

Goodbye Mrs Alston

Word count: 1987

Goodbye Mrs Alston

Mrs Alston is a MILF. I don't use the F-word much in real life, but I'm pretty sure that Mrs Alston would be a worthy candidate for a good F-ing, one day when I'm older and know how to do it. She's getting on a little, sure. You can see it around her eyes. They're blue, with a few wrinkles at the edges - call me crazy but I find it sexy as hell. And then the back of her knees. The skin is sort of translucent and there's a blue vein slipping down like a secret.

I remember reading something about the back of the knees being the most vulnerable part of a woman. The most un-glamorous part. I'm no expert on women but I think that's true. Mrs Alston isn't exactly the type that most guys my age fantasize about, but she has a really nice, soft way about her. Her hair has that silky, clean look and her nails are usually painted, unlike my mum who bites hers like a savage and always has a bit of cuticle just hanging there threatening to bleed.

Another nice thing about Mrs Alston is her fridge. I never turn down playing a bit of Counter-Strike with Dylan because we usually get there just in time for lunch. And today, sure enough, there's a whole spread laid out. Fancy rolls with seeds on top. Cheese already sliced. Mayonnaise in a little bowl with a teaspoon next to it, if you can believe it. Not like at home where we scrape around the bottle to get the last of it out of the grooves, dodging the bit of Marmite that's stuck there like a pioneer in the bloody Arctic. At least I hope it's Marmite.

Mrs Alston tried to give Dylan a hug but he shrugged her off. I wouldn't have minded a hug from her myself but she didn't offer.

“How was your day, boys?”

“Same as it is every other day.” Dylan rolled his eyes. Mrs Alston pretended not to see.

Dylan can be a bit of a dick sometimes.

Goodbye Mrs Alston

Mr Alston accepted a plate of food on the corner of his newspaper laid across the table.

“No mustard then?” was all he said. He wears shiny shoes that are pointed at the end, as if they belong on Felonius Gru, and it suits him. At least when Felonius was still a bastard at the beginning of the movie. Not so much when he became all warm and cosy and had the minions on his lap. Mr Alston wouldn't have a minion on his lap if his life depended on it. He has long lines down the side of his face as if his cheeks are exhausted from all the smiling he's done in his life, but if that's the case it must have been a long time ago because I've never seen it myself. Not even once.

When lunch is over I stood up to help clear away the plates.

“Never mind, hon, I've got it,” said Mrs Alston.

I started to protest but Mr Alston cut me off.

“It's not as if she has anything else to do.”

There was a horrible silence. Then Mrs Alston said quietly, “Please, Edwin.”

I just stood there. When I finally sat down it felt as if I'd betrayed her. I may as well have clapped Mr Alston on the back and said, *'Right you are, could you grab us a beer at the same time, Love?'*

I'm not great with this kind of thing to be honest. I saw a shrink a few times after Dad left and she called me 'conflict-aversive'. Mum said there's nothing wrong with that and anybody who's conflict-aversive or whatever needs to get their head checked. But that's classic Mum for you. She doesn't really care about being heroic, she just wants us to get by.

Dylan's room has lots of posters of movies and the odd girlie one. My favourite is one of a helicopter silhouetted against the sky, with the words “Black Hawk Down” next to it. Those guys were something else. Leave no man behind and all that. Kids these days have no idea. It's like we deserve a round of applause just for wearing school uniform the right way and resisting the urge to

Goodbye Mrs Alston

spray paint public property. Like if a teenager happens to do his homework instead of watching porn and eating Cheerios all afternoon he's some kind of saint. Not that it's just us. Once upon a time people built railways and pioneered and believed in things. Now they just bitch about the weather and what's on TV.

Below the poster there's a cage with two mice in it called Spit and Whistle. White mice with red eyes. They always look like they've been out on the bend, eyelids all pink as if they'd kill for a cup of coffee and maybe some paracetamol. Once or twice I've seen them cruising around on their wheel but when Dylan turns up his stereo they hide away in their bungalow.

“Game time,” said Dylan. He's more into Counter-Strike than me.

We pulled on our headsets and ran straight into the desolate desert town, keeping close to the sides of buildings and ducking behind old cars. Dylan got taken out early in the first round, and then in the second had a dagger rammed into his back. He slammed his hand down on the table and stood up. *Slayer21 has disconnected* popped up on my screen.

“Hey, Dylan,” I called, “Don't rage-quit, we need you.” He didn't answer. Honestly. Such a dick sometimes. More messages popped up from remote team mates.

ChairM4ster5000: *Thanx a lot, mate!*

N00bKiller184: *What a team player :(*

I couldn't try to persuade him otherwise because a sniper started shooting at me from a broken window. I ducked and ran for shelter. Three rounds later we'd managed to get almost all the bad guys and then their bomb exploded and ended the game. We lost.

I leaned back in my chair and exhaled. God damn terrorists.

“Hey, come check this out.” Dylan called from the bathroom. He was laughing. His back was towards me but as I got closer I saw he'd filled the sink and put the mice into it. They were swimming back and forth, then they bumped into each other and circled away. They looked very

Goodbye Mrs Alston

earnest, their noses pushing the water into V-shaped ripples that fanned out behind them.

“What are you doing?” I said.

Dylan had a huge smile on his face as if he had just cracked some hilarious joke. “They need a bit of exercise sometimes.”

He lifted one of the mice out by its tail, its tiny paws reaching for something to hold, and then he opened his fingers and let it fall. It went right under the surface with a splash and came up with water running down its face and off its whiskers. Its ears were pressed against its head but I could see the water was in there too.

“I don't think they like that, Dylan.” My voice sounded stiff and small, as if it came from a child even I wanted to slap.

“What are you like the captain of the fun police?” He laughed again, then turned on the hot tap.

“Dylan.”

“Oh come on, they're fine.”

The mice were swimming away from the turbulence and some water washed over their backs. The air in the bathroom was getting a bit thin and wished I had my asthma pump. I looked towards the bedroom, as if maybe Mrs Alston would miraculously materialise, even Mr Alston, but all I could see was the poster of the helicopter. For sure those guys never needed an asthma pump. They probably had lungs like nobody's business.

The mice were trying to clamber up the side of the sink but they kept slipping back, and I knew the water must be getting warm. They didn't look hungover any more, just desperate.

“Dylan, come on, let's go play another round.”

He ignored me, blocking the sink.

“Dylan, come on.” I leaned across him to reach for the tap. He shoved me arm but I grabbed

Goodbye Mrs Alston

the faucet and twisted it closed.

“What's your problem?” His voice was loud. His face was too close.

“Why can't we just carry on with Counter-Strike? Instead of playing with stupid mice.”

I thought he might hit me and I felt my face screw up but I didn't let go of the tap. Then he nodded and walked back into his room.

I took the mice out carefully. My thumb was right against one of their chests and I could feel it's heart beating, really fast. I didn't feel so good myself to be fair. I pushed my breaths out all the way, emptying my chest. The trick is not to hoard all the old air.

I suddenly wished Mum was there. Not like right there in the bathroom watching me suck on gas, but having tea downstairs or something. It was dumb because she's never been to the Alstons' house, she's never even met them, but there's no accounting for the things you wish for. It's like dreaming or falling in love, all bets are off. I took a careful breath then eased a handful of wet mouse into each of my pockets.

Dylan was logging on again and in the silence the keyboard sounded like a rally of shots. I didn't sit down. “I think I'm going to head actually.”

“Oh yea?” Dylan stared at the screen with a vacant look on his face. I saw two little spots of red firing up in his cheeks.

“Yea.”

“You sure?” He looked up just for a second. Then his eyes settled on the cage behind me, the wire trap door still open.

“I'm sure.”

“Suit yourself.” His face was flushed. His eyes looked a bit glinty. I'm pretty sure he knew.

Walking out I was quite conscious of the damp, mouse-shaped bulge in my pants, and I

Goodbye Mrs Alston

crouched over a bit when I saw Mrs Alston in the kitchen in case she thought it was what it wasn't. As if that's all I could muster.

“Going already?” she asked. “Can't I get you something else to eat?”

It hit me that I probably wouldn't be back here. I might not see her again. A bit of hair had fallen out of her ponytail at the back of her neck and the MILFness was radiating off her like sunlight.

“Maybe one of those seedy rolls if that's all right?” What the hell. The mice would love it.

“Of course. You boys don't eat enough. Would you like some cheese on it?”

“That would be great actually.” They could have a bloody celebration feast.

Mrs Alston buttered the roll and I just stood there. Awkward as hell but worth it just to be kind of hanging out with her. If things were different, or if I was different, I could have told her how pretty I think she is and how kind; and that I don't like Mr Alston's shoes and I'm sorry that Dylan is such a dick sometimes. Maybe if I was some other guy totally I'd take her face in my hands like they do in the movies, our lips really close like we might bust into a kiss at any moment, tell her how bangable she is in a really smooth way, and that I like her nails and her hair and even the backs of her knees. Maybe especially them. But there's no way in hell I could ever do that even if I had ten asthma pumps.

Instead when she gave me the sandwich I looked into her blue eyes and smiled and hoped that somehow she knew.