

Important

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

ALEX GOODSMAN, 33, 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 video!

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)  
C'mon, can ya boot up fast, just this once?

Alex drums his fingers. The laptop's startup sequence is finally done. With a couple of clicks, Alex opens his video recording software. He forces himself upright and squares with his webcam. Another click and the light on the webcam goes from red to green.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Wow. Almost forgot to record this.  
Good thing I decided against the gun. And just in case Ash went with an open casket, ya know?

Alex's eyes drift.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Every day, has just been a struggle. My mind is in a fog or something, and everything seems so meaningless.

Alex looks up again.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry. I can't do it anymore.

The light on the webcam goes back to red. A video chat window pops up, showing the ghastly visage of a seemingly dead college-age rocker, 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.

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 clicks and the webcam once again shows green.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
That blast. Why did I survive? Any  
one of them would have done  
something with their life. I let  
them down. Feeling so worthless  
just ... hurts.

The webcam light turns red again. A window appears with a  
dead woman in desert fatigues, a matching helmet, and an  
unflinching, harsh gaze. Alex's eyes meet hers and widen,  
his brow furrowing.

SOLDIER  
Hurts? A little pain never hurt  
nobody, Corporal. I raised you  
stronger than that.

ALEX  
Mom? How is this happening? I...  
You...

SOLDIER  
Yeah, I died. 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 (CONT'D)

I need to focus on what's  
important.

Alex continues his recording, his words increasingly slurred.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Ashley, my wife. We've been through  
so much. I'm sorry for the mood  
swings. I can't keep putting you  
through that. You deserve better.

The webcam goes red again as another window pops up,  
displaying Ashley, 30, with already 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 clicks and the webcam turns green.

ALEX

Gabrie- Gabby. I'm sorry you won't have a Dad. Treat mother right. Daddy will be watching.

A mouse cursor clicks to save the video. It shakily drags the video file into an email entitled "Final Goodbye" and clicks send after a couple of attempts. Alex notices an extra "l" in "ashley" 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.

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.