

A Ranger's Way

written by

Scott Danzig and Zachary Pen

scott@sneakyghost.com  
(347) 330-2827

FADE IN:

INT. CHEAP HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

ELI GOODSMAN, 33, stands in his US ARMY DRESS UNIFORM, swaying on his feet as he stares at himself in the mirror. A near-empty bottle of whiskey is clutched in his left hand.

His gaze shifts to the collection of EMPTY PILL BOTTLES on the nightstand. He offers himself a trembling salute.

ELI  
Rangers lead the way, buddy.

He takes the bottle of pills in his empty hand and tosses them back, washing them down with booze. A nod to himself to seal his fate.

Eli stumbles in the dimly lit room to the desk. He sits and powers up a laptop.

ON THE DESKTOP: a video program is open, showing Eli taking another swig from the bottle. In the bottom right, there's a notification for "3 Missed Video Calls."

Eli clicks to dismiss the notifications. He looks into the LAPTOP CAMERA, shakes his head in disbelief, clears his throat, and clicks the red RECORD BUTTON. A TIMER starts.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Everything has just been a blur  
lately. Doesn't really make sense.

Eli looks up again.

ELI (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry. I just can't... I don't  
want to...

Suddenly a video call comes in -- UNKNOWN CALLER. He answers, revealing the ghastly visage of DYLAN, a seemingly dead college-age metalhead.

DYLAN  
A little blurriness is okay, dude.

Eli is confused.

DYLAN (CONT'D)  
Hey, that's some rough stuff you're  
drinking. Have ya tried peach  
schnapps? Goes down easy!

ELI  
You're...

DYLAN  
Far out, right?

Eli looks back to the pill bottles, trying to piece things together.

ELI  
I'm seeing things.

DYLAN  
What's wrong with that?

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

DYLAN  
It's all a big party, kemosabe!  
Take it easy.

ELI  
Easy? Everything you did was easy.  
You only cared about getting high,  
and look how that turned out.

DYLAN  
Oh, of course the heir to the  
throne can afford to be so  
righteous! Don't worry, you'll love  
oblivion. Pretty sure Mom does.

At the mention of "Mom" Eli twists his forearm to reveal a tattoo of eyes -- one blue, one green.

ELI  
You don't get to talk about her.

He sits up and knife-hands.

No... No, you don't know what she  
was like after you...

DYLAN  
Hey, chill out! Just enjoy your  
jam, bro.

Eli looks up to see Dylan gone and the video recording timer still ticking away. He can feel his pulse pounding in his temples as he tries to make sense of the bizarre encounter. He takes a deep breath.

ELI  
Focus, Eli. Focus on what's  
important.

Eli addresses the camera once more.

ELI (CONT'D)  
A suicide bomber... out of fuckin'  
nowhere. For whatever reason, no  
one else made it. Why me? I keep  
thinking about what I could have  
done differently, and it just...  
hurts.

A VIDEO CALL ALERT pops up and he reflexively answers. A new  
window displays a dead woman with a harsh gaze in desert  
fatigues and a matching hat. She has one blue eye and one  
green.

Eli flinches in recognition and inhales sharply.

ARMY OFFICER  
"Hurts" you said? A little pain  
never hurt nobody, soldier. Now,  
you gonna tell me what this is  
about?

ELI  
We... my unit, we didn't see him  
until it was too late. They all  
died.

ARMY OFFICER  
Yeah, shit happens sometimes,  
didn't you ever hear that? But  
those boys knew what they were  
signing up for. They don't need  
your sorry ass to join them.

Eli slams his hand on his desk in anger.

ELI  
You don't get it.

ARMY OFFICER  
What, you think I don't understand  
loss?

Eli breaks down and tears flow.

ELI  
When you didn't come home, at least  
it meant something.  
(MORE)

ELI (CONT'D)  
You saved lives! I just... got  
lucky. I let down the ones who  
counted on me.

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

ELI  
I tried! But their faces...

He closes his eyes. FLASHES of the faces of his fellow  
soldiers, bloodied and dead, appearing in his mind's eye.

Eli's tone frosts over.

ELI (CONT'D)  
You had it easy.

The Army OFFICER's eyes meet Eli's, and as her resolve fades,  
Eli eyes slowly blink. Only the video recorder window  
remains, the timer still running.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Come on... you need to finish this.

Eli takes another swig from his bottle, his words  
increasingly slurred.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Ashley -- I'm sorry for how I've  
been lately. My mind... I just keep  
seeing it happen over and over. You  
don't deserve all this. You deserve  
better.

Another call notification pops up and Eli clicks on it. A  
window opens showing an empty kitchen, with half-prepared  
plates of food on the counter. Ashley, 33, rushes past the  
frame.

ASHLEY (O.S.)  
Ellie, put those toys away! It's  
time for dinner.

Eli squints and tries to look around the edge of the frame.

ELI  
Ashley?

No response.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Ash?

Ashley rushes to her seat.

ASHLEY  
(still distracted)  
Oh, Eli, I've been trying you and  
wasn't expecting you to be still  
awake. Where are...

Ashley's eyes square with her camera and she leans in as Eli  
is finishing a yawn.

ELI  
Hi Ash, I'm...

ASHLEY  
Eli! Are you okay? Talk to me!

Darkness surrounds Eli as his eyes grow soft.

ELI  
I'm here Ashley. It's good to see  
you.

ASHLEY  
Eli! Eli! Wake up!

ELI  
What? I'm awake. Is Ellie with you?

Ashley inhales sharply and calls 911 on her phone

ASHLEY  
Yes, I need help! It's my husband.  
Hello?

Ashley glances into her camera then gets up, her tone  
increasingly frantic and fearful.

ASHLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Can you hear me? No, I don't know.  
He's in some hotel room. Can you  
track his computer or something?  
It's urgent!

Ashley's voice fades into echoes.

ELI  
Ashley! Everything's gonna be okay.

After a moment of silence, an 8 year old girl's head peeks  
out from the corner of the call window. She soon presents her  
toy soldier.

ELLIE

Daddy, look what Mommy got me!

Eli's eyes spring open and he leans forward.

ELI

Ellie! Hi baby girl.

Ellie's attention fixes upon her soldier.

ELLIE

Are you coming home soon?

Eli averts his eyes. Ellie, now also surrounded by darkness, plays with the soldier, making it march in front of her.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Hup, two, three, four...

ELI

Sweetheart. I just wanted to tell you...

His eyes return, and he smiles warmly.

ELI (CONT'D)

I love y--

Ellie's skin turns paler, speckled with ridges, as she continues to play.

ELLIE

Hup, two, three, four...

Eli's mood drops as he watches with alarm.

Ellie's eyes droop as her lips tighten. Her veins darken. Eli now stands in darkness, in front of Ellie, as the soldier continues to march.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Hup, two, three, four...

ELI

Ellie! No!

Eli's breath quivers as he stands and claws at his scalp. The deathly visage of Ellie, now wearing a scarred military helmet, considers the toy soldier.

ELLIE

You were supposed to protect me.

Eli leans in, pleading to his dead daughter.

ELI

I thought you'd be better off.

Ellie drops the toy and looks up.

ELLIE

I reminded Mommy of you.

Eli, at a loss for words, tries to reach out, his hand passing through Ellie. He crumples to his knees, tears streaming.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I wanted to be with you, Daddy.

ELI

(stuttering)

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

Eli covers his face and sobs, letting it all out. Eli's vision fades to black.

ASHLEY (O.S.)

Eli? Are you there?

ELLIE (O.S.)

Daddy, wake up!

ASHLEY (O.S.)

Eli! Eli!

Eli's arms shake and strain as he pushes himself back up, his eyelids fighting consciousness. The call window shows Ashley and Ellie, both very much alive and frightened. Ashley urgently motions for Ellie to quiet down.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Tell us where you are! Eli, can you hear me? Where are you?

ELI

Motel 66... Victory Drive...

Eli's head thumps back to his arm.

ASHLEY (O.S.)

He's at the Motel 66 on Victory Drive, probably near Fort Benning. Please, hurry...

FADE OUT.