

Never Not Loved

Novel Excerpt

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About This Excerpt

Never Not Loved is an original long-form narrative exploring themes of faith, identity, and resilience through character-driven storytelling. This excerpt demonstrates my approach to emotionally engaging narrative voice and immersive first-person perspective.

Skills Demonstrated

- Narrative storytelling
 - Emotional voice
 - Character development
 - Long-form writing
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(Excerpt begins below)

Chapter 1:

Glimpses of the bright sun started to appear as my eyes fluttered open. Eventually I was just sitting in bed staring at the ceiling already feeling defeated for the day.

“God- where are you?” I say aloud.

This question has become all too familiar to me these past few weeks. I don't think I have ever been this confused in my life. I know the Lord. So why can't I hear him lately? I didn't think this would happen again- I thought this darkness was done. I thought these lies were put to rest. But here I am crying again, feeling nothing inside. It's a different feeling though. To know the Lord and then still feel this lost, but just know that He is there. Why can I not just make myself stop feeling sad. What even is depression? Why do I have it? Am I sinful for being depressed? I don't want to dishonor Him. I feel ashamed. I just wish I understood what the point was.

A good twenty minutes passed before I rolled over to check the time. It read 8:42 and the day was January 13th, 2025. I worked up all the will I had to finally rise from my bed and get ready before my 9:30 class- which required me leaving at 9:00 if I wanted to be on time. I went to my closet and threw on a pair of leggings and a sweater. Then I quickly made my way downstairs to get my jacket and shoes.

The thought of breakfast is not very appealing to me. In fact, eating in general has not been very appealing to me lately. Oh well. Let's add that to the list.

Walking to class was cold. I felt my fingers freeze the second I took one of my mittens off to check the time. 9:25. Ok, I just might make it in time.

I finally made it to my Advanced Communication Theory class, where my professor greeted me, “Hello Alex! How are you today!”

I kindly replied with all enthusiasm available, “I'm doing great this morning! Thank you!”

Why do I feel like a liar?

As I made my way to my seat I spotted my usual table partner and sat down beside her. The lecture began and I just stared blankly- per usual. This repeated for three consecutive classes, and I talked to basically no one.

Eventually when I was walking home, I thought about how it might be nice to go to the gym. After all, I have been feeling horrible lately so I would like to try and fix myself- even though my friends tell me I am perfect the way I am. Why do I know that and choose not to believe it? It just feels like they are lying- but they love me so they wouldn't lie to me. Right?

I stared at my closet, hating all of my clothes, and found some leggings and a big sweatshirt. I guess it doesn't really matter what I wear to the gym. But what if there was a cute guy that just finally noticed me. I guess I wouldn't hold my breath.

Soon enough I made it to the gym. Hmm what could I do- arms or legs? Honestly I know I need a full-body workout. And cardio- definitely cardio. I need to run this fat off.

An hour passed and I had finished my lift and was well into my run. I needed to make it to 4 miles- or I was a failure. I don't think I could handle being a failure in the gym right now. I'm already failing God, I can't be a failure here also.

Just run more. Faster. Longer. Why does this feel like a punishment? I need to stop. This doesn't feel right.

As I walked home I felt scared. Scared of myself. How could I take something that is supposed to keep me healthy and turn it into a way to punish myself?

I made my way inside and looked over at the fridge. I know my body is probably hungry but I just have no appetite. Maybe tomorrow.

I walked up to my room, passing my roommates' rooms and hearing them laugh behind the closed door. I used to be in there laughing with them. I just feel like my presence would bring them down and I can't bear the thought of that actually happening, so here I am again, just passing by.

Chapter 2:

Grade 7

I just don't understand why I'm never invited to anything. Here I am in bed on Friday night and everyone else is having a sleepover at Anna's house, and I am just crying. My best friends don't even care that I am not there and I have asked them to ask Anna why I can never come to anything and they just never do- if I was invited and they weren't I would have said something to Anna, I would've done everything I can to make sure they never felt excluded, that someone does want them to be there. But I guess that's just a ME thing. I feel so angry, why can't they be friends to me the way I am to them, don't they understand how hurtful this is. I know that it's not their house to invite me too, but what's speaking up to see if one more person can come, what's wrong with that- I WOULD DO THAT FOR THEM. Everyone is just scared of Anna and never wants to get on her bad side otherwise they would be exactly where I am- home by themselves. I never even did anything to Anna, so why me? I thought we were all friends. I know I should leave them be but I need to text Jazzy, she has to know that her complicity makes this ok:

Alex: Hey, I know you are all together right now, is there a reason why I wasn't invited- did I do something to Anna to make her mad?

Jazzy: It's not like that- she just couldn't have a lot of people over.

Alex: I mean it's just one more person, you know this kind of feels horrible, I am the only one not there.

Jazzy: Alex I am sorry it feels horrible- we don't want that.

Alex: Well how do you think this would make someone feel, to see ALL of your friends together and no one thought to invite you.

Jazzy: It isn't like that- we just feel like you bring the mood down. You're just like down all the time. It's depressing.

I didn't respond to that. I just cried harder than I have in my life. I just bring the mood down and am depressing to be around. That's why no one wants me. The one thing I have never been able to control is the depression. Now I know that the thing I hate most about myself is the thing driving people away from me. It's like my worst nightmare of my sadness just being noticeable, was on display this whole time. I can't breathe. It's like I shouldn't anymore, because what's the point? I will never forget this moment.

Chapter 3:

I took my clothes off and stared in the mirror. I hate what I see. This is why I need to workout. I got in the shower and just sat in utter silence. I loved the shower. It was where I knew that I could just be unbothered. I can just sit in here and let the water hit me.

I decided today I deserved a long shower so here I am 40 minutes later. I finished my nighttime routine and got into bed. I realized I haven't checked my phone in forever so I took this time to see who snapped me.

OPEN SNAP FROM GRANT

I was a little excited to see him pop up on my phone. After all, we've been great friends since my freshman year of high school and I've convinced myself that if I ever end up 30 and alone, and I move back home to Michigan that I'll marry him. The only thing is he doesn't feel the same way. Having that conversation way back when was rough to say the least. But he's nice enough to keep talking to me and pretend we never had that conversation. So here we are.

I snapped him back and forth for a little while, ended up scrolling on TikTok forever, and realized it was past 1:30AM. I had an interview in the morning so I definitely needed sleep. At least I made it through this day, tomorrow is going to be a lot of work. I just wish the sadness would end. I closed my eyes to end the thoughts.

Chapter 4:

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP

MUST TURN OFF. I hate waking up to alarms. Which, funny enough, is everyday. I quickly rolled over and turned off the alarm and saw that today was the day. January 14th, 2025. Also known as, interview day, a day I have been dreading for weeks.

A few months ago I signed up to volunteer at my church's nursery. At the time I knew I really wanted to begin serving the Lord in this way. I was so excited. But that was then. That was when I wasn't a disappointment to Him. However, I had this interview on the books for a while and I just felt like I couldn't back out. I also felt like maybe this was the Lord directing me towards the light. The much needed light in this cave of darkness I haven't been able to escape from. I just feel though that this sickness will infect these children. But that's just not true. I know it's not true. But why does that feel like my reality? I am not worthy of watching God's children.

I can't get over this feeling. It's been a while, but journaling has always made me feel closer to God. So here it goes, all on the table:

“God,

In an hour, I am going to meet at Southland and hopefully get a volunteer job. I really want to serve you in this way Lord, but whatever happens I understand that that is just how you want it. I haven't been very faithful to you lately so I understand that I don't really deserve your grace and goodness- I am going to be making changes in my life for the better. I need only you in my life to be fulfilled. I need to stop letting the world distract me. I love you, Amen.”

I believe this all.

After I got ready for the interview, I got in my car and began driving in silence.

I feel tight. My chest is tight. I feel nervous. I am just scared. God be with me, I am doing this for you.

I pulled up to the lot and sat for a minute. I can be here. I can do this.

A woman got out of her car and I honestly just felt her joy. And then I felt sad because I believed that used to be me. The joy that you could just feel radiate off of someone because the Holy Spirit was just so magnified in them. Where did it go? Time to get out of the car- I can do this.

“Are you Alice?!” I cheerfully asked.

“Yes! And you are Alex I’m assuming! I am so excited to finally meet you!” Alice very enthusiastically replied to me.

“Yes, same here!” I mean it.

We walked and talked into the huge church, and made our way to the nursery area. I looked around curiously since I had never actually been in here, only the main area. We went on a mini tour of the area and visited all of the different rooms they had based on age-groups.

That’s when I saw his name on an old name tag. Brooks. The name of a child who had been dropped off probably this past Sunday. Also the same name as my friend who died last year. I don’t know what it was- but it felt like a gift. It felt like he was right there with me and this is where I am supposed to be. I miss him.

Eventually we made our way to her office. Here it is. Where I actually have to be real.

“So Alex, this is kind of just a time to get to know you and your relationship with Jesus” Alice explained to me so casually.

Who am I? Honestly I don't know. That question isn't hard, but lately it feels that way. Not to mention my relationship with Jesus. I am trying to understand that as well. It used to feel beautiful but now I feel shameful. I DON'T KNOW.

"Well, I'm from Michigan with mostly Catholic family. My parents are separated - my mom is remarried with my 15-year-old sister, and my dad has a 5-year-old son and lives with his girlfriend now. I came to UKY and my roommate brought me to Southland freshman year. It completely changed my perspective - I'd never experienced church like this before, with the music and messages. I realized I could have a personal relationship with Jesus, which was new to me. I attended sporadically that year since I didn't have a car, then went home for summer which was tough without a church community. When I returned, I was excited about church but went through a rough patch and stopped going- a friend of mine died. Last spring, during a really dark time, I decided to try church again and felt completely seen and heard. A few weeks later at Easter, I went to service with the same friend/roommate who brought me to Southland, and during the baptisms, God spoke to me in the moment and said 'Alexandra, get up and go give your life to me.' So I did. That following summer was probably the hardest of my life- struggling with my new identity as a Christian while living in a worldly environment with old friends. I felt isolated but leaned heavily on God, and He was incredibly faithful. Then I studied abroad last fall, which unexpectedly strengthened my relationship with Him beyond what I thought possible. Now I'm back and hoping to serve." I finally finished answering.

A part of me felt like a liar because I failed to mention my current mental status, but I didn't feel like unpacking all of these annoying emotions with- to me- a technically complete stranger. I also really believe that this sadness is temporary. I know it is. I believe it. It has to be.

"Wow Alex, your resilience and how you've continued to seek God in the midst of your struggles is truly a gift. Just the fact that you've gone through this journey with really no community is just a beautiful example of that." Alice warmly responded, not realizing the weight of that statement and the effect it had on me. "I also just wanted to mention your character

reference, from your friend Mary. She had some incredibly kind words about you and how much your walk with the Lord has impacted her and how she sees Jesus because of you.”

OK. Now I am crying in front of this woman that barely knows me. Mary. My sweet sweet best friend. I don't know how to feel. This all just feels too much. How am I the person that Alice and Mary say I am? I am not- there's no way. I am not resilient and I am definitely not an example for anyone. Or am I? No. But they wouldn't lie to me. It's just not me though, I am nothing. *You're right. You are nothing.*

“Alice, that honestly means so much to me, also I am sorry I am so emotional.” I said.

“Oh Alex, you never need to apologize for that. We are so excited to have you here and would love to have you come shadow next Sunday.” Alice responded to me.

I got it? She asked me back? Was it that easy? What.

Me and Alice spent the next 30 minutes going over paperwork and training stuff. Then we parted ways and I eventually made it to my car.