

SPIN CONTROL

By Alan Ilagan

February - March 1998

Amid swirling rumors of drunken driving, sexual shenanigans, run-ins with the police, a possible move to Rochester, NY, and the umpteenth fizzling of his latest romance, Alan Ilagan is once again the calm eye of a dramatic hurricane. In his first official interview since August 1997, Alan puts a definitive spin on the start of 1998, and addresses the questions of his current state of mind, his controversial trips to Rochester, and whether or not he's really stopped smoking.

He is late. I was told he was never late. Even before he arrives he is turning the stories and assumptions upside down. Such is the story of Alan's life. Just when we think we have him figured out, he offers a new side, a new outlook, a "new thing". His latest turn is that of a self-destructive, downward-spiral-bound psychotic, and no one, not even Alan himself, knows if he has bottomed out.

He arrives at the restaurant without fanfare. A few heads look up from their plates to watch as the boy in sunglasses breezes into the place. He wears a striped sweater and a pair of faded jeans. Easing gracefully into his chair, he removes the sunglasses and orders a screwdriver.

"See, I am eating," he remarks with a sly smile. His eyes are a little bloodshot, and the darkness beneath them hints at restless nights. "Sorry I'm late. It's been a rough... well, month." There is a weariness to his tone, though it is tempered with a healthy dose of humor. He seems in perfect control, a far cry from the hysterical sobbing mess of which I had been warned I might encounter. He doesn't pretend to be happy, but he is certainly not deliberately bitter either. Once crowned the 'Master of Manipulation', Alan will shock with his easy-going forthright openness and the way he wears his wounded heart on his sleeve.

"Ever since I can remember, I was taught that being honest and open to what you feel was a sign of weakness. And for the longest time I refused to admit if I liked, much less *loved*, someone. In the past few years I had to re-learn everything, and it has not been easy."

Those close to him can attest to how far he has come, but many point out his demanding nature and notorious mood swings to illustrate how far he must go.

"Alan *lives* in extremes," says one friend. "There is hardly ever a happy medium or healthy middle-ground. It's all or nothing, and if it's not working out... well, he tortures himself."

In the past he used the melodrama to leave an impression, but of late it has ceased being a game, and when the real hurt comes along it is unclear how well he will handle it. Following his triumphant Royal Rainbow World Tour, Alan seemed to be easing into civilian life quite successfully. He settled into Boston, making his condo his home at last. Returning to work at Structure, he made the most of the new stability, going out with friends and having people over for dinner and drinks. But it all had the air of a suspended life. Alan made no motions to secure a career-oriented job in writing; he was enjoying himself but going nowhere.

The fall of 1997 found him without his annual autumn romance, but in spite of this he seemed happier than he had ever been. Even though some noticed a growing propensity for drinking, no one saw the calamitous events of early 1998 coming. But by January, the seeds of the reckoning had been sown. One confidante points to Alan's re-union with his Uncle Roberto, whom he hadn't seen since his "desertion" on the Asian leg of his world tour, as the beginning of the downfall.

"My Uncle and I... have a strange relationship. It's strained at times," Alan admits. While nibbling on his Caesar salad he chooses his words carefully, guardedly, as if afraid of saying too much. Without giving specific details, it is apparent that while he loves his Uncle, there remains much tension between them. "It's really disheartening to realize that no matter how much you love someone, no matter how much you give to someone, and no matter how much of yourself you forsake for someone, there is no way to guarantee that you'll get that love back. Eventually, you just have to give up trying, for your own sanity." There have been whispers of his Uncle's violent alcoholic behavior, the latest of which seems to have involved Alan himself.

"He called me from Washington, where he was staying with his Uncle," tells one friend. "He was audibly upset – I could hear his Uncle screaming in the background. Alan tried to play it off as funny, but you could hear the fear in his voice, and the sadness and not knowing what to do. I don't know what his Uncle did to him, but I'd never heard Alan like that before. He sounded on the verge of tears, but what could I do for him hundreds of miles away?"

Many have questioned why Alan continues to return to his Uncle when it almost always ends in disaster.

“He’s such an interesting person ~ he represents the path I never chose and it’s fascinating to watch and witness. I view him in awe, and relief that it’s not me there,” Alan says. Still, there is a limit to the pain one puts oneself through, but Alan will acknowledge none of this and is quick to change the subject.

“My Uncle will never be able to return my love,” he offers. “He doesn’t know how and he doesn’t want to learn, but he is family, and he can never change that, despite his embarrassment of me. No, forget that.” Does this have anything to do with Alan’s sexuality? He hedges, then claims ignorance. It is one of the only times he will refuse comment on an intimately-probing question. Whatever the case, Alan’s trip to Washington, D.C. was the jump-off point for his tumble, and he returned to the Northeast disillusioned and somewhat bitter. He decided to make a quick trip to Rochester, NY to visit long-time friend and personal manager Ann Agresta, and her sister Gina. Alan proclaimed it was a trip to “get a little cock” to raise his, err, spirits.

+++++++

It was at Club Marcella’s on January 22, 1998 when Alan caught the eye of a man in overalls and a baseball cap. Alan is the first to admit that the guy was hardly his usual type. “He wasn’t well-dressed at all, and he had on the two most annoying items of clothing for me, but when he smiled and I looked into his eyes, it suddenly ceased to matter what he wore.” Alan was smitten, and Gina introduced herself to the man, bringing him over to meet Alan, who was unusually flustered and embarrassed by the whole scene.

“Alan, this is Patrick. I’ll leave you two alone now,” and Gina was gone. Despite the awkwardness, both of them hit it off and, according to one eye-witness, were “madly kissing” before Alan exited the club with Patrick’s phone number in his hand, written on a cocktail napkin. The next day, Alan and Gina had dinner at Boom, the ultra-chic restaurant where Patrick works as a chef. Alan had hinted that they might be there, and Patrick sent out a special appetizer to them. For the first time Alan seemed to be at the beginning of a relationship that wasn’t obsessively one-sided.

One of the other chefs confirms, “Patrick was very careful and concerned with their order – making sure everything was perfect. It seemed to be for someone important.”

Too nervous to eat (the start of his so-called “starvation period”), Alan instead filled up with three white Russians. Before departing the restaurant, he and Gina stopped in the kitchen at Patrick’s request. They agreed to meet up at the end of the night.

At this point it seems that Alan was beginning to think of it as more than just a casual sex-fling. The six-hour distance between Rochester and Boston was the only thing that stood in the way. Some wondered why he was even toying with the idea of getting involved when he was scheduled to return to Boston the next day.

Gina had this to say: “It was a challenge. He usually only wants what he can’t have, but I think in this situation it’s different. I think that if he had the chance to be with his guy, he would want him. It wouldn’t be just a fuck-me thing.”

That night, Alan returned to the restaurant alone, and Patrick took him to the Avenue Pub, where they met up with Patrick’s roommates, one of whom had been Patrick’s boyfriend for four years. Regardless, Alan managed to charm them all, and while he would eventually learn that he was perceived as a cheap, man-stealing threat, for the remainder of the evening everyone seemed to get along fine.

Reports vary on what exactly occurred at the Pub. Some say it seemed as if Patrick were “showing off his prize”; others claim that Alan was the one displaying signs of possessiveness. Neither of these rings true to what I know of Alan and Patrick. The one person who commented on record about that night claims, “They seemed like... close. They smiled. Patrick laughed at a lot of what Alan was saying. They seemed happy, like they had known each other for longer than a night.”

Hardly anyone has seen Alan show affection publicly, and certainly not of the physical sort, but it is said that Patrick had his arm around him, and at times even the notoriously-cold Alan rested his hand on Patrick’s knee. This from a man who one shrugged off any physical endearments with a sarcastic quip or cutting comment, and who only recently admitted to learning “how to hug back”.

At around 1 AM, they left the Pub. Alan didn’t return to Ann and Gina’s until 9 AM that morning. Exactly what went on during those hours remains unclear. Some say they fucked, some say they did everything but that. What’s apparent is that it profoundly affected Alan in ways both good and bad. He even spent an extra night in Rochester with the hope of seeing Patrick again. It never happened, and that is what many have said put Alan over the edge.

Suzie Ko, Alan's longest-known friend and sister-figure, offered this after hearing about his latest romantic endeavor: "He was elated, and obsessed, and a little discombobulated because he didn't know what to do next... He asked advice instead of going ahead and doing stuff. That was a first; usually he just does things and then tells us about them after the fact."

Returning to Boston unsure of where he stood with Patrick, Alan launched into his usual obsession campaign. His well-known need for order and clarity in full-effect, Alan wrote a string of letters to Patrick, asking for something, *anything*, to clue him in as to how Patrick felt. Instead of going through with his plan, he showed the letters to friends in Boston to seek their advice.

Long-time pal Christopher Vaeth, who managed the Puerto Rico and San Francisco legs of Alan's Royal Rainbow World Tour, had this to say about the letters he read: "I think they were heartfelt and honest, and there was a purpose behind them; not only to reveal Alan's true feelings, which they do, but more importantly, strategic measures to gauge Patrick's response to their shared night together."

The person who probably had to deal with the brunt of Alan's emotional mayhem was Kimberley Caola. A close confidante since September 97', Kim has arguably become his best friend in Boston, and when Alan came back she was there to pick up the pieces, taking him to museums and coffeehouses galore. After reading some of the letters he intended to send, she offered this on their contents: "I'd have to say one big word: Fear. I would run screaming in the other direction if someone wrote them to me. Alan's poster should be up in post offices everywhere, not for sexually lewd acts, but rather to make sure that he doesn't do any more foolish mailing."

Simon Towers echoes those sentiments. "I felt scared for Patrick. After such a short engagement of knowing Alan, Alan was about to bombard this poor man little man with these decisions to make. The letters were very powerful, particularly to someone who has just known Alan for a short amount of time."

In the end, Alan sent none of these initial letters. (For a time, his 'Obsession' project was to be a collection of these letters; Alan has since given up the idea.)

"He's co-dependent," says one confidante. "He wants to feel needed and when someone shows him attention and love, he jumps on it... Sometimes it can be dangerous when the other person doesn't feel the same way, and you can lose your mind."

Alan has never dealt well with uncertainty. The not-knowing is what really got to him. The man who has repeatedly been crowned 'Best Dressed' started going out in torn flannel pants, sweatshirts, and, (gasp!) sneakers. Friends in Boston were said to be "stunned" to find him in such disarray. He stopped eating and sleeping, his hair was disheveled, and he had no desire to get up in the morning. Still, some took it as yet another one of Alan's melodramatic, meaningless emotional stunts.

"To be honest, I erred on the side of apathy," recalls Chris. "I noticed it, I was a little bit worried, but I didn't pay too much attention to it. I had no sense of the emotions involved in that one night, for I thought it meant to Alan simply that... one night."

Kim and Simon were the two who had the most contact with Alan during his brief return to Boston, and it is clear that they were unsure how best to help him. After toting Alan along on a futile, failed fiasco of a trip to the coffeehouse, Kim had this to say: "Never bring Alan anywhere where he requires a pillow and a blankie.... It's nice to know we live in a world where bald men in overalls with drooling dogs can wreak emotional havoc on otherwise-normal people. That week was visibly horrible to Alan, but infinitely worse for those near him. It was very hard to be helpless."

On the sight of Alan's indifference towards clothing and appearance, Simon had but one thing to say: "Alan committed fashion suicide."

Eventually, for his own mental-well-being, he sent a letter despite his friends' warnings. Receiving no reply, he followed the advice of Suzie and had Gina call Patrick to find out what was going on. Reportedly, Patrick was still interested and wondered why Alan hadn't called him. It was a much-needed dose of encouragement, but in hindsight it may have done more damage than good. Says Gina, "It just made Alan try harder. He just goes further with the letters, plotting, and all that stuff."

Originally he was to be searching for a writing job, but with his lovesick state of mind, he put everything on hold, perhaps wisely.

"He was in no condition to move ahead in life. I mean, if you can't sit through a dinner without running to the bathroom to cry, how can you go for a job interview?" Questions remained over why Alan was so upset over the situation; he never received an outright rejection. In fact, he spoke to Patrick a few times on the phone and seemed happy with the conversations. There was something else going on, something much deeper and affecting than a simple bout of one-night-stand regret. Not many people cry for

days over someone they just met, and it was about much more than Alan's supposed need for romance. The reason for such heavy feelings was rooted in his sketchy past.

"When I spent time with Patrick, I was in shock over how nice and how *good* a person could be. *No one* had ever made me feel so safe and warm. And even if it was just false affectation on his behalf, or something he did with everyone else, well, it still doesn't change what it did for me," claims Alan.

For one rumored to have been a street hustler for the better part of 1996, and whose "relationships" with men had always been dysfunctional at best, Patrick must have seemed perfect. What complicated matters further was that Alan initially "just wanted sex, a one-night-stand," says Gina. "And that's what he got, so I don't understand why this is so... why it's so stressed." Anyone who knows him realizes that Alan is rarely ruled by his libido. "[Patrick] must have done something good for him, not sexually, but emotionally." And there-in lay the back-lash of his repressed feelings over the sex he gave to men for money.

"Patrick, with his goodness, brought back all that shit I thought I'd buried. He showed me how it *should* be, what it *could* be, and what I always wanted it to be, and I couldn't deal with what I had done before. I felt dirty and ruined and wholly unworthy of someone like Patrick. Looking back, that's the reason I was so distraught and crying all the time when I first got back to Boston. And when I realized that, I decided to take a chance at finding happiness. The next morning I bought a bus ticket to Amsterdam and planned my return to Rochester to see what I could do." Alan pauses and sips his drink. He eyes the ashtray and turns it upside down. I ask if he's stopped smoking.

"No. I did for a while, because I always said I'd quit when someone worthwhile came along to kiss me, so after meeting Patrick I stopped. I also wanted to prove to everyone that I wasn't addicted and that I could stop anytime. But I smoke now because I enjoy it. I'll stop when I'm ready, but even then I'll have a cigarette when I'm out. It's not so cut and dry as it once had to be for me."

++++++

Our meal is finished. Alan wants a break before discussing his infamous return to Rochester. We walk along Newbury Street, past the upscale boutiques and fashion-conscious onlookers. I inquire how Patrick has changed him.

"Well, everyone has an effect on me ~ friends, lovers, family, and I just take what I like best from them. I change for the better through those contacts. It's not just Patrick. This past year especially, meeting people all over the world ~ they all changed me. In the beginning Ann taught me to be stronger and to believe in myself despite what everyone else around me said. The kids in Ithaca showed me what I gave to the world. Kristen especially taught me about strength in her own way. I changed a lot from my friendship with Matt ~ I was more outgoing and less fearful of being judged because of my sexuality ~ he accepted me for the person I was, not for whom I fucked. Chris taught me how to have faith, and how to hang onto it no matter how hard things seem. Suzie taught me the importance of having someone who knows you so well, and how we make our friends our home, no matter where they are. Whenever, or wherever, I'm with her I feel like I'm home. LeeMichael illuminated how lucky I was, and how fortunate to have such a caring family. Kim taught me to be more aware of other people's problems ~ just in little ways, like how she'd give her left-over dinner to someone on the street. I change because of everyone's influence. And the same goes for Patrick. I finally threw off the remaining vestiges of my superficiality. It wasn't so important to me what I wore, or what the people I went out with looked like. I wasn't so interested in looking perfect before stepping out into the public. And he showed me, if only for a moment, how content and happy I could be just knowing that someone so special was part of my life."

Indeed, when all the hysterical breakdowns were done, Alan was much changed. He returned to Rochester on Sunday, February 7, 1998. Gina, the one person who has directly spoken with Patrick, said, "Before Alan came back to Rochester I called Pat to let him know Alan was coming, and I got a very positive response from the little fucker. So then Alan pulls in Sunday night, everybody knew, and Pat never called."

Alan is quick to clarify, "Yeah, he knew I was coming, but he didn't know that it was so see him. I had a couple of other things to do there, and that was made clear. He *never* thought I had made the trip explicitly for him."

From Sunday to Wednesday, Alan called and proposed plans to get together, but each time Patrick was busy; one night he had to wash his dogs and the next he had to mate them.

"This is true, but it wasn't like we had plans and he canceled," Alan defends. "I just casually called to hang out and he was busy. No big deal."

Not so, says Gina. "Alan was appalled because Patrick was tied up for two nights dealing with dogs, and Alan couldn't believe that someone would rather mate dogs than go out with him. And for one,

he's an animal-hater, and to be put over for a dog... he was very angry. And he actually said he wanted to pepper-spray the poor St. Bernards. He wanted to go hurt the dogs. To tell you the truth, I don't know what Alan does when I'm at work. I don't believe that he would really hurt the dogs, but you never know."

When confronted with the story, Alan good-naturedly laughs it off. "Yes, I said that," he says with a mischievous smile, "But despite what some may think, I was only joking. *Really*. I would never hurt anything. I might verbally destroy the fuck out of something, but I'm just not into violence. It's absurd."

Even so, Alan does not accept being made a fool, which makes his constant defense of Patrick at every turn all the more mysterious, especially considering what transpired, or didn't transpire, on Thursday and Friday.

Alan gave Patrick a call during the day on Thursday. Patrick promised that he was taking Alan out that night, and that he would call later. The rest of their phone call is the subject of heated debate. Alan himself is uncharacteristically mum on the topic. Sources say the call was apparently riddled with much sexual-innuendo, from both sides. It is said that Patrick even asked Alan to come over to the restaurant to have sex right there while his boss watched. What is known for sure is that Alan never went to the restaurant that day, for sex or anything else, but the conversation did give Alan an inspiration. Realizing that the way to this boy might be through his dick, he quickly wrote out what has become known as the "fuck-me note" which supposedly granted Patrick "one free fuck" at a time agreed upon by the two parties.

Whatever the actual content of that note, Gina delivered it to Patrick at the restaurant at 2 PM while Alan hid in the back of the car. "Overall, I got the impression that Patrick wanted to take Alan out; he said so explicitly," says Gina. She is the only one who has actually seen the infamous note and offers this on its contents: "I think it was cool as hell, personally. It was unique... and ballsy ~ it took lots of balls. But that could've scared him off; he might think he had a crazy man on his hands." Still, Patrick had promised Gina that he was indeed going out with Alan that night. Whether he was put off by the brash letter, scared by its suggestive nature, or simply uninterested, Patrick didn't call.

"We just never heard from him," Gina explains. "I think Pat's a nice guy, but he could have at least been honest with me [if he didn't want anything to do with Alan]. I don't really have anything nice to say about Patrick." But Alan refused to give up. The next day, Friday the 13th, Alan had Gina deliver the Valentine's Day package he had for Patrick. It consisted of a tape mix Alan had made, a pair of black underwear scented with Alan's current cologne ("an inside joke" Alan later says), and a Valentine card. Also included was a tiny note that read simply: "Thanks for scraping the snow off my car" ~ a reference to their one night together when it snowed four inches and Patrick cleared it off the morning-after, at Alan's facetious orders.

By this point everyone else seemed more upset by Patrick's behavior than Alan was, and Gina let Patrick know that. "Myself, I wouldn't have given the bastard anything, but Alan still continues to think that this man did nothing wrong. I think that Alan thought he'd get some kind of reply ~ good or bad ~ just something to let him know where he stood," Gina offers. She reportedly handed the carefully-wrapped package to Patrick saying, "Happy Fucking Valentine's Day. I don't think you deserve this, but Alan wanted you to have it."

Patrick explained how he was busy at work and didn't get out until 1:30 AM the night before, and felt uncomfortable calling so late. Once again he told Gina he would call that evening. For the fifth night in a row, Alan showered and got dressed up, waiting in vain for the call that would never come. When Gina and her boyfriend Michael called for a ride home from the High Hat Bar, it was midnight. Alan gave up on waiting and picked them up at the bar, where he was searched for a gun by a security officer at the door. He drove Michael to pick up some money that a friend owed him. He parked and waited for Michael to return from the house, situated in a questionable part of town, one known for high drug traffic. Fifteen minutes later Alan was pulled over by a police officer, ordered out and told to tell the officer where the "stuff" was hidden; the policeman thought they had drugs. It was almost enough to send Alan over the edge. After the policeman took Michael into his car for questioning, and after he searched the entire car looking in vain for drugs that were nowhere to be found, Alan was fed up with his frame of mind and circumstances.

"It was a disastrous ending to a disastrous day. The idiot officer threatened to call in search dogs, call my parents, have the car impounded, the whole nine yards. Of course he didn't find anything, so he just sped away in shame. God bless the Rochester Police force ~ fucking assholes," he mumbles.

And Patrick had never called. Alan went to bed disheartened, but he wasn't crying anymore. Something different was at work, a new resignation perhaps, and it would ultimately leave him much-altered.

Gina had this to say when Patrick was again silent on Valentine's Day: "He should have called and said, 'Listen, Alan, that one-night-stand was all I wanted. Thank you for the gifts, but I'm not interested.' Don't call and say you'll do something when you won't." It was a low-key, uneventful Valentine's Day. Alan drove by Patrick's house in Fairport with Gina, and later returned there on his own.

"I needed to feel closer to him in some way, and driving always affords me time to think and sort things out," Alan explains. But when he returned to the house, he had nothing figured out. On the exasperated advice of Gina and Michael, he drove to Boom Restaurant to confront Patrick. While in the car, he called Suzie for a quick pep-talk, but eventually wound up circling the restaurant for an hour before driving away in disgust.

"I finally though, 'He is not worth this.' So I went home to bed and ended this Valentine's Day as I have ended the past five ~ alone." It is the closest Alan will come to sounding bitter over the situation. His friends are still up-in-arms over the what they see as Patrick's shoddy treatment of Alan.

"It's reflective of the one night they spent together," asserts Chris. "If Patrick had known Alan better, he would have wanted to see him during Valentine's Day, and he wouldn't have been such an asshole."

Suzie was also disgruntled over how Patrick behaved: "It sounded like he was kind of a fucker. He sounded pretty sleazy, kind of like a dog. It seemed like he was a serial-one-nighter. I think he's kind of a loser, not really worthy of some kind of relationship."

Kim found fault with Patrick's antics. "His behavior was inexcusable, well, except for the psycho letters, he still could have been honest. A simple 'Thank you very much, but I'll have to decline' would have sufficed as opposed to any sort of mental crushing that we'd *all* have to pay for later, and if I ever find Patrick I will kick him very hard for the pain *I* have endured. I'm very glad there no swallowing and/or final hurrah during their what-not because he did not deserve it."

"Alan though Patrick was different," says one, "That he was a nice guy who gave him attention, that he was different than the other one-night-stands, but I really don't know why he liked him so much."

Alan has no answer. We arrive at his condo and he offers me something to drink. Even in jeans and a casual sweater, Alan seems sophisticated. He no longer feels the needs to impress with over-the-top outfits and crazy costumes. He seems more real, more himself, and if this is the result of Patrick, then Patrick can't have been all bad.

"Well that's just it!" he exclaims, the first and only time he raises his voice to make a point. "Patrick did nothing wrong. That is the most important thing to realize. He had no idea that I traveled seven hours to see him, so he can't be blamed for being busy when I casually asked if he wanted to hang out. And as for calling back, well, the guy works 75 hours a week, more with the holiday weekend. I wouldn't be calling *anyone* if I worked those hours. I am not mad at him in any way, and *no one else should be*. He's my friend, that's it," and Alan's voice cracks. Judging from the sad look in his eyes it's hard to tell if his words are anything more than bravado. Then again, it's hard to tell anything about what's really going on in his head. But slowly a smile comes tentatively across his face when he recalls his last day in Rochester.

++++++

Originally, Alan was to drive Gina back to Amsterdam on Tuesday, but with the way things had been going he decided to leave after picking her up from work on Monday night. At 2 PM, Monday, February 16, 1998, Alan marched into the back delivery entrance to Boom Restaurant. He walked downstairs, trembling a little, to where Patrick was setting up for dinner. It was the first time the two had seen each other face to face since their initial encounter almost a month before this.

Various stories had circulated over how, or *if*, Alan was going to say good-bye to Patrick. Alan himself seemed unsure until he walked into the basement and saw him.

"After he didn't return my call Sunday night, I was a little mad. Okay, a lot mad. Nowhere near as mad as everyone else, God bless them, but it was the first time I thought of him in any bad way. I guess all the negative stuff my friends were saying was rubbing off on me. Still, I gave him the benefit of the doubt and decided to hear him out before ripping him apart."

Some wondered whether Alan would resort to his previous antics and wage an all-out war, starting with a huge dramatic showdown at the restaurant. "I know people were a little worried, what with all the knives there and everything," he says with a chuckle, "And there *was* this annoying little dog there that wouldn't stop barking at me, so the odds were that I was going to lose my cool, but it never happened."

After an awkward beginning, the two ascended to the kitchen. "And we cleared up what happened with the phone calls and the past week," Alan explains. "Then I just blurted out to him, 'I don't think I like you anymore' and I laughed it said it came out way wrong. Finally, with nothing else to lose, I went for it and said how I had a huge crush on him, but that now it was pretty much over. It basically came down to the

fact that I live in Boston and he lives in Rochester. He said that if I lived in Rochester or if he lived in Boston then things would be different. In the end we both admitted to wanting a friendship, and we still plan on talking to each other.”

Alan pauses in his recitative and for the first time looks content. “I have nothing but good things to say about Patrick. He is one of the best people I have met in a long time, and I feel so happy to be his friend. And I will not hear anything bad said about him, because he’s truly a great guy. I told him that too, and then he said the same about me, only I’m a “little bitchy” sometimes, which is the fucking truth,” and with that Alan laughs.

It is a dramatic departure from the bitter bile and vitriol Alan usually spews following an impossible romance. It is also a telling testament to the effect Patrick has had on Alan’s life. Chris Vaeth, who has seen Alan through periods of self-doubt, depression, and the entire coming-out letter-to-the-editor trauma, viewed Patrick’s influence on Alan, “In the short term negatively. [Alan] was self-destructive ~ the messages that he left on my machine especially were glimpses of that emotional danger. In the long term, knowing Alan, I think he will be positively affected. He knows how to look at the whole of the situation, write about the bad, and absorb the good.”

Suzie isn’t quick to give any definitive statement of what Patrick did to Alan. “I’m not really sure if Alan will turn out to be salty; you can’t tell until you get another interest. I think... this is a good thing: you know how Alan usually likes someone until they like him or show interest and then he doesn’t like them? Well, this time Alan realized that he really didn’t like Patrick, cause he was kind of dicking him around.”

Kim found the change in him somewhat problematic. “It was good and bad for Alan. It was good because he knows he can have a relationship with someone, he just has to find someone fun and in Boston, *where Alan lives*. It was good for Alan to finally experience a nice reverse hug. It was bad because it’s unfortunate that the first person he has really cuddle with was an ass, and has dogs.”

Simon, who has seen Alan at work and out on the town commented that, “Alan has been on an emotional roller-coaster since early December. Patrick’s appearance in Alan’s life jump-started Alan for a while, but back-fired and brought Alan into a further abyss of depression. Through all the ups and downs and trips to Rochester and back, this experience will definitely make Alan stronger and more discriminating in his future love-ventures.”

“Oh, he definitely changed Alan, but I wonder how much of it was really Patrick himself and how much was just Alan’s constant search for himself,” ponders one insider. “Alan always says these people affect him, but I really think it has less to do with them than it does with Alan’s own growth and self-realization.”

And yet no one before Patrick has had quite an effect on Alan in so short a time. (He even called his Mom from Rochester to explain why he was there; it was the first time Alan had openly discussed a relationship with her.) Witness his move away from an impossibly glamorous fashion sense to a more practical, but just as attractive, casualness.

“I’m no longer obsessed with wearing the perfect ensemble or getting the closest shave or wearing the latest cologne or shaping the perfect eyebrows,” Alan states. It is a change that suits him. At the end of his chaotic week in Rochester, Alan seemed contentedly drained. Immediately after his face-to-face with Patrick the change was noticeable.

“You could see it in his face,” says Gina, who had been there through it all. “He was at ease with the situation with Patrick ~ more relaxed and happy. He accomplished what he came to accomplish.”

Yet all this talk hints at another criticism which as dogged Alan ever since anyone can remember: namely, that he turns his personal life into a structured game, where there is no room for messy emotions or honest feelings.

“He can tend to be overly-analytical, and he sometimes breaks things down using reason rather than leaving room for raw emotion. It makes it less dangerous for him, because Alan knows first-hand that strong feelings aren’t so easily controlled once they surface. It’s safer. But just because he went to Rochester with the set-up game plan to win Patrick over ~ it doesn’t mean he didn’t feel anything or that it was all cold and calculated.”

In fact, quite the opposite seems to have occurred: Patrick broke Alan out of his cool analytical view of romance. It had to happen, and for the first time Alan was ready to let go, open his heart, and take a risk. With such a drastic life-style change, it was bound to wreak emotional havoc, and the flood-gate of feelings it opened no doubt contributed to Alan’s “psychotic” behavior.

“That was easily one of the hardest times in my life. For almost an entire month I was wrecked, and I simply didn’t care. That’s when I stopped eating for a while, stopped sleeping, stopped working, stopped

functioning basically. And that's when I knew that to reach any sort of peace, I had to return to Rochester," says Alan.

Despite all the problems of the return trip (the dwindling bank account, the run-in with the police, Alan's drunk driving escapade) it was not without its bright spots, first and foremost among them was Alan's re-union with Kirsten.

++++++

Theirs was always an explosive relationship. She is the one person whom almost everyone concedes is his "soul-mate". They certainly share a powerful chemistry, and it's clear that they connect on an entirely different plane. But while it made for a remarkable connection, a romance rooted in reality proved impossible. And such potent chemistry made mere friendship somewhat problematic.

Yet when Alan came back to Rochester, Kirsten was there for him offering counsel and advice. Whereas the past was once a source of prickly tension, it now became a comforting backdrop to where they currently stand: they love each other, not romantically, and not just as friends, but as something altogether more special and mystical.

"It took a while for us to get there, but in my heart I always had faith. When our romance fell apart, I held onto this image of us walking hand in hand down some tree-lined street ~ as whatever is it that we are together. I instinctively knew that she would always be an important part of my life," says Alan. He appears to be happy with where they are, and it's a sign of marked maturity for the both of them. The one thing he won't comment on is how she feels about what happened between him and Patrick

"Look, like it or not, Patrick is in some way responsible for me finding my way back to Kirsten. I could never have been so honest with her this time if he hadn't broken me out of my frigid state of detachment. I would never have told her everything if he hadn't given me the freedom to open up and put my heart on display regardless of the risk. Eventually we would have done it on our own; Patrick simply helped to hasten the process, and I have to be thankful for the lost time we gained.

Before parting with Kirsten, she left Alan with a glimmer of hope. "He has *so much* love to give someone," she says meaningfully. "I just hope he doesn't settle, because he deserves someone who can return it."

The last light of the sun is fading through Alan's bedroom window. He shuts the door and turns on a beaded lamp beside the couch. Settling into the early evening, Alan offers another slight smile.

"Fairport is a very beautiful place," he begins. "The thought of it in the summer is what keeps me going through this dark frigid time. And it's enough to know that I have a place to go when I stop by Rochester again, and that I have someone to call when I get lonely... I must say, I make a *much better* friend than a lover. *Everyone* will agree with that. Besides, friendship ~ true friendship ~ is for life, whereas romance is often... just a night."

He smiles slightly again, thinking over what he has just said; not a classic Alan smile, with the contagious dimples and laugh lines, but a subdued bittersweet smile of melancholic sweetness.

Before leaving, I read him a quote from one of his friends: "Alan is a good person with a lot of love to give someone, and he should move on and make someone else happy, who can appreciate him."

He fixes a steely gaze at me and says, rather coldly, "I don't think anyone will *ever* appreciate me, and if they did... I wouldn't know what to do with it." He sees me out and locks the door behind him. That night he calls me at home and asks to meet again the next day, "For clarification."

++++++

It is a bright sunny late February morning. The air is crisp, but the smell of spring is carefully taking its first steps into Boston. Alan walks down the steps of his brownstone wearing distressed jeans, a white T-shirt, and a black leather jacket. Sunglasses hide baggy eyes and even in this early hour he is smoking.

"Look, about what I said yesterday, I think I need to explain some things, what I really feel now." His need for control and order comes through despite how unsure he seems. It is this cold deliberate focus that distances him from others, this hypnotic intensity that shields him from a scary world. Suddenly he stops walking.

"Let's sit here for a while," he says, resting himself beside a garden near Braddock Park. "I'm going to tell you something private and special to me." There is a breeze. It is not cold, but it is cool and damp. Alan crosses his arms over his chest.

"The day after we got back to Amsterdam from Rochester, I felt very, very sad. I started writing a letter to Patrick, telling him how glad I was that we were friends, but I couldn't finish it. That night it snowed ~ the first major snowfall since our first and last night together. For some reason I couldn't stop

crying. I put on two coats and pair of boots and went outside at 11 PM. When I stayed with Gina and Michael I found a certain peace in doing the dishes and cleaning, so I was going to shovel, just to stave off the tears. I wanted to serve someone to make myself feel a little better. But there wasn't enough snow, so I put the shovel back and walked into the forest behind our house. It was so peaceful, and my sobbing was the only noise other than the delicate pellets of ice falling to the ground and crackling over the leaves.

When I was little I used to go back there and lie under this small evergreen whenever we had a snow day off from school. I looked for it, but it was gone, probably dead. And then I prayed as tears streamed down my face. It was pretty much the usual prayer ~ I prayed for family and friends and thanked God for them and all that I had, but then I prayed for Patrick ~ that he was happy. Finally, I said, 'God, I know this isn't a good prayer, but please make him think of me... fondly, and help me become a part of his life.' I laid down beneath another tree and cradled my head on my arm, crying uncontrollably. I wanted to fall asleep and be carried off into some brittle state of unawareness. After a while I got up and brushed the snow off myself, walking back to the house and the side porch, where I smoked a cigarette. I had stopped crying. I wrote "A & P" in the snow with my finger, then wiped it away with my hand. I went back inside, completely drained of tears, of feeling, of caring, of living. I don't know..." he trails off and squints into the sun. "That night I realized that I might very possibly go through life alone, and no matter how scary the prospect seemed, something in me felt I could do it, that if that was the way it had to be, so be it. I felt like, 'I'll do it all alone and be okay.'" He stops and covers his sense of shame with transparent humor. "My parents probably wondered where all the crazy footprints came from," he says with an unconvincing chuckle. "No... I'm sure they knew." Alan lights another cigarette. "When I got to my bedroom I took off the coats and said, "I just want someone to love me." Isn't that stupid?" he asks with a false laugh.

"No," I reply, "We all want that."

"Yes, I suppose we do. And I really thought it was my turn."

Everyone knows what a rocky time Alan has had with romances, but he always had a strong support group of single friends with whom he could bond and commiserate. In the past few months, however, he has watched many of his closest friends delve into successful relationships, leaving him to ponder his own solitude. The list is long: Ann, Kate, Kirsten, Chris, Kristen, Kim, Danielle, Gina, Matt, and Simon have all been involved in romances recently, and none has been as troublesome as Alan's.

"Don't misunderstand, these people didn't desert me, and I am ecstatic that all my friends are finding someone who makes them happy, and in most cases I'm just gaining another friend, but it's difficult sometimes. I mean, after a while I *have* to wonder if there's something wrong with me ~ why can't I ever have a healthy relationship ~ obviously I'm the common denominator in all my past romances," Alan says, not without a tinge of self-hatred. "But maybe I've just stumbled upon a string of wrong people. I used to believe that each of us was destined to be with that one special person. Now I'm not so sure. I think we each have a need for certain things in a person, and it's a matter of finding who best fits the necessary criteria. I'm no longer sure that there's a perfect match. It takes effort to make it work."

Has he given up on romance?

"No... no, I haven't given up. There's always that hope, no matter how much I seem to shut down. If I didn't believe that... I wouldn't be here," and he looks down at his scarred wrists, the results of his last known suicide attempt sometime in the winter of 1995. Since that time he has been through the mill with Tony, George, and LeeMichael, and not tried to take his life, so far as anyone knows. Still, his latest turn with Patrick has some friends worried.

"I've *never* seen him like this," claims one. "Yes I'm worried. It's constantly there, the idea that he's back in that dark place, and who knows what Alan will do."

Another confidante says Alan was headed here regardless of Patrick. "The thins with Patrick was just a catalyst ~ Alan was going down that road since November. At first it seemed like his usual seasonal depression, but even the holidays didn't break him out of it. By the end of January it all came to a head, and I do wonder how deep he is."

Taken in this morbid light, Alan's new apathy towards the importance of his own appearance, his complete lack of any ambition, his devil-may-care attitude towards AIDS, and his recent drunk-driving escapade could be seen as subliminally suicidal.

"I am not going to kill myself right now," Alan says wearily. "The world should be so lucky," he offers bitterly, and that is all he'll say on the subject. It is not entirely convincing, and for the first time I realize the depths to which Alan has descended. He explains that he has to go "meet someone for lunch," but that he'll call me again to finish up. "I'm getting muddled," he mumbles before walking away down Southwest Corridor Park. His head is down, and he misses the gaze and smile of the passing man walking his dog.

“He’s a tortured soul,” claims one friend. “Granted, it’s a self-inflicted torture much of the time, but it’s still torture, and because he does it to himself... it makes it impossible for anyone to help him.”

That evening it rains, a gentle, almost warm rain, and I wonder if Alan is all right. He doesn’t call until two days later and we set up our final meeting.

+ + + + +

“I don’t like the way we ended things the other day,” he begins over a cup of coffee at Hazel’s. He is sunnier today, more peppy, and his celebrated sense of humor seems intact. The contagious laugh is back as well, and I finally get a glimpse of that dimpled, thousand-watt smile I had previously just heard about.

“It’s the smell of Spring,” he shrugs, explaining the pleasant change of countenance. Alan seems happy today. The old sparkle and magic are back, and because of it I somehow feel better. He wears a simply white V-neck shirt, a rumpled pair of khakis, and a set of well-worn black suede shoes. He makes small talk for a while; the trials and tribulations of living adjacent to a building that’s being renovated seems to be the major upsetting feature of the day, “But our baby’s going up in property value, so this had better be worth it!” he laughs. I ask how he likes living in Boston, alluding to the recent rumors of a move to Rochester. “I *love* this city. I always have, ever since I was about nine years old, when I was captured by its cobblestone charm and European flavor. I didn’t even know what it was then, but something made it magical, and I always knew I’d end up here someday. For a while the dream was to go to school at MIT, but then I woke up. Hello, MIT? *Me* at fucking MIT?! Needless to say, I settled for more reachable goals. But I’m here now and I do love it.”

“Does this mean you’re not moving to Rochester?”

“Now the dirt gets dished! You waited all this time to ask me that? I hate to disappoint, but I really can’t answer that right now, and I’m not being coy. The fact is that I don’t know what I’m doing at the moment. I haven’t ruled out a move to Rochester, and it’s still a definite possibility, but if it does happen, it’ll only be for a month or two. Boston is my home. I will always return here, and I couldn’t stay away for too long. But I don’t know what the big deal is. I mean, last year I toured for eight months and I wasn’t living in Boston then and no one made such a fuss. Of course, I understand that people probably have the wrong idea as to why I might move to New York. If I go, it will be because of a writing job offer. Besides, what’s wrong with Rochester?” he asks with a little laugh. “They have a lilac festival for God’s sake!” and he laughs some more.

Alan has spoken all this in a short time, barely pausing for a breath. He seems excited and animated, and after throwing a couple of dollars onto the table he jumps up and says we have to go to Tower Records to see if the new Madonna single is out. “Once again that woman is on top of my life, and this new song... my God! It’s like she’s spying on me,” he says, only half-jokingly.

It is impossible not to laugh along with his heady exuberance. Today he is a kid, just another fan excited by his favorite pop singer. But he is walking around in the body of a young man, a body that does not go unnoticed by the pack of young, rowdy gay men walking towards us in Copley. As they near us, Alan’s smile leaves his face: to look pleasant would be seen as an invitation to engage in small talk, he later explains. For now, a few in the gang hoot and holler. One of them looks directly at Alan and says lasciviously, “Oooh! You are *so* cute! You got a Daddy? I’ll be your Daddy.” Alan fixes a glazed look on his face and walks disdainfully past them. For someone who describes himself as “pathetically desperate”, Alan comes off as coldly discriminating. I ask if he is not flattered.

“By those idiots? He doesn’t even know me and he wants to have sex with me. Nom I’m not flattered.” He turns around, throws one final disgusted look towards the men, and then laughs it off. “There goes another robe,” he sighs wistfully. “Oh well, like I need one.”

While he is clearly in better spirits, he is not where he would like to be. “This kind of thing... takes some time. I was seriously fucked-up for a few weeks, and I’m still recovering. It’s happening, but slowly, and I don’t even know where I’m going next.”

For the moment, his ‘Obsession’ project, the first new work since ‘Bliss’ in April 1997, is indefinitely on hold. Originally scheduled for a late January-early February release, it has been pushed back to late March at the earliest. Insiders say it hit too close to home with the whole Patrick situation, and while Alan has in the past used such coincidences in his personal life to promote his project of the moment, many say that he holds Patrick in such special regard that he has decided against “using” him to advance a project. “It would go against everything that he has taught me about truth and goodness and treating people as people rather than objects in some manipulative life-game,” Alan says.

He has not yet begun the second part of 'diSenchAntMent', which has been delayed for months now, nor has he made any serious motions in finding a writing career in Boston. Rumors of a move to Rochester seem to carry more weight as he moves further away from his job at Structure.

"Look, everyone else has always had a chance at working on their personal life. I never really allowed myself that luxury. I was always too concerned with something else. Last year it was the tour, and I seriously gave up a number of possibilities just to stay on track and not lose focus. And look at what that has done for me. I have forsaken personal happiness, and for what? It's my turn to give it a shot. And if I get hurt, I get hurt. But if I don't try, if I shut myself off to people because it might end in damage, well, what will I ever gain?"

This new openness is one reason for such an intimate, in-depth interview about his latest romance. Alan was once adamantly close-mouthed about his paramours, commenting only lightly, and always non-committally, when asked about them.

"I've learned that if you never open yourself up, you never have the chance to find happiness. It's like Madonna sings in 'Frozen': You're broken when your heart's not open. Superficially you may be getting it right and everything may look okay from the outside, but deep within is an unseen fissure just waiting to split everything apart. I came very close to being destroyed like that, and it took someone like Patrick to touch me and fill in the cracks. And no, he's probably not that special in his own right and I could certainly do better, as everyone says, but even if it was a damn lie it did make me better. I may be bruised and hurt, but I have the ability to heal, and I will never be broken again."

He leaves it like that. I will not see him for a few days, during which I finish the rough interview and ask some final questions of his friends. From them I hear that Alan is once again distraught over things, that he now feels used by Patrick, and that he wants to put a stop to the release of this interview. I call him at home.

"Hello?" Alan says. His voice is cheery and upbeat, until he hears who it is, at which point it loses its magic and settles into a disgruntled tone of despair. I ask if anything is wrong.

"Oh, the same, always the same. This time I found out... never mind. I was once again duped into believing that I was more special than I apparently am. Oh well, no big loss anymore. I really don't care," he mutters. The mood swings have not been exaggerated, and the Alan I encounter on the phone is frightfully unhappy about something, though he has closed himself down and will not offer any indication of what's upsetting him. I propose one last meeting to show him the interview and get his response. He reluctantly agrees, on the grounds that we meet at the Boston Harbor waterfront, across from the New England Aquarium, at 9PM that evening. It is a strange request for the end of February, but I'll take what I can get.

++++++

I walk along the dock, fifteen minutes early, but a dark figure is already standing at the water's edge. The long, flowing black train of a Gothic coat billows out behind the man. A hood covers his head. His arms hang down before him, his hands clasped together as if in prayer. The clanging of a flag-pole in the wind is the only sound that is heard. The dark visage turns around and spies me. For one fleeting instant I am struck with an intense fear, as folds of black fabric swirl about the man who seems to disappear and re-appear in the night sky. He raises his arms and pulls the hood back, revealing his sad face. Alan looks like he has been crying, but I don't dare ask. He walks slowly towards me, gliding on a black cloud as his coat floats about him in the cold wind.

"I was watching the moon," he says quietly, and for the first time that night I notice its white head peeking out from a patch of clouds. Its light plays upon the crests of the water and Alan turns back to watch it disappear into darkness again. I look at his face in the fading glow and I see that he has indeed been crying.

"This is my place. Whenever it gets to feel like too much... I come here. Usually I write letters. It's difficult in the winter with the cold but it's always worth it because it's much more beautiful ~ more still, more clear, more haunting. And if I'm here it usually means I'm hurt, so I never feel scared because at these moments I don't give a fuck about myself."

I am at a loss for words. I look down at the ground, then back at Alan, but he is looking far away, into the sky above the water. I notice the Celtic cross with a dark red crystal at its center, hanging heavily around Alan's neck. The strings from his black lace-up shirt blow wildly in the wind. As the moon re-emerges, Alan's face looks languidly pale and morose in the dim white light.

"No one will ever understand this, why I do what I do, the things that I feel so much more acutely than most people... I don't even understand," and he looks back out over the water to the moon. He stares straight ahead and speaks slowly. I'm not sure if he remembers that I'm here. "No one can ever know how

deeply I love and how much it takes out of me. They just don't get it, and why would I even want them to? When my friends tell me to move on and find someone else, someone better... don't they see? There is a sacred place where each person I have ever loved holds dominion. *No one* can take that place. My love is too special to give haphazardly to any replacement. When I love, I love *hard*, and I often end up getting hurt pretty hard too, because most people just can't deal with it. They can't deal with the fact that I am willing to give my entire being, my life, my soul, over to someone I truly love. And it's not that I don't value myself; I simply value them more. I opened myself up to this person, more than I have ever done in the past. He broke through all the barriers and silly self-defense tactics that always shielded my heart. And when all was said and done, I found that I had let him into the very core of my soul, the once-secret and safe spot that no one had ever touched. I thought it was a good thing, even though it ended up hurting to no end... now, I'm not so sure. Maybe it wasn't worth it. Maybe I would have been better off staying cold and numb and oblivious. Because right now it hurts so much... *it hurts so much*," and at that Alan emits the tiniest whimper before pursing his lips and returning to form. "I think that's it. I've said my peace. Maybe someday... Well, thanks for listening and coming here. If one day people can't find me, you'll know where I went."

He fades into the darkness, a haunting figure of immense solitude, and I think I'm beginning to see the intrinsic difficulty of the life he has chosen, the life he has made for himself, and the life from which he can never escape. He tried to make motions for a better way with Patrick, and in some way with all his relationships, family and friends included, but he has yet to see past his self-pitying need for self-destruction. Time is most certainly running out for him; it may already be too late. The brave, happy front he puts on for his friends is finally taking its toll during those long, lonely nights when he ponders all that wasted love. Glimmers of hope remain, but they seem to be getting fewer and farther between as time progresses. Until he realizes his true self-worth, and stops judging himself through the eyes of others, Alan will never find happiness, and for the moment he doesn't even seem to be looking. Despite the many friends and family members who love him dearly, it's just not enough, and I am suddenly reminded of something Alan said a while back, and the irony of it strikes me deeply:

"It's really disheartening to realize that no matter how much you love someone, no matter how much you give to someone, and no matter how much of yourself you forsake for someone, there is no way to guarantee that you'll get that love back. Eventually, you just have to give up trying, for your own sanity."

Perhaps Alan wants us to give up on him. The words ring with his usual challenging tone. He seems to be daring us to love him in the face of his offending behavior, his coldness, his detachment. And for the most part it is a challenge we accept, a dare we endeavor to conquer. Alan never claimed he was an easy person to love, but many people do, in spite of themselves. I've always thought that Alan was too hard on himself. His love shines in the simple things he does for people: a letter, a little gift in the mail, a cheering phone call at the perfect time. And that's something he'll never be able to hide.

The moon disappears behind a thick blanket of clouds and the water turns black. A cold wind picks up and lashes into me. I think of the person who's waiting for me at home, and I almost feel guilty, but then I remember Alan's happiness when he first told me about Patrick, and I am glad to still be in that place.

+ + + + +

I spy Alan walking through Boston Common a few days later. It is a sunny warm day, a rare gift at the end of February. He sees me and smiles, not a huge, fake smile, but a small one denoting the comfortable acknowledgment of a friend. We walk together for a while. He makes some small talk on the glorious weather. Today's Alan is less emotional, less agitated. He speaks quietly, but with an air of assurance. Wearing a light henley and faded jeans, Alan walks slowly, exuding a subdued sense of shame like some scarlet letter 'A'. He initially seems ill-at-ease over the release of this interview, then changes his mind.

"No, I *do* want people to read it, because it was the truth of the moment," he explains. "And even though I'm feeling a little used... well, it was how I honestly felt then. Hopefully it will stop people from telling me how this guy is not worth it." He won't reveal the specifics of how things have changed, but it is apparent in his low-key manner and slight bitterness that things are different. For all the encouragement veiled in the back-handed compliments that proclaim Alan can do much better than Patrick, it seems that people are missing the point. "I don't think it's a question of who's good enough. Who's to say that I'm "better" than someone, or that this guy is better than that one? We're so quick to judge. I know it's my friends' way of protecting and looking out for me and only wanting the best for me, but who has the right to say that this person is not good enough, especially if he makes me happy? It sounds like I'm just blinded by feelings, but give me some credit. You know I'm not stupid, and even though I finally feel something for someone, it doesn't mean that I have forsaken reason and lost the ability to gauge where the truth lies. And I'm sick of

talking about it, of defending him, of defending myself and my decisions. In the end it will be seen for what it is, and until that time I hope everyone stops trying to place the blame. And even if the guy is an asshole, so fucking what? I mean, *I'm* an asshole for God's sake, and people still love me. Besides, it is entirely possible for someone to *act* like an asshole for a moment and still be a good person. Now, I don't honestly know Patrick, I only know what he did for me, the ways in which he changed me and helped me become a better person. I don't consider that the act of an asshole, but who knows? It's very likely that he just used me for a quick night of sex, and looking back at the way everything happened... yes, it's a distinct possibility. But in the grand scheme of things I hope that's not what is remembered, because in my heart I know that he is a wonderful person. He may not have loved me the way I wanted, but I refuse to take the bad things with me; I will only retain the good he brought to my life. And I challenge anyone to argue with that."

We have come to the end of the park. Alan gives a look of death to a crying child who is in the fits of a tantrum, and then rolls his eyes bitterly. We are about to say our good-byes when a puppy approaches and sniffs at Alan's leg. He looks back at me with a devilish grin: it is a St. Bernard. I watch with baited breath as Alan crouches down and looks the dog in the eyes. The puppy sniffs Alan's face and licks his cheek. "Oh god," Alan mumbles, and then he laughs. He scratches the dog around its neck and the dog loves it. After some good-natured (albeit highly uncharacteristic) horse-play with the small St. Bernard, Alan stands up, brushes off his knees, and walks out of the park.

+ + + + +

AFTERWARD:

Doing this interview was a true test of my sanity, and at times it threatened to break me completely apart. Fortunately, I have a wonderful support group of friends and family, without whom I wouldn't have lived to see the light at the end of that never-ending tunnel. I offer my most heartfelt thanks to the following people who have been an integral part of my survival:

Gina Agresta ~ For the home, the hook-up, the secret recipe, the kindred spirit, and for the deliveries.
Kimberley Caola ~ For dragging me out when all I wanted to do was cry, the museum, the coffeehouse (yes, the coffeehouse), and for seeing that I am solid food.
Simon Towers ~ For lowering himself to be seen with me in my fashion-dead state.
Christopher Vaeth ~ For erasing the phone messages and caring enough to call back.
Suzie Ko ~ For being home whenever I needed to talk, and for the postcards.
Kirsten Myhre ~ For the drinks, the understanding, and for being the #1 Taboo partner with an Andy Warhol bullet-bra.
Mitchell ~ For engaging in conversation when a certain someone just wanted to grope me.
Chad and Chris ~ For the dancing and entertainment.
Kristen Davis ~ For writing back and turning things around, if only for a moment.
Ultra-Special Thanks, as always to Mom and Dad ~ For everything.
And a heartfelt thank you to Patrick Richardson ~ For thawing out what was scared and cold, and for brushing the snow off my car.