

"Alex & Alex"

"What are we?" Alex blurted out.

The Other Alex sat across from the booth and choked on the coffee he was drinking. Alex apologized.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to put you on the spot."

"No, no." He smiled, a genuine, innocent smile and he began to think.

In the silence all Alex could hear was the whirling of the coffee machine, the beeping of the headsets behind the counter, and the clock ticking. It was 2 pm, their usual coffee time.

"Alex." The Other Alex said interrupting his meditation.

"We're best friends, Alex."

"But we've been living together for months now, we sleep together, we do everything together, I've seen your" Alex pointed to The Other Alex's chest. The Other Alex returned a confused look.

"Isn't that what all best friends do." Alex looked at him dazed.

"No, Alex, this isn't," he sighed "I can't do this anymore." Alex got up and walked out of the coffee shop. He tried hard not to cry but all he could think about was the first time he saw The Other Alex smile.

All Alex could hear was screaming from his own mind as he reached for the coffee with the name Alex written on it. Had he misheard, were his eyes playing tricks on him, how could he be so stupid? It took all the strength in him to mutter up something.

"Uhh, it says Alex."

“I know I’m Alex.”

“Oh, I’m also Alex.” The Other Alex produced a smile that scared Alex even more.

“So, whatdya order?” Alex asked, his voice rising a bit.

“A black coffee, I like to put the creamers in it myself.”

“Oh, my god.” The Other Alex said in a volume inappropriate for a coffee shop.

“Me too!” The Other Alex continued to stare while smiling at the now confused and scared Alex.

“So, what are we gonna do about it.”

“Wanna share it?”

“Share it?”

“Share it until yours gets ready.” The Other Alex wheezed. He grabbed the drink and a handful of creamer before pulling a chair over to Alex’s seat. Alex was still confused by it all, but just silently watched.

“How many do you usually use?” asked The Other Alex. He shrugged and replied.

“Well, I usually just add some until it tastes right.”

“Me too.” His volume once again rose too high.

“We’re so alive, so I’ll add one and then we’ll taste it and see what it needs.” The Other Alex opened up a package and poured the contents into the heated beverage. He put the lid back on and let the drink come to his lips. He lifted the back of it and gagged.

“Ah gross, I hate black coffee, here you try it.” The Other Alex handed Alex the cup. He held it pondering if he should take a drink. He began to question why he even ordered coffee at 2 pm. Why’d he even move to this city in the first place? He had nowhere to stay for the night and all of his belongings were in his car right now. This wasn’t him, this wasn’t Alex. He looked

back up to The Other Alex intending to decline, but then he saw him. He was smiling at him. An innocent smile that was childlike and generated warmth. It was a goofy smile ripped straight off of a cartoon character although it couldn't be interpreted as anything but authentic.

“Fuck it,” Alex said. He took the cup and took a big swig of it, he gagged.

“God, I hate black coffee, this definitely needs more creamer.”

“That’s what, I’m saying” The Other Alex laughed and had an open mouth smile. Alex smiled at him. The Other Alex then began to go on about how he usually adds 7-8 creamers and how he loves coffee at 2 pm, and how much he loved the Top Pot, decreeing it the best coffee place in the city. But Alex couldn't hear him. His heart was racing and he was out of breath. He was shaky and his voice began to crack when he spoke.

“Hey, can I have your num-”

“Hey, Alex where are you staying.” This caught Alex off guard.

“Uhh, well this is my first day in the city, I uhh moved here fro-”

“Move in with me.” The Other Alex was standing up and practically yelling now. “I’ve been looking for a roommate and you need a room and now we’re mates.”

Alex blushed. He could see a million reasons not to accept this stranger's offer, but he found his words betraying him.

“Yeah, sure.” And that’s how it started.

The key turned, leading the two Alexs into a New York brownstone apartment on the ground floor. The first thing Alex saw was loads of cardboard boxes sitting on the floor of a tiny kitchenette and living room matching the ones in his and The Other Alex’s hand. There was barely any room to walk around.

“I’ll lead you back to your room, just walk around my stuff.” The Other Alex said as he began to maneuver through the maze.

Alex dodged past boxes, stepping over boxes labeled “dishes” and another labeled “games.” He followed The Other Alex into a bedroom in the back. When he opened the door a pungent smell slapped them both in the face. It was a floral musk that had probably existed in this room longer than the two witnessing it. Inside the room was a full-size bed that was decorated with a quilt and pillows from a different decade. On the wall was a portrait of a vase with red flowers. The closet had remnants of a last tenant which was merely a pair of brown shoes and an old wedding dress that was yellowed. He went over and fell into the seat in the corner, unsettling all the dust that had integrated into the fabric. He tried to smile in this room, but he couldn’t. What had he gotten himself into? He began to hate himself more than he had anytime before. Then his thoughts were interrupted by The Other Alex.

“Sorry it’s so lame in here, used to be my grandma’s room,” He winced looking at all the tacky furniture, “Well, I’m gonna go watch TV.” His hands then went to the bottom of his shirt and he pulled it off over his head and threw the shirt on the floor in the living room. Alex was mesmerized and shocked by his new roommate’s bravado.

“Oh, are you staring at my scars, yeah I’m...” The Other Alex paused before continuing. “TV time.” he eventually added without continuing his thought. Alex continued to stare at the void The Other Alex left before shaking his head and searching through his boxes and pulling out his belongings. After he was finished he went out into the living room to attempt to make small talk.

“What are we watching,” Alex said, sitting on The Other side of the couch, sitting on his knees. The Other Alex had his legs spread out and was laughing at what was playing on the TV.

“2016 Funniest moments Vine Compilations, isn’t it the funniest shit ever.” The Other Alex was crying from laughing so hard. Alex watched the mindless display on the TV and he couldn’t understand it. What was so funny about these idiots doing dumb things? He watched as a guy filled a bottle with mentos and try to drink it. What’d he think would happen? He looked over to see The Other Alex now on the floor. He couldn’t wrap his brain around it, but he smiled and chuckled with him.

That was the ritual for the next 6 months. 2 pm Coffee trips and Vine compilations. Alex would come home after work to find The Other Alex working hard on the couch on another funny compilation video. He’d take off his hat, leave his bag in the kitchen and sit on the couch right next to The Other Alex and he’d fall asleep right there. In the first few months, The Other Alex would bring out a blanket for Alex and retire to his own bedroom, and then he’d gotten into the habit of falling asleep next to him on the couch. More recently they had simply moved to The Other Alex’s bedroom and they’d crawl under the covers and watch TV on his screen. And even in his sleep, Alex could swear that The Other Alex still managed to smile his darn smile.

Now he was not smiling. The Other Alex sat in the Top Pot at 2 pm watching his best friend leave. Or were they still best friends? Should he run after him and ask? Why was he even ordering coffee at 2 pm? What did Alex mean by seeing his? Would he be at the house? Why’d he even move into that big house in the first place? Was it because he snored? Did he want his order? What was he supposed to do? Alex found his hands in his mouth, biting off his fingernails, and when he noticed he snatched them out. This wasn’t him, this wasn’t Alex.