to roll up a roller shutter. A few inches in width, flat and very strong. He said that it was half of the rope that his best friend Eric used to hang himself a few years ago. I looked at him with a confused face and tried to avoid him by looking to the game my boss was playing at the bar with the owner Alain.

I started thinking about what he told me, as he was that drunk and his words were not clear all the time. And suddenly it sank in. I did hear about a story that a person committed suicide a few years ago. Not so difficult to remember really as it was all over the local newspaper at that time I now started remembering and our small beach town only has a few thousand people living in it, so gossip went like a bushfire. The newspaper story just told that Eric committed suicide by hanging. Later we heard that his girlfriend got pregnant at a young stage in her life and he didn't have a job or income just getting out of school, was on the verge of being drafted for the army service. He panicked, not seeing an outcome how to solve this early troubles in his life as she didn't want to consider an abortion. Coming from a good family and screwing up his life this way, he carried the pressure of his parents and society on his shoulders for months. Jef was from a working class family. Eric and Jef were drinking brothers. They met, at one of the cafe's in town and spent endless hours and money on alcohol and lived a life without worries. That is until Eric's faith was decided when his girlfriend at that time revealed she was going to have his child. Eric tried to talk her out of

it every time they met. But she wouldn't have none of it. She didn't come from a wealthy family and she saw this pregnancy as a road to her success. Eric sought help and advice from Jef, who didn't have any solution or strategy to get him out of this situation. One night, Eric, revealed his inner feelings to Jef, being his best friend, that it would be better to end his life than to live with this quilt, pressure and worries day after day, week after week. Jef, feeling empathy for him tried to talk him out of it for weeks. But every following weekend he could see Eric spiralling down more and more, deeper in a hole of despair. Jef, was having his own life problems with his parents and girlfriend at that time. The more he spent time with Eric listening to his stories the more he got drawn into Eric's plan to end his suffering. Alcohol, in late seventies was used in overflow and almost everyone was getting drunk and crazy every given weekend. This did not help both of them to get away from a destructive path. One night, both having enough liquor in their blood sitting in the back of a bar they made the pact of darkness. Eric showed a long rope cut into two equal pieces. He held his hands in front of him with each hand holding a piece of rolled up rope. They promised each other to hang themselves in the following days to both end their misery. In those days helplines for suicidal guidelines didn't really exist or had any impact on society. I believe the only helpline at that time was a number to call and you would be connecting to an answer machine. Alcohol played it's part strongly as that same night, Eric left this world and his unborn child by committing suicide by hanging himself with his part of the rope. When Jef heard that news he was devastated and broken.

Now, Jef is standing before me, drunk as hell and committed to perform his horrible act this night, feeling guilty of betraying his best friend a few years ago. I left him for a moment and I went to my boss Pat and told him in short what Jef's plans were. He, already sufficient drunk at that time, looked at Jef trying to keep standing up, leaning on a bar chair, laughed it away and said this is just drunk talk, an I should not worry that much. That is when Jef emptied his third full longdrink of white rum and stumbled his way to the exit door. I followed him outside and asked if he would get home safely. He replied: 'I am gonna make an end to my life, I have enough of this life.' I reacted to this by saying to him not to move and I would call him a cab in the club. I ran inside, asked the bartender to call a taxi and ran out quickly again to help him. He was leaning to the parking wall and mumbling words to himself. He looked to me when I approached him and said that his life is over and I should leave him in peace. He continued this pointless conversation for some minutes as the taxi arrived. The driver got out and I could immediately see on his face that he was not very happy with what was standing in front of him. Jef refused to get into the cab, the driver got upset, I ended paying him half of the fare and left angry and upset.

Jef took off as well and I saw him walking to the left, direction golf course, our town has. I remember thinking, as I know he lives on the opposite side, where the hell are you going Jef . I went back in the club and told the last happenings again to Pat and he seemed less interested than before. I just couldn't let it go that he walked to the left knowing that he lives to the right. At that time I was not imagining myself anything. Why should I? At fourteen of age, I had little life experience anyway. It kept bothering me and I said to Pat that I would check upon him quickly just to see if things were alright. He knotted. At that time, it must have been around three thirty in the night. I walked quick, direction golf course. The course has a water tower that gives access to the golf parcour. The fence was open, I continued my walk to see if I could find him here. The golf course is divided in two by a narrow sand path, fenced on both sides by chicken and haywire. About six small stone bridges are built over the path. The stone bridges have iron railings on both sides to hold yourself when passing them.

That's where I saw him sitting... on one of those bridges. The lower iron railing in front of his chest and his legs hanging off the bridge. Rope around his neck, knotting it to the lower part of the iron bar that goes into the cement bridge. While doing this, he was moving from left to right as if he was on a sailing boat in stormy weather. I was behind in the bushes about fifteen meters away, kneeled down and watching the scene. I remember there was enough moonlight that night to see his actions. A morning fog made the whole scene even scarier and I remember thinking to myself over and over again, he won't do it, he won't do this, he would never..at that time he already lowered his bum off the bridge and held himself at the lower iron bar. Suddenly I jumped up, as a rabbit ran just behind me, my heart jumping out of my ribcage, I turned back to see what was happening...and his hands were gone..he hung himself...I ran to the bridge as fast as I could, grabbed the iron bar and looked down and there it was..his eyes open and bloody red..his face, color purple..his body slowly turning around, the rope making ticking sounds being stretched by his weight. Trying untying the knots was like trying to squeeze your fingers between steel cables, I managed to untie two of them but the last two was impossible as his full body weight pulled on the strong rope.

Without thinking I jumped over the handrail and landed next to him in the sand path. Frozen for a second I remember thinking: 'do something, don't just stand here'. I grabbed both his legs and lifted him up. I lifted him so hard, he hit his head on the cement stone bridge and starting bleeding like a gutted pig. The blood ran over half his face. He started to breath and gargle at the same time. Spewing the blood out of his mouth in bursts that was running into it, from the gaping wound on his head. My first scariests moment in my entire life so far, standing with a half dead corpse in my arms bleeding and hung up by the neck, in the middle of nowhere at four o'clock in the misty morning, loudly screaming for help to no one's ears. After several minutes, Jef's weight, about eighty five kilos, started tiring my arms, no one was responding to my repeated screams. I did not know what to do, as my arms automatically slowly lowered him and hanging him up again. Doing this I mumbled:'no,no..no' softly to myself. My heart skipped beats, hanging him slowly by the neck until he abruptly stopped breathing again. I let go off him.

Knowing what I just have done, the next episodes in my mind, happened in slow motion. I climbed over a two meter haywire fence, ran up the slope to the bridge, where on my way I stumbled over a red iron ball. I kicked it that hard that the iron ball came out of the ground and was rolling in front of me. It was the ladies tee-off marker. The markers are placed in the ground by a thirty centimetre pin attached to it. I started rubbing the pin over the rope connecting his body with the bridge on the small part where the it touched the flat cement part of the bridge, I guess his weight and my unnatural force on adrenaline made the rope tear and I heard a duff sound of a body hitting sand. I looked down, and there he was. Face up. I stretched his legs to a normal position as they were behind his body and I ran as quickly as I could back to the club. Patrick and Alain were still in the same position at the bar as I left them earlier. My appearance in panic, sweat and blood on my clothes, quickly made them realize that something out of the ordinary happened. They called an ambulance that was accompanied by the police. They took me in for questioning. I told them the whole night's story. Between the taxi part of the story and him reaching his bridge, he somehow must have lost his wallet, as they asked me if I would know where it would be. I never spoke to him again for the last four decades.

I told the story to a few close friends of mine, whom seemed more in shock after my telling, then exited. I don't know how or when it happened but I guess through mutual connections, Jef and I, became friends on Facebook a few years ago. It came to my ears that not so long ago, Jef won a quite substantial amount of money with a winning lottery ticket. I believe in both the universe's immense beauty and

cruelty, that always will move in mysterious ways. I guess if time exists, there must be a right place and time for everything.