

Important

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

ALEX GOODSMAN, 52, stands in front of a mirror in his MILITARY DRESS UNIFORM, within a bedside lamp's isle of light. He breathes slowly and deliberately as his heavy eyes rest on the collection of EMPTY PILL BOTTLES on his nightstand. He offers himself a salute.

ALEX
Rangers lead the way, buddy.

Alex takes another swig from the BOTTLE OF VODKA in his other hand, but then stops abruptly, his tired eyes showing pain.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Shit! The note!

Unsteady footsteps traverse the shadows. A body flops into a chair. A bottle slams onto a desk. A laptop screen lights up with a double beep to reveal an impatient, sleepy Alex and a vodka bottle fighting to regain balance.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Why is this thing always so slow?

Alex drums his fingers as it finally finishes booting. He shakes his head, then a notification window appears.

ON THE SCREEN

Video chat reminder, 8:30pm

With a couple of clicks, Alex closes the window and opens a word processor. He forces himself upright and begins to type.

ON THE SCREEN

Every day has been a struggle. My mind is in a fog.
Whatever I do, it all seems so meaningless. I'm so
sorry, but I can't go on like this.

The ghastly visage of a seemingly dead college-age rocker appears in a video chat window, strumming his bass guitar.

ROCKER
A little fogginess is okay, frat
bro.

ALEX
What is this?

ROCKER

Hey, that's some nasty stuff you're drinking. Have ya tried butterscotch schnapps? It's really good.

ALEX

But you're dead.

ROCKER

Far out, right?

Alex looks at the drugs.

ALEX

I must be hallucinating.

ROCKER

What's wrong with that?

ALEX

I didn't want to end up like you. I wanted my life to mean something.

ROCKER

Life never meant anything, dude. It's all a big party.

ALEX

That's because you never cared about anything. You just wanted to get high, and look how that turned out.

ROCKER

If you stopped caring, you wouldn't be so miserable. You'll see. You'll like oblivion!

ALEX

No, I need this to have some meaning.

Alex clicks on the window with his note and puts the rocker in the background.

ROCKER

What meaning?

(plays guitar)

Just enjoy your song, kemosabe!

The rocker's image fades to black and his window disappears.

ALEX
I need to focus on what's
important. The ones I hurt.

Alex continues to write.

ON THE SCREEN

The blast. Why did I survive? Any one of them would have
done something with their life. I let them down. It
hurts to be so worthless.

A window appears with a dead woman in desert fatigues, a
matching helmet, and unflinching, harsh gaze. Alex's eyes
meet hers and widen, his brow wrinkling.

SOLDIER
Hurts? A little pain never hurt
nobody, Corporal. What's wrong with
you?

ALEX
Mom? How is this happening? You
also died!

SOLDIER
That's pretty freakin' obvious,
kid. Now are you going to tell me
what all this is?

ALEX
We didn't see the mine. My entire
unit is gone and I barely felt it.

SOLDIER
Those soldiers knew what they were
signing up for. They don't need
your sorry ass to join them.

Alex slams his hand on his desk in anger.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)
You can sulk and throw your little
tantrum, sure. Congrats, you've
earned it!

Alex breaks apart, and tears flow.

ALEX
I just want it mean something.
When you didn't come home, Mom, it
still meant something. You saved
lives!

SOLDIER
Honey, I lived my life. I wanted
you to live yours.

ALEX
But ... but I let down the ones
depending on me.

SOLDIER
And now you're letting everyone
else down by going AWOL.

ALEX
I tried! Can't get their faces out
of my head.

Alex's tone frosts over.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You had it easy.

The soldier's resolve fades as her window disconnects. Alex
clicks on the window with his note.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I need to focus on what's
important.

He continues to write.

ON THE SCREEN

Ashley, my beautiful wife. I'm so sorry for -- my mood
swings. I don't deserve you and I can't keep putting you
through this.

Another window pops up, displaying Ashley, 40's with graying
curly hair, her eyes averted.

Alex squints and chews his lip.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Ash? You're ... okay?

No response.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Ash?

The woman turns and yelps, smiling nervously with her hand to
her chest as she waits for her breath.

ASHLEY
Oh, Alex, I didn't think I'd
actually find you online.

ALEX
Yeah.

Alex yawns beneath heavy eyes, and relaxes.

ALEX (CONT'D)
As long as you're okay.

ASHLEY:
You don't look well, Alex. What's
going on?

ALEX
Everything will be fine.

ASHLEY
What do you mean by that? Where are
you?

ALEX
Hey, can you put Gabby on?

ASHLEY
You're making me really worried.
You can talk to me.

ALEX
You deserve better.

Alex's head nods down and up in microsleep. Ashley inhales sharply and calls 911 on her phone

ASHLEY
I'm worried about my husband. Yes,
hello?

Ashley glances into her camera then gets up.

ASHLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Can you hear me? Yeah, he's
connected from somewhere.

Ashley's voice fades. Alex leans his head back, peeking through nearly closed eyelids, as he types ever so slowly.

ON THE SCREEN

Gabriell- Gabby. I'm sorry You wont have a dad. treat
mother right. Daddy will be watching

A mouse cursor clicks send. Alex notices a missing letter in his wife's name in the email address, just before the mail vanishes. A failure message soon appears in the inbox.

Alex's face lowers as he trembles and his eyes water.

An 8 year old girl's head peeks out from the corner of Ashley's window, her curious eyes searching.

GABRIELLE

Daddy?

Alex's eyes spring open and he leans forward.

ALEX

Gabby!

GABRIELLE

Are you coming home soon?

Alex averts his eyes.

ALEX

No. I just wanted to tell you...

His eyes return.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I love y...

Gabrielle's skin is paler, speckled with ridges.

ALEX (CONT'D)

What's going on?

Gabrielle's eyes droop as her lips tighten. Her veins darken. Her eyes fade to white.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Gabby! No!

Alex claws at his scalp.

ALEX (CONT'D)

How is this happening?

GABRIELLE

You left me.

Alex steels himself.

ALEX

It... It was for you. Your Mom was there to take care of you!

GABRIELLE
I reminded her of you. We've been
sad.

Alex, at a loss for words, touches the screen.

ALEX
I just thought... I...

GABRIELLE
I wanted to be with you, Daddy.

ALEX
I'm so sorry.

Alex's head collapses onto his arm as he cries. Alex's view
fades to black.

ASHLEY (O.S.)
Alex? Are you there?

GABRIELLE (O.S.)
Daddy, wake up!

ASHLEY (O.S.)
Alex! Alex!

Alex's arms shake and strain as he pushes himself back up,
his eyelids fighting consciousness. A chat window shows
Ashley and Gabrielle, both very much alive and frightened.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)
Tell us where you are! Alex, can
you hear me? Where are you?

ALEX
9th Street... Motel...

Alex's head thumps back to his arm.

ASHLEY (O.S.)
He's at the motel on 9th Street.
Please, hurry...

FADE OUT.