

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 a 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 a small red circle appears on the screen along with "REC".

ALEX (CONT'D)
Wow. Almost forgot to record this.
Good thing I decided against the
gun, right?

Alex grimaces.

ALEX (CONT'D)
No, I couldn't do that to you.
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 go on like this.

The recording indicator disappears. A video chat window pops up, showing the ghastly visage of a seemingly dead high school-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

Don't buy into that, kemosabe. It's all a big party.

ALEX

What? You never cared about anything, except getting high. 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. You're a disgrace.

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 red circle appears once again.

ALEX (CONT'D)
That blast. Why did it get everyone
else? They all would have made
something of themselves. I keep
thinking about what I could have
done differently, and it just ...
hurts.

The recording indicator disappears. 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
Yeah, seems like life's shit hits
the fan on its own time, don't it?
But 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 being so on edge
lately. My mind drifts, and I just
see it happening over and over. You
deserve better.

The recording stops as another window pops up, displaying
Ashley, 33, letting her already graying hair drape onto her
lab coat.

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 got home and wasn't expecting you to be still awake.

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? Did you take something? Where are you?

ALEX
Hey, is Gabby there?

ASHLEY
You're making me really worried. Where are you?

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, with a soldier action figure in her hand.

GABRIELLE
 Daddy, look what Mommy got me!

Alex's eyes spring open and he leans forward.

ALEX
 Gabby!

GABRIELLE
 Are you coming home soon?

Alex averts his eyes. Gabrielle plays with the soldier, making it march in front of her.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
 Hup, two, three, four..

ALEX
 No. I just wanted to tell you..

His eyes return, and he smiles warmly.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 I love y..

Gabrielle's skin is paler, speckled with ridges, as she continues to play.

GABRIELLE
 Hup, two, three, four...

Alex's mood as he watches with alarm.

Gabrielle's eyes droop as her lips tighten. Her veins darken. The soldier continues to march.

ALEX

Gabby! No!

Alex's breath quivers as he stands and claws at his scalp. Gabrielle considers the toy soldier.

GABRIELLE

You were supposed to protect me.

Alex pleads to his dead daughter.

ALEX

It... It was for you.

Gabrielle puts the toy down and looks up.

GABRIELLE

I reminded Mommy of you.

Alex, at a loss for words, touches the screen, and crumbles back into his seat, tears streaming.

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)

I wanted to be with you, Daddy.

ALEX

(stuttering)

I... I'm... s...s...sorry.

Alex cries into his arm, sobbing, letting it all out. Alex's vision 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.