

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!

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... C'mon!

Alex drums his fingers. The laptop's startup sequence is finally done. Alex clicks to dismiss a notification announcing "3 incoming chat requests missed" then 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. Wouldn't want to do that to
Ash anyway.

Alex's eyes drift.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Every day, has just been a
struggle. My mind is in a fog or
something. It all 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, dude.

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 ...

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, kemosabe. 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 weren't so uptight like Mom, you wouldn't be so miserable. You'll like oblivion!

ALEX

You don't have the right to talk about her.

ROCKER
Hey, chill out.
(plays guitar)
Just enjoy your song, bro!

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
How is this happening?

SOLDIER
Look, kid, are you going to tell me
what all this is or what?

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

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

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. You gotta stop living in the past.

ALEX

I tried, Mom! I 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. 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, is Gabby there?

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.