

ALAN'S STORY:
The Wild Horse

Alan's Story: The Wild Horse

Safe. Safe was always the only way to describe me and my life. Safe, always safe, too safe for my own good, too safe to really take MY life into MY hands. Everything I really wanted just sort of flew right past me, leaving me still wanting that which flew. But, I can't complain, not really anyway. My life would in fact be better than most. I have a high-paying job as a computer programmer for a multi-national company called Wontech, which deals with so many different areas of industry that I sometimes feel I'm working for some evil, sweatshop-running, book-cooking, low-down company that just has me there to hide-and-cover their dirty little secrets with my technical wizardry. Of course, for my technical wizardry I get a more-than-modest income, flexible hours and a desk job. So - in some respects - my life is pretty sweet.

The main problem with being safe is that you lose the will to go for what you want, like some wild horse that has been starved, beaten and tired so that it would no longer be wild, that instead it would see the advantages of being tame. That was what I was like, filled with ideas, hopes, dreams and goals, even the will, courage and backbone necessary to do them. But that was beaten out of me, instead I was given the opportunity to live a steady life, rather than a happy one. I gave it up, gave up pursuing what I really wanted, who I really wanted: Her.

Yeah. Her. That girl. The one. The one I wanted. The one I needed. The one thing that would have - without doubt - turned my steady life into a happy life. The one I could never have.

Of course I realised I was out of her league, but she had never made me feel that way. It was just something I knew. I mean a nerdy, little, glasses-wearing, pocket-protecting, safe guy like me could never get her. It was like two different worlds, two worlds that may have been connected on multiple levels but were still miles apart. She was everything: pretty, funny, caring, friendly, understanding, open and completely unavailable.

Every week she would have a new boyfriend at her apartment (Which was just down the hall from mine) and every month or two she would end up having a fight with him, and every time it would be my job to comfort her (And if things got really hostile: Have a chat with the boyfriend, just a chat. I can be quite convincing). She would sometimes come over, just to borrow milk or something, then when I had given her what she was looking for, she would thank me.

It usually went like this:

"Hey, I don't mean to bother you or anything but could I borrow some milk off you? I didn't get time to get it this week. . . I had alot on my mind." She said this knowing full well that I knew what was on her mind that prevented her from getting a basic need

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such as milk (At least I think she knew, but then again maybe not. I mean, maybe she thought the walls were thicker than they actually were, and that her and her boyfriend's shouts were little more than whispers to the tenants on the same floor. I mean that could be the case).

Then I would reply:

"Oh. . . Okay no problem . . . Just wait there a sec." After that was said I would go and get the milk, and by the time I came back her beautiful pure eyes would be filled with tears. I would hand her the milk or whatever she was looking for, she would give me a more-than-amazing smile as the tears dripped down onto the tip of her beautiful nose. At this point I would do the gentlemanly thing and ask her in to talk about it, clearly emphasising the lie that I was clueless to her situation.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah I'm fine, just a little bit on my mind at the moment. Travis just broke up with me. I thought we were forever."

"Are you sure you're fine? Do you wanna come in and talk about it? I'm a good listener. I can put on a pot of coffee, or something stronger if you want it."

To this day I don't know why she came in, but she did, I assume it was because of how non-threatening I was, she knew that I would not in a million years take advantage of her fragile state, that I would do as I said: listen.

"Okay, as long as I'm not putting you out. I could do with a good pair of ears."

"Well that would be me. . . Yeah. . . One, Two . . . I think they're good as a pair." She would laugh at this, I always feel humour is a good way of settling a person. The simple act of testing out my ears was enough to get a little giggle out of her, making her - for a moment - forget about her problems. "Okay. . . Come in and make yourself at home. . . So which would you prefer? Coffee, tea, or something a bit stronger?"

"Coffee would be good, thanks." At this point in time she would come in and sit down on the sofa, I would prepare a pot of coffee and she would talk, and I, well I would just respond.

I was her shoulder to cry on, the one who helped her get over it, and when she asked me I would become her bodyguard, the tiny little guy left with the job of hunting away her big, scary, angry boyfriends. The ones she broke up with. Simply put: I was the guy who was always there for her. Just goes to show that nice guys do finish last.

The nice guy who had to pick up the pieces of the bad guys.

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Anyway, that girl, the one I needed and wanted, the one who had the ability to change my life from steady to happy goes by the name Meghan Connolly. And would you believe? Guess where she works, as well as a certain computer programmer? Yes that's right!! She works at the reception desk of Wontech. She was a secretary, a secretary in the building where I worked, a tenant on the floor where I lived and - like I said before - in a completely different world from my own. Social circles were different, social events were different (Nightclubs for secretaries, watching Star Trek for the computer nerds. Neither were activities I had any interest in) and social standing were different (She was a stunner and I was just stunned).

One of the reasons why Meghan Connolly was out of my league was because of the men she was into. She - for some reason - liked what I would call (For lack of any better words) walking pigs. Even from down the hall I could hear them telling her to do things for them. All I could think of was how she should have been, how I would have treated her, how I would have made her feel special, put her first, made her happy. But they had only ever been thoughts. I always justified my not being with her as something that was beyond my control, something I couldn't grasp, something that could never change, no matter how hard I tried, it was simply not meant to be.

But, even a tame horse can revert to its wild self.

It all just came upon me on a seemingly normal day.

I woke up at 8, had a shower, got dressed, had breakfast (Corn Flakes. Safe, huh), watched the news and headed off to my destination for 10:30.

I like schedule, just not normal ones. I have flexitime. I can go into work at midnight if I want to, and as long as my work was done I would not get in trouble. In fact I didn't even have to go into the building at all. I could have done my work at home by remote computer if I wanted, but of course I had my reasons for going in, reasons that will become clear soon. But back to my original point: I like structure in my life.

But there could be no structure with her. I knew that. But that was also what I loved about her. She could make every day different, even I could sense the spontaneity that she put in my day through her minor appearances, each one making it a stranger and more magical experience.

I knew that I would have to change before she could become mine, but as someone who lived should know: It's hard to get out of rut. It's like a record that keeps playing the same two seconds

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of a song. The only way to stop it is to knock the needle off the axis so it can play the song properly. In other words: an outside force.

So until that outside force came I was stuck in my rut, unable to get the girl, or change the way I lived. I had to wait, wait for the outside force, or for her to change.

I suppose you could say I got lucky, but that's not how I'd see it. I didn't get lucky, a whole lot of other people got unlucky. But before I get to that I think I should explain a bit more about myself.

I believe in the whole nurture over nature thing, that what happens to someone makes them. So you may ask: What happened to me that made me such a schedule-mad, spontaneity-fearing, riskless guy? Well I don't exactly know much about that, to be honest. There are probably a lot of reasons, there always are. At this point I'd like you to think of a child, a nameless, faceless child. Have you thought of one? Okay, well this child has parents too, so imagine them too, maybe use your own as an example, their appearances I mean. Now for the actions. Imagine an angry, strict father who beats the child. Is that picture in your mind? Okay, now for the mother: The mother of this nameless, faceless child is a of a dotting kind, the kind who hugs and loves and spoils. Are you getting the picture? Well this mother is also a neat-freak, so when this child is learning to use the potty, and the child misses and makes mistakes the mother gets angry. Naturally enough this causes hostility. The child learns to hate his filthy body, and through it becomes impotent. But wait the story doesn't finish there. No, this nameless, faceless child grows up. He grows up angry, angry and overcompensating. He needs someone to blame, and boy does he find it.

Do you know who this nameless, faceless child is? No it's not me, it's my example of nurture over nature. Okay, now it's time to give him a name and a face. But, first you should guess. . . No? Alright I'll give you the answer. This child is none other than the infamous Adolf Hitler. And the sequence of events in childhood are what made him, to a certain extent, but it was when he was denied from attending a Jewish art college that he finally found someone to blame.

Now I'm not comparing my story to that of Hitler, but the cause and effect nature of the universe affected both of us, as it does everyone. So now's the time for my story of cause and effect:

First of all I just noticed that I have forgotten to mention my own name. So, here goes, I am Alan Cassidy, known for being near

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the start of an alphabetical list whether judged by first name or surname, and known for that alone.

In most ways I'm entirely unremarkable. I was a slight-bit-more-than-average in school almost the entire way up, and because of that I had zero credibility. I wasn't stupid enough for the dumb kids, nor smart enough for the nerds. And that made me a target of bullies. I was alone, always alone, isolated. As I said I was targeted by bullies, not just one bully, but many, many bullies. Bullies of all different kinds. Book-knockers. Lunch-Takers. Bus-trippers. Locker-tossers. Notice-posterers. Rumour-spreaders. Fight-starters. Trouble-makers. Stuff-saboteurs. And many more. Of course after a while it stops bothering you. You find avoidance routes within the school, figure out the tricks behind *their* tricks, gain pity from others and toughen up. And then eventually they grew tired.

Even after all that bullying I rose above it. There were no plots of revenge in my mind, never did I think that way. Never for a moment did I think it was my fault. Never once did I report it (That may be the wrong thing to do, but I knew I was tougher than that).

Through it I grew tough, tougher in body and mind. Even with my meagre intelligence and appalling social standing I graduated from high school with good B's and no thoughts of shooting up my school after bowling practice, or because I didn't like Mondays (In truth I was close with that one. I didn't like Tuesdays).

College was a completely different story:

When I was there I shone, shone like the sun through a magnifying glass. I wasn't sure what it was, but I believe that it was simply the universe making up for the rest of my school years by giving me the greatest college years that a dumb nerd like me could ever get. The universe made it up big time, simply put: I was in the zone. Everything worked out for me: Projects that were left until the last night before deadline got high marks, parties that in High School I never would've been invited to were begging me to go.

I was the party-starter, the project-helper, the procrastinator, and I was that which mattered most to me: I was welcome. I was welcome, welcomed by all, loved by all.

And yet I was lonely, yet I was ignored, unwelcome and hated.

How could these contradictions occur at the same time you ask? Well, that is a question I cannot answer, not for lack of verbal ability, but for lack of understanding. I did not know, did not understand, couldn't understand why I felt the way I did, and yet I did. But I have an idea:

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I believe it was because of other people, other people's falseness to be precise. I knew that with one wrong move I could be cast aside, like some one-hit wonder band, loved one minute, criticised the other. I knew that, that I could just as easily be hated, that I could lose everything that I had worked so hard to achieve, it could all be gone in a second. I didn't understand why it happened, but I knew it did. I knew that the life of the party could be considered dead to all there. It was insane! But possible. After all you see it every day, people being shunned from their clique for talking to the wrong person or saying the wrong thing, or simply on a whim. Shunned, shunned not only from their group but also left with the inability to join another. For once they are cast away they are dead, socially dead.

So instead of fading into some form of obscurity, I made a choice, a choice that I have stuck by, a choice that has in turn made me socially ignorant (For lack of a better word). I left my place at the top, leaving a clear void for all those fickle party-goers. For all I cared they could pick their own flavour of the month to replace me. All I know is I left, I left them before they could leave me. I left myself alone, unable to feign interest, alone amongst the group of me, myself and I.

But even though I quit at the peak I remained reliable. I was no longer the life of the party, but I was still reliable, still nice, nice to those who did not feign niceness when around me, those who did not pretend, those who did not show the usual qualities of a two-faced person (The qualities being: A big smile, a chirpy persona and a heart full of hate), to those I was reliable. Of course it wasn't just to those that I was reliable, I became reliable to the false people.

How dare you Alan?!!

Wait a second and let me explain, it's not what you think. I was doing it for me, doing it for myself. It was my way of rising above it you could say, rising above the fickleties of the fake.

My reliability interested me for a while, but I was not happy.

Lack of love was the reason. I had not found anyone, no one appealed to me. I had my more-than-modest share of girlfriends (All were during college), but none lasted long. They just didn't seem right, not in a 'she's weird' way, nor a beauty way (To be honest I wouldn't have cared if they were drop-dead gorgeous). It was just they didn't seem that interesting. They never had anything to talk about (That was something I thought was strange, since according to the stereotype all women did was talk), it was

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almost like I was dragging the conversation out of them and they were just sort of there, without opinion, emotion or interest. And that didn't suit me at all. I hate having to create conversations, if they are not natural then what's the point? I know this may sound slightly gay but - to me - an emotional connection is ten times more important than a physical one. I mean sex just isn't that important. I know it implies the survival of the species and all that jazz but I really don't think that women in nightclubs start off their night thinking:

"Oh my God I hope I meet a guy tonight so I can save the species."

That would be ridiculous. Obviously sex is natural in a relationship, but it should not be the be-all and end-all of relationships, talking is good (As long as it doesn't cut into T.V time).

But like I said, all through college I had not found a single girl that I could connect with emotionally (Physical on the other hand there were a share, enough to make up for the bad elementary, middle and high school times), then after college I headed into the world of work in a computer and office supplies store, where all I had to do was input the stock, manage the accounts and protect the computers. Since that was all I had to do I was bored, bored out of my mind. Nothing challenged me there, but yet I stayed there for a year and a half. She was why (No. Not Meghan, not yet), her, the first girl, the one I connected with on both a physical and emotional level, Jade Levinson.

Well what can I say about her? First thing: She's a heart-breaking bitch who ruined my life. Second thing: she was the one who made my life complete (For the relatively short time she was in it, before she became the heart-breaking bitch mentioned earlier). I know that seems strange, but then again life is strange. I was working in the computer and office supplies shop at the time, and she was a regular customer. She was one of those clumsy individuals with a computer. Every week she came in with her laptop and every week she had somehow managed to download the latest virus available. It was almost as though she clicked the big red button that appeared on the screen when you're on a risqué site (That was another reason I was into her, just from that I thought "Hmmm... What kind of site? If it's what I'm thinking she'd be very interesting."), and if that was the case she pushed it on a schedule, because every week without fail she had one, and every week - without fail - I would warn her and fix it. And of course like every other average-looking guy in the world I tried

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to use my position to gain some flirting time, so even though the job only took me two minutes I would milk it and make it take about an hour or two, so we could talk while she waited. And finally, near the end when I could no longer use the virus as an excuse to talk to her I would ask her out on a date. Now as I look back on it, I must admit I was insanely persistent. But she didn't seem to mind, probably loved the attention.

At the moment you may be wondering how I managed to connect with her on an emotional - and physical (Can't forget the physical) - level when it appears that I seemed to have simply crashed and burned every single time. Well, like I said: I was insanely persistent and eventually my persistence paid off.

It was the definition of insanity really (You know, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result) but I think that she probably only said yes in the first place because of pity and annoyance, but no matter what the reason, it was one foot in the door.

We talked, talked nonstop inside that little shop about everything as I pretended to type the keys of her laptop as if I was fixing it (Even though I had it done within the first 30 seconds). Yes we talked, talked about everything from music (More like debates when it came to the topic of music, she was very passionate about her taste in music. It was almost like she was trying to convert me to what she liked, and I admit I kind of admired her resolve. That was probably the clincher.) to politics (Of course that was always a short conversation. I mean, who really cares? Not me, nor her. The way I see it they are all a bunch of liars, parading around with the truth in their back pocket and speeches in the front) with bits and pieces of casual small talk when there was a silence.

I feel that personalities are what help bring people together, whether they clash or are identical. It's what makes up a couple. Well me and Jade were a bit of a clash when it came to music and hobbies but almost everything else we were the same.

It was uncanny, it was either polar opposites or the exact same. There was no in-between. Maybe that was the problem, people always say it's the little things that end a relationship, of course usually it's a build-up of small things, and that's probably what happened us, of course maybe - just maybe - she was simply a heart-breaking bitch.

Both are valid reasons.

But now is time to talk about the start.

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The start of what Alan? You've already explained how you got her on a date, is that not the start?

No, that was the beginning, not the start. That was the foot in the door. The start was my first attempt at getting through the door: The first date. Well here it goes:

I don't know about myself (It's pretty hard for males to judge that sort of thing) but she was more than hot that night, more than stunning, more than beautiful, she was unbelievable. I mean I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it was the same person who came into the store every week with a new virus on her laptop, but yet it was. So the only word I could muster up to describe her was 'wow' (If I was in a cartoon it would have probably been 'hominahominahomina' and a drool down my shirt), simple yet effective, and probably the only word I could have spoken at that particular time without mumbling, stuttering or drooling. It's not often I'm lost for words, but at that moment I needed a defibrillator built especially for my brain, because I'm pretty sure that for about 5 minutes I just stared as she called me to come on.

We were going out to dinner. I had arranged the entire thing, asked her what food she liked (Wasn't it just my bad luck that she liked Mexican. I swear my bowels have never been the same since), made it a more casual than formal affair by arranging it for 6 o'clock, and then I waited for her to arrive. I waited in my check shirt, suede jacket combo and black jeans. I felt I looked pretty damn spiffy (Note to self: Never ever, ever, ever use the word spiffy as a description about myself, or anybody for that matter), but that was nothing compared to her. Compared to her I wasn't prepared enough. Compared to her it was like I was wearing pyjamas and had a bed-head.

She wore a black dress with a functionless white belt around the waist and modest height shoes (And by modest I mean a couple of centimetres lower than stilettos, thus leaving you with the ability to walk well while drunk). Her hair was a silky, smooth blonde and her skin a near pale peach (A real pure pale that went really well with the blood red lipstick that she was wearing, pure and wholesome. At least that's what I thought). Amazing really, somehow she had made it a formal occasion. Even though I had felt it was a pity date she made me feel different. At that moment she was there for me.

Although for all I know she could have been trying to make an ex - or even a current boyfriend - jealous. But even so, I could use my boyish good looks (Yeah right) and charm (I like to think so) to convince her my way.

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As far as I saw it that date was a roaring success. I mean it must have been, after all I got another one (That on its own was enough to convince me of some form of success, but that wasn't all that happened that night. Let's just say it was a damn, damn good night), and another, and another, and another, and then she moved in with me. Couple more dates after that we broke up on less than friendly terms, but that's a story for later.

But for now it's all about me and Jade's first date. So back to that.

It was in a normal Mexican restaurant, a place called Jorge Allesandro's.

It was a quaint, quiet little place. You know the kind. The kind of place recommended by friends, friends who neglect to mention how incredibly overpriced it is, and how the food will launch an attack the next day, like some sort of Trojan horse ambush on your insides.

But, for that night everything was perfect, I didn't even gripe about the expense, in fact I even remember telling her to order whatever she wanted (Of course I was secretly hoping that she ordered salad or something cheap, because if she didn't it would probably cost me a month's wages), this seemed to please her (May have even been a deal breaker) and then to top it off I asked whether she wanted any wine.

She did.

I did a bit of preparation for that particular moment. I researched wines, sorted them on occasion, price, type of food that should be eaten with them and even country speciality. I politely asked her to order her food, making sure not to sound like some sort of stingy, rushing bastard. I made sure to add in why I wanted her to order her food straight after asking her whether she wanted wine. I explained the intentions of both questions.

She seemed to understand, but in hindsight I'm not sure if she did, but nevertheless she smiled a toothless smile and nodded.

At that particular moment I hit a bit of a hitch.

What hitch Alan? How could you hit a hitch Alan? You had a plan, how?

Well as most people should know, as soon as you make a plan the universe tries to end it. After all the universe thrives on chaos, and anyone who tries to avoid chaos gets targeted. Naturally enough.

Well the hitch was this: The food she ordered was not among any of my wine research. Even if it was , the insanely overpriced

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restaurant known as Jorge Allesandro's had the worst wine selection that I have ever seen. It was almost as bad as:

"Hello. Could you tell me what your wine selection's like?"

"Well. . . Uh. . . We've got red. . . white. . . and pink"

It was pathetic, beyond pathetic. It was bad business. But that didn't matter much, I kept pretending to know what I was doing. She ordered her food and I picked the wine.

I stayed confident, although she didn't make it easy. The dress. It was the dress. The dress and the woman wearing it. It put me off. It was unbelievable. Astonishing. My blood was rushing and I needn't tell you where.

She was definitely out of my league, in fact we probably weren't even the same sport.

Anywho, we ate - slowly -, we talked - smoothly - and I, well, I stared at her every chance I got (I didn't mean to. It just happened).

I got past the hitch nevertheless. My staring wasn't noticed - much -, and I walked her back to the door of her home (For me it was a good sign, a sign of trust. But I wasn't one bit ready for what happened next).

I got a goodnight kiss too, but that didn't mean goodnight. I got into her home - and much more. It was good going, and there was more to come in the weeks to follow.

It's amazing how things work really. You can tell a lot from how a relationship starts. At the time I thought it was the best way it could ever begin, but now I think it was possibly the worst way it could have begun. I mean: Sex on a first date? What would those five words tell you? Well as I look back it tells me that she was approval seeking. It was almost like that was her icebreaker. Maybe she was insecure, and that was how she overcame it. But whatever way you look at it, it was pitiable. It's not often you can feel pity for someone pretty enough to never have to work a day of her life. But she still gains pity.

Heart-breaking bitch.

At this point I feel the need to skip over the weeks between the first date and the last date as they are of no real interest. Instead I will go straight to how she became the heartbreaking bitch I knew and loved.

One could say that love is a fickle thing. Most people who are in love would disagree and say that love has no beginning or end (For

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people like that who are reading: That is a circle, idiot), but that is what I believe.

Love is a game for winners - in my opinion. It is a game that is played even though it will just annoy you in the end. I think of it as Monopoly: Everybody starts out with nothing, and then no matter what way you play the game it's always the banker who wins.

The answer: The winner cheats. Love works on the same principle. No matter how good your position is in the game you always want a better one.

And that is how I see love. You'd probably call me a pessimist or simply cranky. But I'm a realist. Nobody wants to settle. People want the biggest, best thing that they can get. They want the rockstar, the billionaire, the sports star.

They want the best the world can offer.

But eventually people just settle. I settled. I admit it. As far as I was concerned I had gotten the best I could possibly get with Jade, and I was happy to stay that way.

Unfortunately, the feeling wasn't mutual.

So, here comes the moment of heartbreak. The couple of seconds before my heart broke I felt like I was jumping out of a plane, ready to parachute onto a paradise island, but on the moment and a couple of seconds after it I felt like I jumped without a parachute.

It's strange how things can make you feel. First I felt the pulse of adrenaline. It was like I was running on something else, like some almighty high. But then you take the plunge and it just disappears, and you're left naked and vulnerable.

We were back at Jorge Alessandro's (Don't ask me why I went back after the bowel implosion I experienced last time. The only reason I can come up with is nostalgia and superstition). Luckily for me there was no hitch this time. This time she ordered the right thing and the restaurant had the right wine. It felt like it was going to be a good night, but it was just the shining good before the horrible catastrophe.

I had everything planned out (Sort of. To be honest I was really running on my gut instinct. Of course that probably wasn't the best idea since I was in the same restaurant that had managed to empty them entirely a year and a half beforehand). Spontaneity and planning were involved in the night. A perfect mix of both, melded together seamlessly, I couldn't tell the difference between either.

Nothing was safe that night. Nothing predictable. She should have said yes. She should have. Everything was perfectly

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chaotically surprising and interesting. Everything was new. She should have said yes, but who cares.

She should have said yes.

Said yes to what Alan?

What do you think? The only question that matters. And what should have become obvious to you is that it was the question which led to the heartbreak, its answer to be precise. No prizes for naming the question.

I asked her to marry me. That was my question. The only question that really matters. That was my jump from the plane. That was what caused the adrenaline to pump. The fear. The uncertainty. The unknown. I didn't know what was going to happen, but like every man who has ever asked that question I assumed that I already knew what the answer would be.

How wrong I was.

Of course I had prepared for the eventuality that was 'no'. You have to be prepared for it. I was jumping from a plane but I had prepared so that even if my parachute failed I would land relatively unharmed in the water. I had prepared, somewhat.

I was prepared for certain replies, certain excuses, certain reasons. She might say no because she didn't want to be tied down just yet. I was prepared for that. She might say no because she was afraid of real commitment. I was prepared for that also. In no way was I prepared for what she actually said. I was not ready for the reason, no guy would have been.

Her reason was entirely unexpected.

This was her reason for saying no (I'm sure you will be as unprepared as I was): She had already said yes to another guy a month ago.

Another guy?!! She had been dating another guy?!! She had said yes to another guy?!!

It wasn't a joke, and even if it was some sort of sick joke it wasn't funny.

It was a serious moment in my life, one which had caused me utter embarrassment. I had went the whole nine yards. The ring was more than three times my monthly salary. The church date had been reserved (In hindsight that was definitely over the top). I even got down on one knee for Christsakes!! But instead of coming out of the restaurant engaged I came out dumped and down a helluva lot of money.

Apparently, the other guy - the guy she said fucking yes to - had been dating her for a month and a half (I recommend you re-read what I said about her reason. If you do you will without a

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doubt realise that the heartbreaking bitch known as Jade Levinson said yes to a guy she had been dating for fifteen days).

Ain't that just a kick in the crotch?

Yeah, that's what I thought. And she chose him.

I can tell you the exact moment my heart broke into pieces that night. I know because the clock in Jorge Alessandro's was 26 minutes fast, and on the clock in Jorge Alessandro's a chime rang out to mark twelve o'clock. And that, ladies and gentlemen was the exact time my heart broke into a million pieces.

11:34. A time that will forever haunt my life. Now, every time I see those numbers on a watch or clock I lose it. I smash the clock or watch into a million pieces, just like my heart. This has led to me being banned from a few people's houses, but what can you do? Every time I see those terrible, terrible numbers, I think of the heart-breaking history behind them and just can't help it.

After that awful night I broke down entirely. I stopped going to work, lied in a foetal position, refused to eat, destroyed anything that reminded me of her, and led a lonely, damaged, depressed life, then I fell apart. Dreams and reality became indistinguishable from one another. I was staring into the abyss. As far as I could see my life was over. There was no one around who was able to get me back. There was no one to do anything. I was stuck. If I had a gun I probably would have ended it. I was too much of a coward to be a jumper or hang myself. Pills were a clean way to go, so I tried it. But it didn't work. I ended up in hospital.

Jade was the one who found me. She couldn't even let me die in peace. Selfish bitch. She called an ambulance and when it arrived she left. She put her key for the apartment in my pocket and disappeared.

When I woke up in the hospital my parents were there. They smiled when they saw me. To them it was lucky I was still alive. To me it was unlucky.

After my stay in the hospital I had to go back to my parents house. They didn't trust me to stay on my own anymore. They would keep an eye on me. My mother was so disappointed. She couldn't believe I'd even think about ending it. When I was recovered she shouted at me for a good hour and a half about how selfish I was. She knew about me and Jade, all she had to say about that was that I shouldn't give the whore the satisfaction of committing suicide over her. And I had to agree. No matter how much I loved Jade she had betrayed me, so why should I punish myself? She was the one who deserved it.

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From what I've heard about Jade it appears that she entered an abusive relationship.

It feels good to know the universe fixed it.

After that realisation and a month at my parents I was back to normal. I quit my job in the computer and office supplies shop, thus I no longer saw that heartbreaking whore every week. I became contented. Yes, contented.

You may remember the wild horse that has been starved and beaten so that through mistreatment it becomes tame. Yes? No? Well I have said it again now, and with good reason.

For the defining moment of my life as a wild horse ended at 11:34 on a carpeted restaurant floor in front of a woman I loved who turned me down.

At 11:35 I was tame. The word 'risk' disappeared from my internal dictionary. I was now driven by the words 'conform', 'safe', 'schedule' and 'plan'.

From that moment on I did not step one toe out of line. If I had a plan, and something went wrong I would back away in a calm and orderly fashion, towards the emergency exits. And through that life went on.

I quit the job in the computer and office supplies store and moved away.

Within another two weeks I got my safe job at Wontech. This job helped me to conform to a factory mould and let me schedule my life and avoid spontaneity at all costs. The tame horse became all that there was.

And so that brings me back to where I started. Safe. Always safe. The moments in which I had taken MY life into MY hands had ended in disaster and thus prevented me from being able to do anything of that sort ever again. Not for a woman, not for anything. Not even for her. Yeah, her. That girl. The one. The one I wanted. The one I needed. The one that would change my life back to wild. The one who was out of my league, but in my life. Out of my reach, but within my grasp.

She was in my grasp, always in it. I just never had the ability to close my fist. I couldn't. I wouldn't. It would not have been conforming, nor would it have been scheduled, and definitely not safe. But the universe always has a way of intervening, doesn't it?

Fate. Coincidence. Accident. God. Karma. Call it what you want. I, myself don't call it anything. Why would I want to call it

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something? There was no point in calling it something. If I did it would lose its power, its relevance. I believe it has much more power and reason if it remains unnamed.

All that matters is why. The why is what's important. Not the name, nor the what. The why is the only question that really needs an answer.

To me the why was the means to an end. The horror and hope one could say. The shock and awe, like when Jesus was crucified. He was killed horribly and without real reason, but it made others see the good for the future. The Hope. Death and Resurrection. That's one way to see it. The means to an end, an end pre-defined by the universe. The catalyst for action, for spontaneity, for mistakes without retreat, for my love for her to finally reveal itself, for me to jump out of that plane without a parachute and still not give a damn whether I live or die.

To me that's true love: Caring about someone so much that you wish them happiness in their life, even if it's away from you. And I must admit I was fully willing to accept that, willing to accept that I would not be there to see her happy, that I would be overlooked and forgotten. And I think that was what made all the difference.

I was ready to love, ready to be overlooked, ready to be forgotten.

I was fully willing to accept that life. As long as she was happy I would stay contented. Happiness would be beyond me, only with her could I be happy.

That may seem a bit melodramatic - like some evil twin featuring soap opera - , but it's the way I saw it. There was no one else for me. The leagues (Leagues? Is this Moby Dick?) between us didn't matter. The on-again off-again boyfriends didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Nothing, except her.

But alas, now I must take a leap back in time, a leap back to childhood.

Why Alan?

Because that's where everything begins. The start.

Now let's go back to my childhood:

I was a happy child, born on the ninth of March. Right on time. Apparently I was a painless birth, at least that's what my mother said. I'm not sure if she was happy with that or disappointed. You may be wondering how any person could be disappointed with painless labour, but my mother probably was, she would have wanted

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the knowledge that is - supposedly - bestowed on a woman after a painful birth. She didn't get another chance to experience the pain, as I was an only child. Apparently they simply didn't want another child, selfish bastards.

So I grew up alone, no siblings that would also be fighting for my parent's affection, no rivals. Just me and my parents.

My dad, David, was a mechanic. He was a patient, calm sort of man, who to this day I have never seen angry. Annoyed, but never angry. He was the kind of guy who instead of giving out to you for doing something wrong would just make you feel guilty and then leave you unpunished.

My mom on the other hand was his polar opposite, but I must admit they did work well together. She was an impatient, on-the-edge sort of woman. Simply put: She was a control freak. I wouldn't have been surprised if she had about ten gastric ulcers at all times. She was always stressed out. There was always something to worry about, always something. To this day I have wondered what would happen if she smoked some marijuana and tried to relax. Would she calm down? Or would she become even more stressed? Like some sort of meth-taking Energiser bunny.

She wasn't really an angry person, just easily agitated and quick on punishment. One time I got caught painting the neighbour's cat (I was giving him racing stripes) and she saw me. She freaked out. She sent me to my room to wait for punishment. She liked to make them fit. If I broke a plate she would make me glue it back together, then break the rest of the plates that matched and glue those too. For the cat-painting thing she made me put Tippex over the word cat in every single one of our six-years worth of Cat Weekly. It took me hours, but I must admit it gave me a need to show creativity in the things I do.

I did that through computers. When I was ten I designed a game, a flash game that could be played online. It was called Potato Fight. It was a fighting game where you fought as a potato - which could be customised - against a super-potato. Life points were shown by the amount of skin and spud left. The finishing moves were awesome too. In one of them you could pull out a masher and . . . mashed your opponent. Another involved a deep-fat fryer, and the third a peeler.

It was an internet success, so naturally enough I earned no money from it, although I almost got a job working for Naughty Dog, but then they found out I was ten. Unlucky really.

But back to childhood. From the mention of eccentric punishments you'd probably think I would grow up strange (Like the nameless, faceless child mentioned earlier) but it was the opposite. I was

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as normal as normal could be. Those eccentric punishments only happened once every four years or so. When I did do something bad/wrong I usually tried to be caught by Dad rather than Mom. That way I'd avoid any real punishment and just get a guilt trip.

But that punishment-avoiding became harder when I got to middle school.

Why you ask? Well the answer is a simple and almost predictable one: My teacher was Ms Shannon Cassidy, my Mom.

It's hard to stay out of trouble in school when your Mom is teaching you. That could probably also explain the bullying, but it does not explain how they avoided her detection. But anyhow, there are two ways a teacher with a son or daughter in their class can go:

1. She/he can give him/her special treatment, e.g. Be nicer to him/her than other students, let him/her off punishment for homework not done etc.

Or

2. She/he could come down much, much harder on their son/daughter in order to prove a point to the other students and teachers. If homework was not done then him/her would get twice the punishment of a normal student, also excuses would not be accepted (She/he would know that they are not true) and talking in her/his class would not be condoned under any circumstances.

No prizes prize for guessing which kind of teacher my Mom was. I'll tell you one thing : She was the harshest, strictest teacher I have ever had in my whole damn life, and it didn't help that - at the time - I was kind of a trouble child. I was cheeky, disobedient and loud. What more could a mother ask for? I suppose she had to experience the pain of childbirth in some other way , and me being a wild child was how the universe made up for it.

I made sure my parents had their hands full. I was being bullied and they didn't know it, and that was how I made sure they paid attention every other moment. Acting out. Rebel with a reason. I wanted to see my dad angry and I wanted them to notice me.

Luckily for them I lost interest in the bad kid persona and settled down. I was content as a wild child. You could say that that's where I first got the taste of contentment. I lost patience with being content as a wild child. Why? I do not know, but I know that the second time I would experience contentment I would not simply lose patience. I would become trapped in it.

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Things happen to stick you in a rut. Nobody notices when those things happen, but when they do they engulf you. I mean I knew nothing but the life I had. The contentment. That was all there was, until something happened.

The record stopped skipping you could say. Life found a way. But all that matters is that everything changed.

The contentment disappeared, fear took its place, then anger, then worry and then finally I went to where I wanted to go: Happiness. This is what happened:

It all just came upon me as I said before, while I tried living a seemingly normal day.

I woke up at 8, had a shower, got dressed, had breakfast, watched the news and went about the rest of my day, unaware of how much was going to change.

But it all happened anyway, happened suddenly, something that was probably beyond any of our control, something spontaneous, chaotic, unpredictable. It was a tragedy to all lost in the blaze that engulfed the building of Wontech. Those on the topmost floors did not make it out alive, and even those who did, left something of themselves behind. It came as quite a shock. The fire was so big that it even got a headline spot on national papers and news programmes (Wouldn't you know it wasn't on the news I watched). It was almost another one of those "Where were you when it happened?" sort of tragedies.

I knew where I was, luckily enough for me it was not within that building. Ten minutes later and I would have undoubtedly died in my 24th floor office along with the hundreds of others who did.

Meghan was caught in the blaze. When I got to the building (Still unaware of what had happened) I saw the smoke and immediately my first thought was of her. As with any fire there were onlookers, clasping their hands over their mouths as they watched the drama unfold, some praying for those trapped inside the building, others looking on with eager faces (Pyromaniacs trying to get their fill) and then there was the fire brigade, the heroes of the hour, the brave souls who were willing to risk their lives on a daily basis (But probably praying for extensive news coverage so they can get their face on the T.V and their words in the paper).

I don't remember much about my behaviour as I watched from outside the burning Wontech, but what I can remember are some of my immediate reactions, the strongest of which was my shouting for Meghan, praying that she was alright, hoping, crying for her, shouting to the heavens so they may take me instead. Those were my

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immediate reactions, probably the immediate reactions of any person who was hopelessly in love with a woman whose life was apparently in danger.

I watched for hours and hours upon end as I saw them putting out the fire and dragging out some of the survivors. I assumed that Meghan would have been one of the first out of the place, she was usually situated on the third floor, which would give her a good chance of making it out, but the mind of a man in panic is not as easily convinced.

Soon the firemen stopped their search of the building, knowing that all that would be left was corpses. I scoped the crowd, keeping the ambulances and gurneys within my sight, scoping them all out, checking for even a glimpse of her.

Then, I saw her.

She was badly burned, her face scarred deep, but I still knew it was her. I knew from her eyes, those kind, caring ones (I could spot her from miles by those eyes alone). She was sitting upright on a gurney about to be wheeled into the back of an ambulance. I raced over without another word, before they could close the doors and I spoke:

"Meghan, thank God you're okay -- "

"Oh Alan, Don't look at me. . . I'm hideous" She said as tears started flowing from those kind, caring eyes of hers.

"Don't be ridiculous, you're still your same beautiful self. . . You're lucky you're alive and well."

She got angry at this:

"YOU CALL THIS WELL!!" She said as she pointed to the burns on her face. I may not have been a burn expert but they didn't look very healable, there would always have been some trace.

"I'm sorry. . . I know you're angry but, what I meant was that that's only physical. . . So much worse things could have happened. . . You could be dead. . . I could have been dead. . . And what would I do if I didn't have you to borrow my milk and drink my coffee?. . .I don't think I could live without you."

Those last words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, but once they were said I could not take them back. She had heard me clearly, I knew it. I had made her smile with the milk and coffee line (Even though it had hurt her she seemed happy), but I had shown my real feelings in that last slip of the tongue. I could not take those words back, nor did I know how to justify them towards another meaning, so I left them hang. I always had a feeling she knew I had a thing for her, but after that slip she knew for sure. Before she could reply she was whisked away in the ambulance.

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She knew I loved her, what was I to do?

I did what I thought was the right thing. I let her rest in the hospital.

I heard from one of her secretary friends that she had gotten some surgery to reduce the appearance of some of the burns. I knew she would need to rest after an experience like that, so against my first instinct I let her rest. I did however send her flowers, as many as I could muster from the same place without looking like a stalker (That turned out to be enough to fill her entire bedside with flowers. Lucky I knew her favourite flowers too). After two days of letting her rest alone without me I went to visit her, I felt that any time after that would have been disrespectful.

At the time I was planning to justify my appearance by pretending I was checking to see if she got the flowers, but it did not come to that. I walked in the door of the four-patient room and looked around, not fully sure if I got the right room, but then I saw the left-hand corner of the room. There was a wicker basket filled with blue roses and a few more bouquets (Mine being the giant wicker basket filled with blue roses that was almost three times as big as anything else given to her) and, lying on the bed in a torso-upright position as she checked on the person who had just entered the room (Who being me) was Meghan Connolly, that girl. The girl with the kind, caring eyes and the flawless smile looked up at me while as her kind, caring eyes twinkled off the sunlight shining through the window near her and sparkled my way. I had walked in the door nervously but after seeing her look the way she did (While I had completely forgotten about the scars that were still visible on her face) I approached her bedside with a smile, a smile that only she could ever have planted on my face, no matter how I felt inside I would smile, and I always will.

"So . . . I see you got the roses I sent." I said through an unrelenting smile that was just stuck there, stuck there without my will.

Just stuck there.

"Yeah. . . I did. . . Thanks. . . But are you sure you sent enough? I mean you didn't have to be so stingy." She said as she smiled, not half as big a smile as mine, but with the same feeling behind it.

"Yeah I probably should have sent more. . . I mean one basket definitely isn't enough."

She laughed, and I laughed along. Then something came over me. I don't know what, why or how but it was like something had changed, something within me. As I looked at her smiling and laughing something changed. It was almost like at that moment the

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tame horse became wild. I don't know how to explain it, just that something changed, changed me, a switch went off in my mind and a new risk-taking voice appeared in my head, a voice that exerted nearly all control over my movements. At that moment the wild horse took over (And wouldn't you know - as though through some sort of weird work of the universe - it was 11:34 in the morning).

I saw her there, looking down at her knees. She was almost waiting for something, something that she wanted to happen. I didn't notice any of these signs until after I did what I did, but those minor details didn't matter anyway.

I kissed her.

She was looking down at her knees sadly. I sat in the chair opposite her.

I rose, she looked up and then I did it. It happened against all my better judgement, but still it happened. A spontaneous moment in the usually scheduled life of Alan Cassidy was not something to be forgotten. She looked up in surprise, bordering on sheer disbelief. But I knew it had made its mark. If she hadn't heard what I said right before she was whisked away in the ambulance then this was completely unexpected, but she had heard it, and on some level it was expected. She looked at me once more as if something had suddenly clicked in her head. Then *she* did something unexpected.

She kissed me back.

I can honestly say that after this strange - but magical - moment in the four-patient room of hospital my life was happy. It was more than steady and scheduled, it was happy and spontaneous. That something that clicked in *her* head was probably the jolt of reliable.

I was the reliable guy. The nice guy. The one who was always there for her (I sound like the damn F*R*I*E*N*D*S theme). The one who truly loved her, no matter whether she was scarred or not. The one who was always forgotten about. The one who was left to pick up the pieces. The one who protected her. And now the one who was with her(My happily ever after you could say).

Just goes to show that nice guys sometimes do finish first, but what also must be learned from this little story is this: The wild horse beats the tame one each and every time.