

For a short time, we stared at each other silently. Finally I couldn't take it any longer. "What do you mean you've been expecting me? Who are you? What's going on here?"

"You've been chosen to undertake a very important task."

"What am I going to do?"

"You'll be told. In time."

"I'm not doing anything. I'm not part of the military, and.."

"Just relax," he cut me off. "Let's have a little discussion." He keyed a button on his phone. "Corporal, and you bring our guest some coffee?"

I shook my head. "I'm not much of a coffee drinker."

"Well, you'll love this blend. It's special."

A woman in uniform appeared at the door and placed a mug in front of me before leaving again. "Go ahead, you'll need your strength where you're going."

"And where is that?"

"Have a drink and we'll talk. I told you you'll enjoy it."

I sniffed at the coffee, then took a small sip. It tasted like the same stuff you'd get from any roadside diner, and I set the mug down again. I waited for my host to speak, but he didn't. I took another sip, and then a third.

"You're doing something important," he said again. "It's for your country, for your family, and for the future of mankind."

He said another few words, but I couldn't understand them. My brain wasn't working and my eyes felt heavy. I tried to fight but I couldn't.

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A heavy drone came to my ears and I lifted my head. I was surrounded by soldiers jostling each other. One by one they stepped toward an opening to my right, and jumped.



I gasped. I'd never been skydiving, let alone was I qualified to make a jump like this one. I held back until there were only two of us left. He grabbed my shoulder, and I braced for what I expected was coming. He leaned close and shouted in my ear. "Not you. Go up to the cockpit." With that he turned and leapt from the ramp. A series of parachutes dotted the sky behind the plane, but I never saw one open for him. I truly hope that I just missed it.

I made my way to the cockpit, which was completely empty.



I slipped into the pilot's seat and scanned the instruments. The autopilot was set, holding a course I couldn't make out. The plane continued on its way and when it showed about 100 miles from the destination, I began a descent.

It didn't take me long to recognize the skyline of New York City.



And I took a bit of a look around as I flew the last few miles down to La Guardia airport.



I switched of the autopilot a few miles out, and the plane started to drop. I had to push the throttle levers almost all the way forward, and yank back on the controls to keep from hitting the buildings below. The tires touched the runway and I set full reverse thrust and extended the spoilers. I pulled off the runway and cut the fuel flow to the engines. I got out to take a look around, and for the first time could see the aircraft I'd just landed.



I ran my hand through my hair, then turned toward the terminal. A breeze blew and I stuffed my hands into my pockets. I felt a piece of paper and pulled it out.

*"When you're alone and life is making you lonely
You can always go"*