

THE FALL

By Alan Ilagan

Autumn 1998

* From the very beginning he consisted of a complicated mass of contradictions. Exactly ten years ago he burst onto the scene ~ the cute, preppy boy with a bowl haircut and impeccably-matched sweater and turtleneck outfits who had a heart of coal. Adopting the persona of the villain, he stormed through 1988-1989 with a terrifying vengeance, destroying and wreaking havoc on classmates and family with wild abandon and wanton glee. It was an image difficult to like, but impossible to ignore. His mischievous mirth was accompanied by an underlying sense of vulnerability, and the entire package was as fascinating and intriguing to watch as it was repelling to those whom he hurt. * By 1990 he softened his act, perhaps sensing the loneliness to come, but the bad-boy image would remain with him forever, despite numerous attempts at redemption. The cruel, sarcastic bite was replaced with a gently-ribbing wittiness, while his clothes veered further from classy and closer to trendy. * In 1992 he came into his own with an eye for cutting-edge fashion, and a knack for causing a controversy with the most simple of gestures. His Creative Writing Project for the senior English class was sent to the school psychologist just as his first relationship with a girl sparked rumors of salacious public sex acts. * During his first year of college he became embedded in our minds with a string of “projects” and an increasingly scrutinized personal life. His ‘Sex’ opus almost landed him in jail; ‘Love’ brought about rumors of an engagement; ‘Depression’ and ‘Family’ hinted at artistic and moral substance. The summer of 1994 found him at home in upstate New York, enjoying his last romance with a woman and setting tongues wagging with more sordid sex stories. * In Autumn 1994 he would bottom-out and fall from favor (the first of many slides) with his ‘Darkness’ and ‘Apology’ projects, as well as his controversial first-ever relationship with a man and the subsequent break-up with his last girlfriend. The ‘Preference’ project of February 1995 was the first tentative step in coming out as a gay man, and on his first Tour, *Chameleon In Motion: The Friendship Tour*, he made motions to discover who he really was. * After a series of emotional breakdowns and messy relationships, he moved into Boston in the winter of 1995-1996 after securing a job at a retail store and impressing all with his surprising work ethic. Artistic maturation was evident in the work showcased by his ‘Desire’ and ‘Loss’ projects, and his writing took on the visage of a possible career path. Professionally he was perfect, excelling at school and work with ease, but personally he was a mess, as evidenced by his bout with hustling and a number of failed romances. The Spring 1996 *Magical Mystery Tour: Master of Manipulation* found him in a frenetic state of mental unbalance, culminating in an admission of several suicide attempts over the years and an ongoing battle with depression. * Refusing the use of drugs and psychoanalysis, despite the advice of family and friends, he worked through the problems on his own, and in the final months of 1996 (and the last days of college due to an early graduation) he planned and plotted *The Royal Rainbow Word Tour: Alan is King!* From January to August 1997 he traveled the world, penned the best fiction of his career (‘diSenchAntMent’), and found some sense of self with the help of good friends, ultimately resulting in his famous coming-out letter-to-the-editor to his hometown newspaper. * He returned to his Boston home in the Fall of 1997, working steadily and easing into a more sedentary civilian life, before wrecking his emotional state in the early months of 1998 with a disenchanting romantic Waterloo that ended with a dismal spattering of one-night-stands, leaving him hardened and bitter. * The Spring of 1998 was a period of rebuilding, when he at last looked within himself to eradicate the demons of the past. It was a rocky time of introspection, but it was nothing compared to what the Summer of 1998 would deal him. * This is that story. It is a tale of tragedy and comedy, a time of intense happiness and profound sorrow, and a glimpse into the deepest and darkest corners of one man’s soul. Prepare for THE FALL. *

The Boy is Back in Boston, and he has quite a tale to tell. Following months of turmoil (personal, professional, and physical) Alan Ilagan returns to the city for good, and looks to the future with a knowing nod to the past. Since May he has gone through several life-altering experiences, including a stalking, a disastrous weekend in Rochester, the death of his best friend’s father and the subsequent feelings of blame, numerous one-night-stands, persisting rumors of alcoholism, and a boyfriend or two. In this starkly revealing interview, he offers new insight into what makes him tick, and as readers will discover, the labyrinth of Alan’s mind is deeper, darker, and more complex than we ever suspected.

PHOTOGRAPHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE FALL BY SUZANNE KO AND CHRISTOPHER VAETH

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There is a chill in the air. The sky is deep blue. Flowers glow richly with intense color, reinvigorated by the cool breeze following a hot and hazy summer, and perhaps sensing that this is their last show before impending death. It is autumn in Boston. The trees burn with shades of auburn, scarlet, gold, crimson, burgundy, and maize. Pumpkins and other gourds spill into the street from sidewalk vendors, apple cider is offered in white paper cups, and the smell of burning leaves wafts through the frosty atmosphere. People walk a little faster; their looks are more serious as they return to business as usual. The easygoing attitude of summer lifts as students return to school, and the shops begin their long slow trek to the holidays. It is a time of change, as evidenced by the shorter days, windier nights, and the striptease of the trees. For some it is a time of impending doom; yet it also contains a sense of renewal, rebirth, and restoration ~ a time to lay frivolity to rest, and a time to make things happen, all induced by the biting sting of the first frost ~ a bitter forewarning of colder days to come.

For Alan Ilagan, the Fall was always a season of mixed emotions. The pit in his stomach grew more bothersome as August ended and a return to school crept in with the morning fog, but it was shrouded and warmed with a sense of coziness brought on by the subdued spicy colors of the earth and the chance to bundle up in thick sweaters. There was a certain clarity to the Fall ~ the air seemed crisper, the stars shone brighter, and the heavy stifling heat of summer finally let go its vice-like grip. That how, overwhelming feeling was necessary though, for without it there would be no relief, no sense of release. The months of June, July, and August could bear down upon and burn the most stalwart of souls, and Alan was no exception. Summer 1998 found him in the midst of the most life-changing experiences of his existence, and while some of the drama has dissipated with the arrival of Fall, it is not clear what effect these events have had on him.

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He greets me with a quick, perfunctory hug ~ his arms lay lightly lifeless on my back and he pulls back almost as soon as he leans in. There is an icy remoteness to his initial manner, a detachment evident in his falsely-affected smile and over-zealous handshake. His eyes glaze over, then flit left and right and behind me, as if afraid of making direct contact of any sort. It is strangely distancing from the man who once offered the most detailed examinations of his life in print and photographs. Is it also somewhat understandable ~ the past few months have seen Alan in crisis after personal crisis, and it is not surprising that he keeps things at a safe, impersonal distance.

Of course, this is the same charge he has been battling ever since anyone can remember: that he is cold, detached, unemotional, and incapable of true feelings. Only now does Alan own up to the partial validity of those allegations, and it is clear that this goes back further than this past summer: back before Patrick/LeeMichael/George and all the other Tome-Dick-and-Harrys, beyond the world tours and delusional behavior, and well before the bouts of hustling, the forays into alcoholism, the drug games, and the suicidal depressions.

"This is where I met Tom," Alan explains as we walk beside an open-air market that has been erected for the last few days of summer. Trinity Church looms ahead of us, and late-afternoon sunshine filters through the remaining leaves above our heads. Sitting down on a bench, Alan recalls that fateful day in September of 1994.

"I saw this man walking towards me, and he had the most amazing blue eyes, and they just captivated me. I couldn't help but turn around after he passed, and he looked back too. I wasn't even sure I was gay then, and as Tom invited me to his place I felt it wasn't really happening, like it was a dream. But I knew I wanted to go there, even though I was scared out of my mind. I mean, I was only nineteen and he was thirty-six, and I didn't know a thing. The rest is history." Well, almost.

He certainly gave a detailed account of their budding relationship in *The Journal of Alan Ilagan*, Volume One, which was released on December 23, 1994 at his annual Christmas bash. What follows is a telling excerpt that recounts one of their conversations in Alan's own words:

We were getting along all right now. Mostly it was he and I bantering with sarcastic comments. It was fun. We were walking away from the theater, looking for a place to eat. I asked him a few more questions.

"When was the last time you were tested for AIDS?"

"Yesterday, like I do every day," he answered.

I laughed, but asked again seriously.

"When were *you* last tested?" he asked.

"I've never been tested."

“Well.”

“But I haven’t been with over thirty people either. So when was it?”

“Two years ago.”

I know it shouldn’t have, but somehow it surprised me. I thought of his cold. What if...?

“And how many people have you been with since you were tested?” I asked, somewhat afraid of what the answer might be.

“Umm... about ten.”

“Ten?! You’ve been with... how do you know...”

“Look, I told you,” he began sternly and loudly, “I didn’t want this education crap. Now if you have questions, ask someone else, do you understand?” He was yelling. “I told you that. I don’t want to be mean, but I told you this before and I don’t want any more of it.” And that was it. In that one moment my world turned from something over which I had some control into something that whirled and whisked me in whichever whim it had. The wind caught up. Before this year I would have been bawling in this situation. Now I just walked stoically with Tom. He looked back at me. It wasn’t a joke. Did he think I thought it was? I just looked back at him, giving a slight ‘Well, that’s that’ smile. I almost hated him what he had just done. But I didn’t.

It was Alan’s first gay relationship, and it is impossible not to feel sadness at the thought of that scared boy who reached out so helplessly for guidance, only to be screamed at for asking his questions. Unfortunately, he saw nowhere else to turn, and if Tom was his entry to the gay community, then he’d have to make the most of it.

“I was very alone and desperate. It was an extremely intense time, and in a lot of ways a very special time, because I was coming to terms with my sexuality, which I had basically blocked out of my mind since I was six or so. And Tom was... well, he was the first, and you always think the first is *the one*. I knew great changes were at work, and it was becoming clear that once I took the chance... there was no going back.”

He plunged into his feelings for Tom with a frightening ferocity. Friends at the time claimed he was smitten, but with a tremendous naivete.

“We were all worries, not just about the gay thing, but about his health and mental well-being, and he seemed to take it all very nonchalantly, like he didn’t really care,” says one. “He completely romanticized the whole situation. No one found out what a jerk Tom was until we read the journal, and even then it seemed sugar-coated.”

There was once incident that Alan did not include in his journal, and he would later recall it as the scariest moment in his life thus far. He will not speak about it today, and only a few select friends have heard the tale, or at least the parts he felt comfortable sharing.

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The story goes that Alan went into Boston one day to see Tom. It was an unplanned visit, and Tom was not expecting him. The day was misty and overcast ~ a cold day even for October. Alan walked up to Tom’s apartment and yelled into the window since the doorbell was broken. Tom opened the door and Alan entered. The smell of alcohol was on Tom’s breath, and Alan launched into one of his preachy, criticizing tirades that are merely blustery shows of affectation, wholly devoid of judgment, but enough to sting those who don’t know him well. Tom was drunk, and in no mood for Alan’s shenanigans. He pulled his arm back and landed a blow across Alan’s face. Blood spilled out of his nose immediately. He reeled back and Tom instantly felt remorse, blotting up the blood with a wet paper towel and offering profuse apologies. Alan simply said it was okay, he understood, and left as quickly as possible. He would still see Tom for about two more weeks, after which the relationship died.

Someone who has heard this tale firsthand admits the profound effect it had on Alan. “He just said it was the most scared he had ever been, that right after he was hit he felt this overwhelming sense of fear and dread and confusion.” What is most confusing now is why Alan went back after this occurred.

“He has an insatiable need for love, and he really has an enormous amount of love to give someone,” says one insider. “But he’s still unsure of how to go about it. Alan has never done things the easy way.”

Indeed, the majority of his actions cry out for love and affection, but it is unclear as to where this originates. He recounts how, as a child, he would write notes to his Mother before he went to bed, even if she was in the house, to say how much he loved her.

“And most of the time she would write back, but sometimes she wouldn’t, and it would always hurt when I woke up in the middle of the night and there was no return letter. Now I see that she was probably

tired, or simply forgot ~ she was going to school to get her Master's Degree and was often away when it was time for my brother and me to go to bed, but as a child I just couldn't get enough of that attention. They were basically love letters. When we're little I think we sort of romance our parents. I'm certainly not saying I was *in love with* my Mom, but I loved her immensely and I didn't know how to get that across. It never seemed to be enough. It's like that guy in *Of Mice and Men*, when he hugs the puppies or kittens so hard that they suffocate and die ~ there can never be enough love, and it in fact *hurts* to love so much. Now, I know my parents love me more than anything, but for some reason there was always something lacking, and I still don't know what it was, or what it is."

He is vague when confronted with more probing questions about Tom and that whole period of his life, but it is this vagueness that hints at its underlying importance. When he doesn't want to talk about something, it usually means that it is especially meaningful to him in some way. Writing, talking, and putting it out in the open seems to diminish the magic of the moment for him. He'll go one and on ad nauseam about things that don't matter to him ~ witness the graphic sex tales, the detailed accounts of obsessive crushes, and the length monologues about the simplest of events ~ but when something really matters he simply shuts down and retreats within himself. Or perhaps he has truly laid that time of his life to rest and feels no need to discuss it further. Alan stands up, stretched his arms, lets out a little laugh, and suggests we walk.

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A brisk breeze has picked up, and the evening turns cooler. In camouflage fatigues, a white T-shirt, and a black sweatshirt tied haphazardly around his waist, Alan is not dressed to impress. Today's look seems to have more to do with what was clean and easily accessible ~ a far cry from the glamorous, high-maintenance fashion-plate of the past.

"As you can see, I've grown out of my appearance-obsessed style-over-substance stance of the past few years," he says with a chuckle. "But," he warns sardonically, "I can *still* play any role." Of this I have no doubt: Alan has moved through every style, fad, trend, and fashion moment during the past ten years, and been remarkably adept at making each his own.

At the start of it all, circa 1988 he made his very first splash with those extravagant sweaters, matching shirts, preppy pants, and upper-class school-boy look. It was a smashing success, and the daily compliments he gleaned fed his superficial fire.

"It was great to hear those things, but ultimately it was detrimental. Suddenly it became this huge thing, 'What would Alan wear next?' and I constantly felt like I had to top myself. Mostly it was in my mind, but that didn't make it any easier. I would *cry* over not having a new outfit and having to wear something that I had already worn a few times." I raise my eyebrows critically. "Yeah," he concedes, "It was sick and stupid and shallow and I was very immature and foolish."

The attention he received was like a drug ~ he grew dependent on getting noticed for his look, and it became an obsession. By 1991, after having gone through the Skidz craze and living to tell the tale, he moved away from the classy attire that had become his trademark and into the cutting edge of trendy chic. His outfits changed from day to day, and instead of adopting one set style for a while, he transformed with hairpin turns: from frilly Victorian dilettante one day to S&M-tinged, leather-whip-wielding bondage boy the next; gauzy Greek minimalist one moment and Mardi Gras sequin-&-feather fiasco the next. He could be the boy-next-door in jeans and a T-shirt, or the ultra-sophisticated man in Armani. His exotic worldly features lent credence to his claim on any role: long, dark tresses allowed him to be a sexy Latin lover; a black-rooted, platinum-blond crop turned him into a flaming queen; a touch of powder made him a pasty-faced vampire, and a buzz-cut, silver chain, and construction boots could make him a tough guy. The Tours allowed Alan to run rampant with costumes, and anyone who has participated (or at least seen the pictures) can attest to the fact that he can successfully wear many hats, literally and figuratively.

Yet it all had the air of suspended reality. For most people, their clothes say something about themselves; for Alan, his clothes seemed to *obscure* who he was. The crazy outfits and over-the-top accessories served merely as armor, a wall through which we were only given a glimpse of the man behind the masks.

Ironically, it was on his Royal Rainbow World Tour 97' (during which he donned the most wildly extravagant ensembles of his life) that he finally worked out his need for glamour.

"About half-way through that tour I was running out of space to put all the clothes I had accumulated, so I started stocking them in the attic, and suddenly I could visualize all of them at once, and I just thought, "My God... there is so much wasted money here, and I'll probably never wear any of this stuff

again' and I felt terrible. At the time I also had a great group of friends who supported me unconditionally no matter what I wore, and it finally hit home."

One look at the storage space in the attic confirms the story: three long rows of outfits hang across the room. There are gaudy colors of every fabric, exotic plumage and all sorts of feather boas, a zillion robes and night-wear, at least twenty coats, sequin fantasy garb, over thirty hats, and countless accessories. It is a diva's dream, but for Alan is now represents the frivolity and wasted extravagance of someone in search of meaning in all the wrong ways.

As we walk up Boylston Street and past the high-end fashion boutiques, Alan seems far-removed from such indulgences. It is a testament to his inner beauty that he has never looked better than he does now. Gone are the fancy duds, and for the first time his clothes don't distract ~ rather, they augment his face and figure. Alan is letting his eyebrows grow back for the first time in three years.

"That alone should show you how little appearance means to me at this point, and it's not worth saying anything more about it," he says dismissively. These days he favors low-maintenance duds, the sort that can be found at Mass. Army and Navy, the Salvation Army, and urban outfitters. It tends toward trendy, but Alan seems unquestionably at ease in his new "look". His hair is rather without a set style as well ~ brushed forward, short, and naturally dark. "Easy up-keep," he laughs, and he seems completely comfortable in his skin.

Alan's friend Alissa has seen him through the long transformation. "Although I miss the Diva fashion line," she says, "I like the new understated Alan. He's more approachable."

Chris Vaeth has witnessed all the changes since 1995, (including the lavish tour costumes and party get-ups) but isn't entirely convinced of Alan's new image. "I have to admit... I like those "glamorous trappings of the past" much better than the dull trappings of the present," Chris says, as he himself wears a pair of too-baggy, too-dirty, not-too-trendy dark jeans, a ratty, hole-filled, faded blue T-shirt from some tired high school function, and *sneakers*. Oblivious to his judgmental hypocrisy, Chris goes on: "Alan is my only guy friend who can pull off those outfits, and while his new clothing might reflect a personality change, it is boring. I've come to expect more from royalty."

Alan listens to the comments with a blank face: it is not the first time he has met with disfavor over what he wears. (Recall how in 1995 Kate Ochal broke down crying and refused to be seen with Alan while he wore a bondage-themed outfit with women's garments hanging on the outside; a few months later, while on his *Chameleon in Motion* Tour in Rochester, NY, Alan was mistaken for a clown at a local Ponderosa while donning a bright color-blocked pair of silk boxers over red silk pants, an assortment of colored beads around his neck, and a sparkling beret made of a cacophony of rainbow sequins.) At this point in his life I get the feeling that Alan is tired of drawing attention by way of outrageous outfits. It is a change that suits him, and, ironically, he seems to get more glances than ever before. Gay men and straight women take notice, but Alan appears sincerely oblivious to the attention he once courted so vociferously.

He points out Boston's theater district and tells me about some upcoming shows. For the moment, Alan is any one of us, walking and talking and going on about life in an unassuming manner, but I get the feeling that there is activity ten-fold beneath the surface. It is apparent in the change that has come over him since last we met.

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A little over a year ago I had been invited to attend "King Alan's Royal Birthday Celebration", which was thrown on August 24, 1997. I arrived to witness Alan mingling and laughing with a dozen or so of his hometown friends. He wore a black pajama set of silk, with tiny gold pin-stripes, and a dramatic sheer leopard jacket with a black ostrich feather border around the neckline and sleeves. It was clear that although he had dressed up for the party, that time of his life was drawing to a close. After traveling the world, from the squalor and obscene poverty of the Philippines to the grandiose mansions of Hong Kong, from the stark, lean existence of the peasants in Ireland to the fancy trappings of the Royal family in London, Alan seemed to have made some sense of it all, and that translated to a re-working of what was important in his life. One of the first things to go was his penchant for pricey clothing. Second, he eradicated the bitchy, self-serving attitude that had been his calling card.

"It had always been a joke, a tongue-in-cheek sort of thing, but after a while it became fact, and it was *hell* trying to change that image. It's still with me in a lot of ways, but the smart ones know how to take it with a grain of salt," he explains.

When 1997 came to a close, Alan found himself yearning for romance. It had been a year since he had any serious interest in anyone, and in that time he sacrificed all possible paramours due to the tour and other distractions.

“Nothing was going to get in the way of his ‘Tour’, at least in his mind,” says one friend. “And that just showed how cold he could be. I know of a few occasions where people wanted to get to know him better, but he just took off for the next scheduled tour date, even if he could have stayed longer.” That kind of discipline and calculation made it difficult for people to feel pity when he ended up alone at the end of every night, but Alan seemed unbothered by it. Only after the tour ended, and he had learned some valuable life lessons, did he open up and allow himself to feel anything. At the start of 1998 he did just that, and he ended up getting incredibly hurt.

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The infamous ‘Spin Control’ interview, chronicling Alan’s fall from grace and his infatuation/obsession with a guy from Rochester, NY was one of his lowest points. Released in March of this past year, it told the absurdly detailed travails of Alan’s desperate attempts at winning over someone who didn’t want him.

“I was really worried about Alan,” Alissa recalls of the troubled period. “He catapulted himself into this “relationship” with a guy he insisted was nice, but who treated Al like shit in my opinion. Then came this headlong rush into darkness. I had never seen Alan so depressed, so low energy, so dark. All the usual melodrama was lacking. He sounded and acted completely unstable, and I was afraid that he would hurt himself or someone else.”

‘Spin Control’ was supposed to put an end to the swirling rumors of instability and mental anguish, but it served merely to magnify the problems. For many, that interview was a sorely misguided attempt at mental reparation. Even Alan uncharacteristically admits tinges of regret when it is brought up.

“I don’t really *regret* it as much as I wish that I had waited and not paid such homage to such a fool,” he says with slight bitterness. “But it was my absolute truth of the moment, and for that I’m not ashamed in the least. It took balls to put that out there, and it was something that I had to do.”

Still, many found fault with Alan’s actions. “It was a piece of shit,” says his friend Matthew Yager. “He was pathetic and sad and... the whole thing was a load of crap.”

Others took Alan to task over the supposed intent of the interview.

“He claimed he did it to show that he had opened up and could really care about people without all the manipulation and false pretence of before, and he said he did it to show people what a special person this guy was, but then he goes and objectifies the whole situation, completely removing any and all *real* emotion by using this guise of an interview. It was supposed to be real life, but it was really just another of his acts. I mean, hello? Look at the Thank you page ~ it might as well have been a curtain call, because it was one of his best performances, because it wasn’t real.” The words don’t seem to register with Alan; perhaps in his silence is an acknowledgment of truth.

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We have reached Downtown Crossing. Bull-market vendors smile as Alan browses their wares. He smiles back ~ cold, contemptuous, false. When a shabbily-dressed old man ask him for change, Alan sneers a nasty, “No,” as if the man had just asked for his first-born child. It is this Alan that most people know, especially acquaintances who haven’t had the time or given the effort to look behind the cruel visage. It is, in a way, Alan’s greatest protection device, but it is also an off-putting element that may actually hurt more than it helps.

When he meets people, he comes on strong ~ loud, brash, and sometimes obnoxious. There is rarely a subtle introduction (and even when he merely offers a handshake, it is often coupled with a dramatic “*Charmed, charmed, charmed*” drawl.) The first thing he inspires, almost universally, is trepidation. Along with that comes the view that Alan is “aloof” and “cold”.

Spencer Burke, one of Alan’s original co-workers at the Faneuil Hall Structure store, had this to say about his first meeting with the then-nineteen-year-old in the Fall of 1995: “[I first thought] he was arrogant and self-centered. His friendliness seemed forced. Personally, I felt threatened by his forwardness. But all my first impressions of Alan were really defense mechanisms, generated by Alan, to weed out those people who are not worthy of his friendship.”

In the Royal Rainbow World Tour Book, John Rakstis, a co-worker from the Rotterdam Structure who had met Alan in the summer of 1996, wrote these words: “When I first met you I was scared of you, because I envied your individuality. How you could and how I couldn’t. How you did and how I didn’t.”

Alan’s first meeting with Alissa Myrick (who had started going out with his friend Chris Vaeth) was equally frightening. As Chris pointed out the pretty girl boarding the bus at Harvard, Alan let out an earth-shattering scream for all of Cambridge to hear. As Alissa recalls, “My first impression was of a lunatic

wearing a fur coat and leopard skin bag was having some sort of psychotic orgasm by screaming my name in Harvard Square... I thought Alan was a very hyper, very extravagant FREAK.”

Even the usually-unflappable Mr. Vaeth was taken aback when he saw Alan for the first time: sitting on a couch at 121 College Avenue, Ithaca, NY, wearing a silver sequin jacket, wrap-around mirror sunglasses, and shiny silver lame pants. “He was dressed like a bug,” Chris says of that day in the spring of 1995. “First impression? Fear. But then he gave me a plastic daisy, and I started to like the guy.”

It doesn’t always go so quickly from fear to friendship, however.

“Oh God, Alan can be very mean. And not just an angry kind of mean, but a vindictive, calculating mean,” claims someone who wishes to remain anonymous. “I don’t think he realizes the bite his words have, or the power he has... He ends up hurting people a lot more than he knows.”

The tale is oft told about the time when Alan rebuffed an overweight woman begging for change by asking her to “take this momentary lack of funds and use it as an incentive to stop eating.” Ouch. And then there was the incident where a fellow student didn’t offer Alan the courtesy of holding the heavy door to his dorm open, thus forcing him to dig out keys and fumble with the lock. Reportedly he ran up the stairs and left her with this comment, “I’d yell at you for that, but it looks as though God has punished you enough.” Hard to love? Try impossible. What makes it all the more difficult is the fact that no one seems to know how Alan has been hurt so badly as to warrant such a bitter take on the world.

“It’s a complete mystery, but it’s so obviously there: this is a young man who has been in some serious pain. He’s never been specific, so no one really understand why he is so mean sometimes, but his behavior hints that it’s a result of being hurt so much that he will do the hurting now first now,” says one long-time confidante. “It’s very transparent, but we still don’t know the underlying reasons for it.”

A few don’t think there are any. “Alan hasn’t gone through any real tough pain in his life. If he’s mean, it’s because he’s bored or tired or putting on a show,” says one. Others echo those sentiments.

“I doubt his evil stems from any traumatic experience of his childhood, I just think it’s a way of keeping himself entertained, at the expense of others. Let’s face it, Alan’s not always a good person. A lot of us aren’t, but I don’t think I’ve seen anyone get as much joy out of being bad as he does. And a lot of the time it’s very entertaining.”

That may be a key element to understanding him: Alan is often sadistically sarcastic, but even behind his most biting barbs there seems to be a knowing wink, an escape clause of playfulness that allows forgiveness and maybe even a healthy dose of gratefulness at such abuse. The most important aspect in this behavior seems to be Alan’s skewering of himself above all else. He is brutal in his self-deprecation, and if he can take it, he certainly can give it.

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Many point out that while he may be outwardly mean at times, he is also one of the most loyal friends, once he decides to let down his defenses. Ginette Hazarie, whom Alan met in November 1995 at Structure and whose wedding he attended in June 1997, contends that Alan is “a genuine individual with a big heart. He’s a wonderful person... a kind soul.”

Another one of his managers at Structure felt similarly: “Alan is awesome... I know I can trust him with anything, and that’s a very hard quality to find in someone. The more time I spend with him, the more I realize how down to earth he can be,” she says.

Kate Ochal, who has had her ups and downs with Alan in the ten years that they’ve known each other, says, “I think that Alan may be a tad eccentric and sometimes he does things which I don’t understand, but underneath it all he is a very loyal and true person to the people he cares about.”

Adds Chris Vaeth, “Alan has brought into my life not only fashion and fun, but also one of the most genuine friendships of my twenty-three years.”

Even those people whom Alan aggravates and annoys with his incessant teasing and sarcasm find it hard to find fault with him. John Gariepy, one of Alan’s first store managers at Structure, and the one whom Alan terrorized during their work time together, admits their relationship was “volatile, but I know it’s only the surface. He’s a gem underneath... faithful too.”

As we weave our way through Downtown Crossing, Alan takes me on the back-route used mainly by business folk, thus allowing us to bypass all the hapless tourists. “They’re almost as bad as the students,” he whispers conspiratorially. We end up at the Waterfront near the New England Aquarium. It is said and documented that this is one of Alan’s favorite haunts, and the way the breeze comes off the harbor accompanied by the cries of gulls, it is clear to see why. He is quieter here, and less ready with a laugh. It seems to be a fitting spot to investigate the stories of this past summer. Letting out a deep sigh, his

acquiescence is surprisingly easy, and his frank forthrightness is in opposition to his current guarded lifestyle. The evening descends as he begins his tale, and he will not pause until it is dark.

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In May of this past year, Alan found himself growing bored and tired of Boston. The dull hours of work at Structure (where he had been steadily employed since September 1995) had taken their toll, as had a lack of direction and ambition. He needed time off, time to re-group and re-focus, and a time to grow inspired again. The messy non-relationship with Patrick now over, he felt it was a good moment for fun. Heading to Rochester, NY, where he had always enjoyed the riotous company of pal Gina Agresta, Alan's plan was to let loose like he had never done before.

Ever since his self-proclaimed days of hustling (and even before then, some say) Alan had never expressed a keen need for sex. In fact, he had often facetiously called himself "Asexual"; Chris Vaeth likened Alan's sex drive to that of "a plant". Once in Rochester, however, Alan's sexual drive took a decidedly upward swing, no pun intended. He could usually be found at the Avenue Pub, or Tara's, or Club Marcella's, often chatting up the available men and teasing those who chose to play. Many an occasion saw him collecting phone numbers and stolen kisses, but no one is sure exactly how much he actually did with those people. Regardless, it was a time of sexual recklessness, but not completely devoid of Alan's ongoing search for love and affection.

On one trip Gina set him up with her friend Scott, who was a regular at the Avenue Pub. Alan enjoyed a low-key affair with him for the month of May, but the relationship was ultimately doomed due to combination of factors: Scott was much older than Alan, they had little in common, Alan didn't seem that interested, Scott drank a lot and smoked too much pot. It was a turning point in the way Alan handled romantic endeavors: no longer would he dive head-first into total commitment and love. From now on this aloof young man would do the heartbreaking, and in Rochester he tore through the gay scene with dangerous abandon. When all was said and done, he had made a new name for himself: Alan was a slut.

His self-esteem artificially raised and his confidence outwardly at an all-time high, Alan made an irresistible pick-up. He rarely left bars alone, but refused to spend the entire night with any one person. The defenses were up in full-force, and for the most part he could remain unaffected by his actions. If anyone was going to get hurt, from now on it would be the other person. He also discovered the power of the rebound: whenever he felt he was getting too close to someone, emotionally speaking, Alan would find someone else with whom to fool around in order to move on.

Accompanying this new way of life was a growing reliance on alcohol. Always one who enjoyed a good drink, Alan was making it a habit. He soon felt he couldn't go out anywhere without "a cocktail to lower my natural suspicions and inhibitions." On more than one occasion did Alan find himself in a compromising position thanks to his "lowered inhibitions."

Initially it was a thrill; Alan had never really let go, sexually speaking, and his actions of the time could be seen as a healthy exploration of his sexuality, one which did not involve money or power as in his hustling days. He re-discovered his sex drive, and all those promiscuous nights of desire were, to him, a necessary step in moving past the specter of prostitution.

Not everyone agrees that it was the best way of going about things. Friends were said to be highly concerned about Alan's new Life-is-a-cabaret carelessness. The drinking, the smoking, the sex ~ it was all too much, too fast.

"I have known Alan for less than a year," Ms. Myrick begins with a note of concern. "How many men has it been? Inches of dick, but very little substance. Pages of interviews, but not too much sensitivity or contentment. At first, I thought Alan was a classic dram queen/poet, i.e. living on the edge to write, to experience, to be free. But edge is razor-sharp, and it disturbs me to see Alan depressed."

Alan himself saw the deficiencies of the path down which he was traveling. It soon grew stale, and he finally realized it was an empty way of living. He headed back to Amsterdam to spend time with his family and think things over.

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On Saturday nights, when he is staying with his parents, Alan plays cards. His fellow players are middle-aged women; he met them several years ago (two are parents of his friends). He has become a fixture at these games, and the ladies seem openly amused and happy to have him join. Throughout the years, Alan has always found time for these card games. He shares a special bond with these women, who have seen him through suicide attempts, depression, broken relationships, his coming-out as a gay man, and numerous traumas.

"I met them when I was going through a rough time with my own family, and these women sort of became surrogate mothers to me. They would cook and talk with me when I was desperate for that, and they accepted me in their own way," Alan explains. He likens their card games to "a raunchy version of the Golden Girls on acid ~ a real trip." Yet beyond all the crude sexual innuendo, the X-rated banter, and the cutting sarcastic comments and quips is a true feeling of love and support. Alan is accepted at face value; he doesn't have to dress up or pretend or put on a show for these people ~ they love him just the way he is. And it is also clear that the feeling is mutual: Alan can be counted on to bring a cheesecake, an entertaining story, and the simply joy of his presence each and every Saturday he is in town.

It is an image quite different from the ruthless man that we sometimes see walking down the streets of Boston, and it is the real Alan that those closest to him claim to know.

"Look," he says, downplaying his kindness, "those women have always been good to me. I will never forget their complete acceptance when I told them I was gay... it wasn't even an issue for them, and for that I was extremely grateful. And I know that they get a kick out of me, with all my sordid tales of debauchery and other foolishness, and I'm more than happy to entertain. They're good friends of mine."

The waning days of June drawing to a close, Alan began putting his questionable fast-living to an end. Early July was spent winding down and reflecting on what he had been doing, and unlike his traditional public behavior of the past, Alan did most of the thinking on his own, without searching out the advice of his friends and confidantes. It was the beginning of a private life, something which he had forsaken in an effort to remain remembered. Unfortunately, it was also the start of an inward isolation that would ultimately threaten to destroy him.

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His life had become an open book to all, a soap opera where we tuned in daily to see or hear about the most minute wanderings of his wayward existence. At times it seemed as if he was going out of his way to get himself into insane situations, just so he'd have a story to tell or a picture to show.

"Things were getting out of hand... in a lot of ways," he says. "Did you hear the first song on the *Ray of Light* album?" he asks as way of explanation. While Alan was always ready with a Madonna plug, I never truly understood his obsession with the pop star until I listened to that album. In the opening song she sings:

No famous faces, far off places, Trinkets I can buy/
No handsome stranger, Heady danger, Drug that I can try/
No ferris wheel, No heart to steal, No laughter in the dark/
No one-night-stand, No far-off land, No fire that I can spark.

Upon hearing that song for the first time, it instantly recalled Alan to my mind: not simply for the words, but for the impassioned wail that this part builds up to: it is a crying-out for help, for rescue, for understanding, for love. Alan's been to the far-off places and lands, he's bought the countless trinkets, he's had many a handsome stranger and engaged in the heady danger; he's tried a drug or two or three, stolen and tread upon a few hearts, and exchanged a bit of laughter in the dark. Above all, he's done the one-night-stands and now finds himself without a fire to spark.

His reckless lifestyle finally taking its toll, Alan was left void of all inspiration, almost void of feeling itself in any form. This new numbness wasn't all bad, however: it enabled him to come to terms with many elements of the past, including his infamous liaison with Patrick Richardson and the resulting trail of one-night-stands he left in Rochester.

"By the end of July I knew I had to go back there one last time, to put it to rest once and for all," he says definitively. During that time Alan had a lackluster crush on a guy in Saratoga, but sensing that it would go nowhere, he gave up romance for the moment. However, his friend and ex-manager Dawn had set him up with a friend of a friend. "Since it was the first instance I had ever really been set up in a somewhat normal manner, I couldn't say no," Alan explains. "Though at the time I had no high hopes whatsoever. In fact, before meeting the guy I just thought, 'God, let this be over with quickly. Let me meet this loser and move on,' I swear. And this time I meant it ~ I was in no mood to meet anyone, but of course that's always when something good happens."

On Wednesday, July 22, 1998, Alan dragged long-time friend Kerry Ochal into a club in Albany, NY for support while he met with Mr. Christopher Church. While eyeing his intended set-up (who shyly sat at the bar chattering with a mutual friend) Alan was being pestered relentlessly by a sleazy creep who wouldn't leave him alone, despite his repeated rebuttals. Alan called Chris Church over with a come-hither

gesture of his hand and introduced himself. "Sit next to me and talk so this loser will leave me alone," he whispered to Chris. The two hit it off quite well, and Alan was pleasantly surprised.

"I simply wasn't expecting anything like him. I mean, I didn't think he would be a total jerk or anything, but I never thought we'd click so well. It was refreshing and fun, and I hadn't had that... well, ever." After exchanging phone numbers, they departed with a handshake, an incredibly chaste move from a man who was once the cock-tease of upstate New York, and a telling sign of the change that had been wrought since the heady days of Rochester, when tongue-kissing was a way of introduction. Chris said he would call on Sunday night, after Alan returned from his trip to Rochester and Boston. There were matters there that had to be cleared up: Alan had never officially broken up with Scott; the *final* closure with Patrick; and the laundry list of phone numbers that spilled out of his address book. The next day he would head out to Rochester to take care of those items, and to celebrate the ending of an eventful chapter of his life. It was to be his very last trip to Rochester for a long while: Alan planned to return to Boston for good shortly thereafter.

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Arriving in the early afternoon of July 23, Alan brought a twelve-pack of beer to Gina and Michael, with whom he stayed during his time in Rochester. They shared an apartment directly above the Avenue Pub, and Alan had often commented on the convenience of the place. While he trusted the two of them, he also knew they had a way of asking for money often, so Alan put \$200 in the pocket of his shorts so he could show them an empty wallet and be left alone. He showered and dressed for dinner.

At 6PM Alan arrived at Boom, the restaurant where Patrick Richardson still worked as a chef. He had reservations with his friend Chris Vaeth, and the two of them sat down and had a few drinks. Already tipsy by a trip to the Avenue Pub en route to dinner, Alan was outspoken as usual, and told the waitress to alert Patrick of his presence. He joked that he just did it to get a free appetizer, but he also wanted Patrick to know that he had gone on, at last.

By the end of the meal, Alan and Chris were invited into the kitchen to say hello. It was the first time any of his close friends had laid eyes on Patrick, and after all the talk and stories, it was nothing short of momentous. On meeting Patrick, Mr. Vaeth was hardly impressed.

"I wondered how many more gray hairs were under that baseball cap," Chris says critically. "I thought he was nice but... I didn't get the feeling that Alan seemed to get when he met him. In that short conversation, I couldn't pinpoint the source of Alan's depth of feeling. I was relatively unmoved, considering the whole build-up with the [Spin Control] interview. It was like, 'That's what this is all about?'"

Before departing the restaurant, Alan left Patrick with a handshake, and a wicked smile. They haven't spoken since, and Alan seems genuinely uninterested in him, pointing out that the whole ordeal of the past winter had nothing to do with Patrick himself, but rather with Alan's own personal journey. "Patrick just happened to be the one who was there. He's sadly unremarkable in his own right," he dismisses with a bitchy chuckle.

Alan returned to the Avenue Pub and was going to put the \$200 back in his wallet to go out when he discovered it was missing. He called Gina into the room for an explanation.

"Oh my God, that snake Michael took it. I saw him over by your shorts but I thought they were his," she said to Alan, starting to fume. "I knew he was doing something 'cause he was all suspicious. He took the money, that fucking snake."

It was a blow to Alan on many levels. First, there was the simple fact that he had been unemployed since the end of May, and \$200 was a great deal of money for him. Second, it was a personal attack, because Alan had trusted Michael and felt deeply hurt and violated by the turn of events.

"At first I sort of panicked ~ there was this huge churning in my stomach. I mean, I had three dollars in my wallet with which to get to Boston. And then I felt stupid and dumb and careless. I should have known better, but it had never been my intention to leave the money there at all. Finally I was just mad and pissed and upset by the whole situation."

Gina went out to find Michael while Alan lingered outside the Avenue Pub in a vile mood. An hour or so later Gina ran by him, clearly upset, and demanded that he talk with her. Alan listened suspiciously as she recounted her story. Gina claimed that she had been duped into following a guy who said he knew where Michael was, then said she was forced at gun or knife-point to give him a blow-job, and finally that she had her jewelry stolen by the man. Alan didn't know what to believe anymore. Gina blamed Michael for the whole incident and was in tears for much of the evening, though many close to her wonder at the authenticity of such a scene.

“Hey, I’ve seen Gina through a lot of things over the years,” says someone who knows both Gina and Alan, “And I hate to say this, but I do doubt the truth of her story. In all probability she went out, sold her jewelry, and came up with this bullshit story to clear her name and explain the missing stuff. It’s a shame that someone like Alan had to be involved in any way, but a lot of people warned him about going there.” Even Gina’s own sister had little faith in the validity of the outlandish tale.

Michael reportedly used the money to buy drugs. When he came back at one o’clock in the morning, he initially denied taking the \$200. At this point he was high, and did not take kindly to Gina and Alan’s condemnations. Gina and Michael yelled and fought and carried on while Alan just slid into a chair and wondered where it all went wrong. Eventually the fighting turned physical. Gina was screaming at the top of her lungs for Alan to call the police while Michael manhandled her and blocked the phone. Gina was in hysterics, yelling that Michael didn’t even care that she had been raped; Michael, high on something and out of control, yelled back.

“You was raped? Huh Gina?! Answer! You were raped?! You’re telling me some guy stuck his cock down your mouth and you couldn’t do anything about it?” Michael screamed as he struggled with her.

“Yeah, Michael, I was! He stuck his cock down my fucking throat and made me suck it or he’d kill me,” she shouted in a harsh, hoarse voice. “You think it’s fucking funny, you fucking nigger... You think it’s a joke... you fucking bastard,” she whimpered, breaking into sobs again. “Alan, call the police!”

“Yeah, go ahead, call the police and tell them you were raped Gina,” Michael said.

“We’re also turning you in for stealing my friend’s money,” she told him.

Alan sat in rapt disbelief, coupled with an intense fear for his own safety for the first time. Michael and Gina grappled and fought in the bedroom, right next to the phone. Alan eyed the portable unit next to him and debated whether to dial 911 and leave it by the door, allowing the operator to hear the cries and judge for herself. He then recalled that the portable wasn’t hooked up yet; he would have to get the phone from the bedroom somehow.

“I know I probably should have left then, but I was very upset about the money, and I wanted it back, so I stayed,” Alan explains, his voice shaky as he recounts the horror of the moment.

Michael emerged from the bathroom and once again denied taking the money. Gina followed, screaming that he was a damn liar who used it to buy drugs and get high. The fighting began again, with Alan in close proximity as Gina hurled a heavy glass case at Michael, who charged into her and held her arms down as he shouted into her face.

Alan moved to the bedroom and held the phone in his hands. What would he say? His hands trembled as he picked up the receiver, then put it down. He sat on the bed and listened to the brawl in the next room. He picked up the phone again and shakily dialed 9-1-1. Recounting the night’s events, and giving the street address, Alan’s voice quivered with honest fear. The operator asked if the yelling in the background was turning violent, and Alan confirmed that it was.

Michael entered the bedroom as Alan held the phone to his ear. The operator assured him that a police car was on its way and Alan hung up the receiver as Michael came closer to him.

“What did you say to them?” Michael asked.

“I just told them about the money and what was going on,” Alan said, suddenly strangely unafraid for his own well-being.

“Did you say how Gina had been raped or anything?”

“No, that has nothing to do with me.”

“So are they coming?”

“Yes.”

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When the police arrived about ten minutes later, Michael was gone. Alan let the officer into the apartment and told the story of the stolen cash.

“Look, you and I both know he took the money, but unless someone saw it, we can’t do anything,” the officer explained kindly. An hour or so later, Michael returned to the apartment. He admitted to taking the money and buying drugs with it, and apologized to Alan. He went and sat outside for a while. Alan write up a hasty admission-of-guilt form letter and had Michael sign it, and then used Gina as a witness. He still harbored a few hopes of getting the money back, but was starting to resign himself to a bad streak of luck. At 3:30 AM, Michael and Gina went to sleep together, and Alan passed out, mentally drained and emotionally numb. In four hours he would have to get up and drive to Boston with Chris Vaeth and Mark Hennessy, and he didn’t even have enough money for tolls. When the 7:30AM wake-up call rolled around, Gina called Alan into the bedroom.

“Alan, you see this?” and she pointed to her and Michael together, “This is over. He’s out of here,” she claimed. “Oh, and don’t tell my mother any of this either.”

The downward fall had begun, and that first drop, so steep and scary, foreshadowed worse things to come.

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At 8:30 AM, July 23, 1998, Alan Ilagan arrived at Chris Vaeth’s house in Fairport, NY. He was slightly hung-over, had gotten only three hours of sleep, and wore dark sunglasses to hide traumatized eyes. He looked at Chris and just shook his head, managing a weak laugh before relating the details of the night in a husky whisper. Easing quietly into the passenger seat, Alan let Chris do all the driving that day.

“He was obviously exhausted and emotionally drained, and I originally thought that it was because he was up all night, but once I discovered what had happened it was clear that his trust had been betrayed,” Chris explains. “He was pissed about the money and unsure how he would get it back, and pissed about losing a night’s sleep before a big trip, which is always important to Alan, but what I didn’t recognize right away was that this trip to Rochester was supposed to be closure, and as he was leaving it was opening up a whole new slew of shit.”

They picked up Mark Hennessy, who was going to Boston to secure a place to stay on his entry to Boston University in the Fall. Alan was understandably moody: alternately stewing and brooding, he nonetheless managed to make small talk and entertain for the six-and-a-half hour drive to Massachusetts. He was also scheduled for an interview at the Chandler Inn, a South End Hotel that had an opening for a Front Desk position.

The next morning was hot and humid, but Alan was in decidedly better spirits, thanks to the easygoing fun with Chris and Mark. Perhaps fearful of coming off as bitter (or maybe the rumors were true after all), Alan had a few shots of vodka just before his interview. It was eleven o’clock in the morning, and he washed it all down with an Orange-Mango Snapple.

The interview went well, and Alan felt that he had the job. He had been straightforward about his upcoming cross-country trip (to pick up friend and current manager Suzie Ko), but they seemed okay with it and promised to call upon his return. Early Sunday afternoon, while he and Mark awaited the always-late arrival of Chris Vaeth for the trek back to upstate NY, Alan called Amsterdam to check his messages. There was one, and it would prove to be the single glimmer of hope that would carry him through the next week:

“Hi Alan, this is Chris. We met on Wednesday night. I know I’m not supposed to call until later, but I’ll be working until about 11 o’clock tonight, and I didn’t feel comfortable calling so late, so call me around 11:30 if you want. If I don’t talk to you then... well, just call, cause it will be cool. The number is \_\_\_\_\_. Okay? Bye.”

Despite the recent Rochester fiasco, the lack of a job, and the violent summer storms that pummeled them on the ride home, Chris and Mark confirm that Alan was *very* happy for the remaining duration of the trip. It was a happiness that would prove to be short-lived, however, and while the storm clouds cleared as Alan entered Amsterdam, darker ones were brewing in the cool descent of that evening.

He pauses in the recitative. It is night. A cold wind has moved in from the Harbor, and the moon is a white crescent rising over Boston’s World Trade Center. Alan unties the black sweatshirt from around his waist and slips his arms into it. He looks boyishly innocent, with wide eyes that survey the glittering waters before us. The cord of a flagpole clangs high in the air as the wind rises. Taking a deep breath, Alan plunges cautiously into his story again.

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In order to truly understand the magnitude of the events that follow, one must have a brief knowledge of Ann Agresta and her relationship with Alan Ilagan. While they officially met for the first time in the Fall of 1987 (upon entering Wilbur H. Lynch Middle School), they wouldn’t become good friends until their sophomore year at Amsterdam High School, 1991. During that year, the two forged a deep friendship based in truth, understanding, and a shared sick sense of humor. Ann brought Alan out of his shell; she was outwardly confident, extremely intelligent, dared to be different, and didn’t seem to give a damn what the world thought.

“She was supreme inspiration,” Alan says warmly. Not often one to talk of others in such glowing terms, he has nothing but accolades to bestow upon the young woman whom many regarded as his best friend from 1991 to the end of 1997. “I met her at a time of doubt and insecurity,” Alan continues, “I didn’t know who I was, so I would look to her for strength and reassurance. We absolutely grew up together.”

I comment that it was Ann who introduced him to a new way of life. “It wasn’t so much a new way of life,” he clarifies, “It was just bringing me out of my sheltered existence, and showing me a *different* way of life. She showed me the Southside of Amsterdam, and took me to my first rock concert,” Alan recalls with a smile. Ann was also the one who introduced him to the card players, one of whom was Ginny Agresta, Ann’s own mother.

“Ann sensed it was a difficult time for me, with my family and everything, and she knew that those silly card games were my only escape.”

Throughout the coming years, their relationship would deepen and mature. They saw each other through family strife (they shared a common bond in having siblings who were prone to arrest), personal traumas (both suffered bouts of severe depression and self-doubt), and the more general dilemma of growing into adults. They shared their most intimate secrets and feelings, and seemed to understand each other like no one else before or since.

Though the distance between them grew as Ann headed to Rochester, NY to attend the Rochester Institute of Technology, and Alan moved to Boston, MA to matriculate at Brandeis University, their friendship hardly diminished; in fact, it only grew stronger.

“When we went to college and moved away from home, we suddenly realized what was important to us, the people who really mattered, and what was going to last. When things got shaky, we depended on each other,” he explains.

Ann was one of the only ones who stood by him as Alan weathered the blow-up over his ‘Sex’ project of October 1993. Shortly thereafter he enlisted her as his first official “Personal Manager”, in charge of overseeing his artistic career (including the Tours, projects, stories, and public image perception). It was a professional and personal partnership that would yield some of Alan’s most well-known endeavors. (Ann was the encouragement behind such hot projects as ‘Darkness – October 1994, ‘Preference’ – February 1995, ‘Desire’ – February 1996; his controversial written work ‘diSenchAntMent’ from March 1997; and played a part in all three of his Tours, most notably his virgin *Chameleon in Motion* Tour in the Spring of 1995.)

Privately they were good friends finding their way in the world, friends who could be counted on for an honest answer, no matter how frightening or personal the question. Ann never judged or condemned Alan for his questionable actions (the hustling, the drinking, the drug experimentation, the one-night-stands) and Alan has loved Ann and supported her in the face of several disastrous relationships.

Despite their tight friendship, they did live six hundred miles away from each other, so personal day-to-day contact was impossible. They shared phone conversations and the occasional letter, and would always have a special bond unbroken by almost anything, but their lives no longer intersected on a regular basis. Alan had a new life in Boston; Ann had two important boyfriends, one of whom Alan had never met. Whatever the reason (and for one of the only times this evening, Alan refuses comment on the situation) Ann and Alan were heading in different directions. In the first part of 1998, sensing that they were no longer professionally in-sync, Alan dismissed Ann as his Personal Manager, which had more or less become an in-name-only position. (Suzie Ko was named as her successor.)

While friends in-the-know claim Alan was upset by Ann’s current relationship, he remains tight-lipped about the whole thing, perhaps stung by charges that he has a big mouth. No one but Alan knows exactly what he did and said.

“Look, I made a few mistakes and I said more than I should have to the wrong people, but I was scared and desperate... I took the only recourse I knew, and Ann knows that it was done in the name of protection and concern and love for her,” Alan says defensively. “Missy and Kirsten and a few other people who knew of the situation felt the same way I did ~ I was just the only one who had the balls to say anything and to try to do something. Granted, it didn’t do a lot of good, but at least I cared enough to take a chance.

By July 1998, there was palpable tension between Ann and Alan, but they seemed on their way back to each other. In the end it was to be a grave tragedy that would serve to re-unite them in love, compassion, and understanding.

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On the evening of July 26, 1998, Alan returned to Amsterdam, NY after his weekend in Rochester, NY and Boston, MA. Still fuming over the stolen \$200, he tried calling Gina Agresta to find out about the status of the money and Michael. After getting no answer for the third day in a row, Alan had no choice but to call up Gina’s mother, Ginny, and ask if she knew how to get in touch with Gina. He made the call at around 7:30 PM.

Upon hearing of Ginny's planned trip to Rochester later that week, Alan explained the whole stolen money story and offered to give her a ride. She said she'd call him later that week to let him know.

"It wasn't like he was telling on Gina, or spreading gossip, it was just a casual thing that he mentioned. And really, I don't think it was wrong ~ the kid was out of money and had just been fucked-over in a big way," says one insider.

Gina had always had issues with her family, and this was another story that would upset her parents. Sometime shortly after Alan made the phone call, Ginny told her husband Pucky about the situation, and then went out to run errands. Both were a little upset over the latest development, but when Ann spoke with her father an hour or so later, things seemed all right; they joked and laughed over things like always.

By 10:30 PM, Pucky Agresta had died from a heart attack. Ann and Gina drove from Rochester to Amsterdam late that night, and Ginny was rushed to the hospital with heart problems brought about by the death of her husband.

The next morning, Alan awoke at nine o'clock to the ringing of the phone. It was his friend Missy Natale.

"Al, did Pucky die?" she asked.

"What?" Alan asked groggily, not in the mood for stupid questions at the early hour.

"I heard someone say that Pucky Agresta died of a heart attack last night," Missy continued. Never one to buy into rumors or hear-say, Alan said he didn't think so, but he'd find out.

He called Florence Maslak (known affectionately as Funzie), one of the original card players, and an old friend of the Agresta family. She confirmed it: Pucky had died the previous night and Ginny was at St. Mary's Hospital. Alan called Missy back and told her it was true, then hung up and sat in stunned silence. He had said a few words of jest to Pucky just a few hours before he died, and he couldn't believe this was happening. Suddenly the most terrifying thought crossed his mind, but he pushed it away before it registered completely.

A few minutes later, Alan called Kirsten Myhre and told her the sad news. The two of them decided to go to the hospital to see Ginny. According to Kirsten, Alan in some short of shock; she had never seen him like this. He only said a few words to Ginny at the hospital, and in the car he appeared distracted and upset beyond reason.

"It was obviously a huge sad event, but I didn't understand so much why Alan was that affected. Yes, he knew Pucky, and of course he was Ann's good friend and basically an extended part of the family, but even so, there was something else," claims one friend.

While in the car with Kirsten, Alan remained silent. After departing the hospital, they drove to the Agresta house to see Ann. She greeted them with tears and hugs. As Kirsten offered words of encouragement and asked if there was anything that could be done, Alan stood in silence, on the verge of tears. Ann explained what had happened, and that Pucky had in fact died a few hours after Alan's phone call to the house. The worst, most horrendous of Alan's suspicions had been confirmed: he was partly responsible for the death of his best friend's father.

"I don't know if I felt that it was all my fault, but I certainly felt partly to blame, and I knew others would think the same thing, and *that* was the worst part," Alan says quietly. "It was surreal... like walking through a thick warm fluid. It was just going through the motions and functioning, but nothing really making sense or registering at all."

He gave Ann one final, long, hard hug good-bye, whispering, "I love you" into her ear.

"I love you too," she said through tears.

When Alan returned home there was a message on the answering machine. It was an agitated, confrontational voice:

"Alan, this is Gina. Please don't say anything else to my mother about Michael or anything, because I'm being blamed for this whole thing. Thanks, I appreciate it."

At that point, the full weight of the death fell upon Alan's shoulders, and it was impossible not to feel responsible. For the first time in his life, Alan kept it all inside. He told no one what he was going through, what he was feeling, and how he blamed himself. Friends and family sensed a change, but most overlooked it as a normal reaction to the situation.

"Oh God, Alan was so different those few days. I knew something was up, but he never told me explicitly. I'd ask what was wrong, and he'd shirk it off," says one. When pressed, Alan would simply say that Ann's father had just died, and how could he be happy over that."

“Alan was a completely different person that week. When I heard what happened, I thought he might be blaming himself for it, but I didn’t have the nerve to ask him, I just sort of waited for him to tell me on his own,” says another.

The wait was in vain. Alan, perhaps fearful of the power of his words, told no one what he was thinking. It was too much to even ponder, much less express out loud. He felt the eyes of Amsterdam on him, and was beginning to buckle under the self-imposed scrutiny. Unable to talk to his closest friends and family, Alan remembered to call Chris Church. Needing an escape and a break from his hometown, he agreed to meet Mr. Church at the Barnes and noble Bookstore that evening. At around seven o’clock, Alan poured a mixture of vodka and fruit juice into a plastic bottle and drove into Albany drinking the alcoholic concoction.

He arrived at the bookstore in a liberated sense of tipsiness, but got it together to disguise the fact from Chris. They looked through magazines while sitting in the café, and Alan socialized with the two friends Chris brought with him. At the end of the evening, Alan followed Chris home and the two went inside until midnight. An hour or so later, Alan was back in Amsterdam, and back in reality, choosing an outfit for the wake.

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The morning of July 30th was slightly overcast. Before showering, Alan went downstairs and poured himself a screwdriver. Dressed in a pair of black pants and a black V-neck sweater, he slid on sunglasses as he and his parents drove to the Riley Mortuary for the first viewing hours. He stood in line in front of Julie and Florence Maslak. He hugged Ann, Ginny, and Gina, and shook hands with the rest of the family before gazing at Pucky and saying a prayer.

Throughout it all he maintained a stoic face, behind which was a fragile, brittle mental state, one which threatened to crumble and scatter emotional debris in its wake. Alan was barely hanging on, and the isolation he had forced on himself was taking its toll. Finally, with so much weighing on his mind, he broke.

Alan sat in his parents’ kitchen and related the whole story to his Mom, from the horror-filled night at Rochester when his money was taken, to his most recent feelings of fault over the death of Ann’s father.

“I get along well with my Mom, but that was the first time in a while where I had gone expressly to her for help and support, and she was great about it, even though there was really nothing she could do. I felt better after telling her,” Alan says.

He had agreed to accompany Missy to the second viewing, and before she picked him up, Alan downed a few shots of vodka to get him through it. He still didn’t tell his friends the specifics of what he felt ~ it was still too fresh, too important, too painful.

Even during an intense get-together with Kirsten and Missy following the wake, Alan remained quiet about his true emotional frame of mind. He went to bed in a state of numb intoxication.

The funeral took place the next morning at 9:15 AM. Alan and his mother arrived and sat with Missy Natale. It was a difficult service, made more-so by the large number of openly grieving family members. When he watched Ann walk to the front of the church, her hair swept beautifully into a French twist, Alan’s heart wrenched.

“I just had this profound feeling of sadness sweep over me. I thought of Ann and just wanted to cry. She seemed so sad and alone at that moment, and my heart simply broke,” Alan says in a husky voice. “And then, when everyone was piling out of the church, I had this sickening feeling that if I was in *any* way responsible for that... how could I even live with myself?”

Alan gave Ann one more hug, and then departed. The car was hot from being in the sun. Alan put on a pair of sunglasses and opened a window.

“Al,” his Mom began, “You know you didn’t do that, right? You weren’t responsible...”

“I know, Mom,” he snapped. After that, no more was ever said about it.

The next day he called Ann and picked her up for lunch to talk. It was the first time the two had talked intimately since New Year’s Even 1996-97. They slipped into their comfortable rapport, although the day was understandably imbued with a sense of loss and melancholy. They spoke little of what had happened over the past few months, instead focusing on the safe peripheral ground of more general topics. Still, they had found their way back to each other, even if it was brought about by tragic circumstances.

“In that one simple gesture, I felt that Ann was forgiving me for all that I had done,” Alan explains. “I knew she didn’t blame me for the death, but there were other things that begged for forgiveness, and in our usual silent understanding she said that everything was okay. It meant everything to me, and it profoundly changed a lot of things in my life.”

He finally figured out what he had been doing his entire life. All the clothes, all the bad behavior, all the masks, all the Tours and delusional grandeur ~ it was a way to block out reality, a shield to protect himself from the harshest truths. When Ann's father died, it was no longer possible to keep the real world out. No fancy outfit, no clever manipulation, and no witty deflection could get him out of it, and he was scared. For the first time, Alan would have to deal with what was real, and no one, especially not Alan himself, knew what would happen.

Some would have run away, and a few years ago Alan would probably have done just that. Others would simply slip into denial. A few might go completely off the deep end and flail away, their minds lost forever. But Alan weathered the change, and forced himself to the wake, the funeral, and the family meetings, despite some serious reservations. He stopped by Ann's on the day she went back to Rochester and has since sent letters religiously in an effort to console and help with the loss. The two of them have returned to each other's lives and share an unbreakable bond of true friendship. They've learned a lot in the past few months, and they have realized how important they are to one another.

"I love Ann immensely," Alan says. "She is beautiful, talented, caring young woman with a heart of gold. She has an amazing love to give someone, and I sometimes worry that she gives it away too easily, but I support her completely in her decisions. I'm just grateful that we found our way back to each other, because she is someone I want with me for life."

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Exactly one week after the death of Ann's father, Alan was scheduled to pick up Christopher Church from Albany Airport. Originally it had been a haphazard whim, with Alan telling Chris that he loved the airport and that he would gladly pick him up, but when Chris found himself without a ride home, Alan made the offer serious.

They had only seen each other about three times since their first meeting, and Alan was unsure what he had gotten himself into. Still, something felt right about picking up Chris Church.

"It was so... *domestic*," Alan says with a loud laugh, "But it was the best way to end a really crappy week. I needed to get away, so what better place to go than the airport?"

The plane was scheduled to arrive at Albany from Portland at 12:48 PM, but Alan got to the airport at around noon, and set up shop at the bar, ordering a couple of screwdrivers.

"Hey, I was a little nervous. I didn't know how I felt about the kid then, and I wasn't sure if I could handle simple conversation, and if I didn't like him I wanted to be free enough to tell him. And if he didn't like me, then I wanted to be able to at least feel happy for the moment," Alan says chuckling.

The flight arrived early, and as Alan sat at the bar, Christopher Church glanced out of the corner of his eye and saw his chauffeur ~ slightly drunk, but very cute. Alan hopped off the barstool somewhat embarrassed, but glad at the sight of the boy. Chris drove them to his place to drop off his things, and then they went out to lunch. The traditional morose seriousness of past romances had no place in the way Chris and Alan got along. They had fun together and genuinely enjoyed each other's company.

"It was such a refreshing change of pace," Alan says with relief. "There wasn't the usual intensity and manipulation ~ it was light-hearted, easy-going, and fun. The guy just cracks me up," he says with a smile. Alan refers to him simply as "Church".

It hadn't always been so easy. Alan is notorious for the way he handles relationships; his romantic track-record reads like a bad page from the diary of the Marquis de Sade. He once dove whole-heartedly into *any* possible connection, and his indiscriminate behavior landed him many a jerk. By the time Mr. Church entered the scene, Alan had learned a lot, but also found himself disillusioned, distrustful, and decidedly wary of any romantic entanglement. He didn't really want to get involved; in fact, some say Alan merely wanted a quick summer fling before returning to Boston and "real" life.

"Well, that was what made it so good," Alan explains. "At that point I was so sick of everything, and when I met church I was very apprehensive about getting involved in anything serious. I kept my distance... I *still* keep my distance. It's not so sickeningly intense, thank God!"

"It doesn't come when you're looking for it, it doesn't happen when you demand or expect it, at least not for anyone I know," Chris Vaeth says. "Over-analysis might make for a good short story, but it can also stunt potential relationships."

That may be the key to Alan's current frame of mind, especially in terms of his relationship with Chris Church. David Margas, who has known Alan since Autumn 1995, sees the change. Citing that Alan is a lot less "high-strung" than he used to be, and "much more mellow and easygoing. It becomes him."

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Mr. Church was a teacher in Albany, NY this past summer when he was introduced to Alan through a friend of a friend. Unlike almost everyone else Alan has dated, Chris was the same age, the same height, and had a full head of hair. He favors a more casual look than Alan, and can usually be found in a faded white baseball cap, slightly-oversized T-shirts, comfortable jeans, and well-worn sneakers or sandals. In many respects more down-to-earth than Alan, Chris can also hold his own in queen-like histrionics. There is no clear-cut gender assignment in their relationship; neither is the definitive “top” or “bottom”, nor do they conform to any designated stereotypical roles.

On first meeting Alan, Chris says mater-of-factly, “I thought he was very cute, shy, and honestly a bit weird. Hello ~ telling someone you don’t know that you have no morals... I should have said good-bye.” For once, someone was dishing it back.

After seeing Alan on a number of occasions ~ dinners, trips to the bookstore, visiting friends, hanging out at Chris’ apartment, etc. ~ and having long talks over the telephone late at night, Chris still didn’t have the boy figured out.

“I had mixed feelings about Alan over time. He surprised me and bothered me with his past hustler life,” he admits with some concern. “What surprised me the most was how nonchalant it all was... He needs to look at what made him do it and maybe seek psychological help if he can’t figure out why this behavior is destructive and abnormal.”

Mr. Church is the first person Alan has dated who has received an across-the-boards vote of approval from all of Alan’s friends.

“It was very weird,” admits Alan. “Most of the time everyone is a little suspicious of my dates, and after hearing about them they usually find something to disapprove of, but this time around *I* was the one who was a bit leery.”

It is testament to the loyalty of his friendship that Alan’s friends are so fiercely protective. They frown upon the long line of losers that he has gone out with and are instinctively dubious when he tells of a new one. Such was not the case with Mr. Church.

“This was the first time that people had to tell me to go ahead with it, instead of reigning me in like a crazy horse. I’m usually the one who is chomping at the bit. What’s with all these animal references?” he asks with a laugh. Clearly, Chris Church has been a good influence, and Alan’s relaxed manner and ready laugh are signals of a happier place.

When Mr. Church helped Alan move his things back to Boston, he had the chance to meet Chris Vaeth and Alissa Myrick. In place of the fancy dinners and big production numbers that would have characterized such a meeting in the past, the four of them met for a low-key evening at Alan’s condo. While Mr. Ilagan and Mr. Church sparred verbally, there was a detectable warmth between them, and their sarcastic jibes thinly veiled the underlying affection. Mr. Vaeth and Ms. Myrick were undergoing their own evening of tension, but they too noticed something new at work.

Says Chris Vaeth on the interaction between Alan and Chris Church: “They bit each other’s heads off, but that may have been because they wanted to impress Alissa and I (for whatever reason) ~ it was a social setting ~ looked pretty much like junior high school puppy love ~ lovers who *act* like they hate each other... but it’s an *act*.”

Alissa concurs: “I thought Chris Church seemed like an intelligent, funny guy... I thought that he and Alan drilled on each other a lot, and I couldn’t tell what was verbal foreplay from what was actually meant to hurt... it was funny to see Al getting a taste of his *own* attitude though.”

When asked about Alan’s past fashion-life, Mr. Church rolls his eyes. “I like him better now only because I’m not a big fan of glamour shots,” he says with a hint of sarcasm. “Can we say Alan is a bit narcissistic? Yes, we can!”

It appears that Christopher Church actually “gets” Alan and his off-beat sense of humor. Initially unsure of how to make his apparent rudeness, he has since come to understand that no harm is meant. “He’s a bit biting when he wants to be,” is all he will say in response to Alan’s legendary mean streak, choosing instead to focus on his goodness: “We instantly became friends... I appreciate his kindness and honesty.”

When pressed for more details on their relationship, Mr. Church hedges, much like Alan, saying only that, “He is someone who is now a close friend. It might be more, but only time will tell.” He leaves it at that.

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There is rarely a happy ending in Alan’s world. While he seems sincerely content for the moment, some point out that this has less to do with the fact that he’s seeing Mr. Church and more to do with Alan’s

own life-journey. A few friends doubt the sincerity of his current romantic state, perhaps due to his messy history.

Alissa Myrick is the one who first met Alan while boarding a bus in Harvard Square. As she heard him shouting her name and waving a leopard jacket in the air, he made an indelible first impression. In the past year they have grown closer; at first she was merely the “fuck-buddy” of his good friend Chris Vaeth ~ she has since blossomed into a dear friend in her own right. She stands about five-seven, has a fabulously funky head of braids, and animated eyes that flash behind glasses with a metallic violet frame. Attending graduate school at Harvard University, she cuts a chic figure in Levi’s 501 dark blue boot-cut jeans and a pair of black tie-up shoes with stacked heels from Nine West. Silver hoops dangle from her ears, a silver ring encircles one finger, and a blue bead necklace nestles above the décolletage of a black Victoria’s Secret underwear tank top, revealing “decent” cleavage. It is a sharp contrast to the messy casual attire of her boyfriend Chris.

Alissa is one of Alan’s relatively-new Boston friends, and her self-respect and strength is a telling sign of his trademark penchant for surrounding himself with good people. She listens intently to all of Alan’s tales, and has become an invaluable source of advice and encouragement.

“Relationships require a strong sense of self-worth, self-respect... not to mention the willingness to compromise,” Alissa says. “How much of that does Alan have? Plus,” she adds with a devilish smile and twinkle in her eyes, “It’s always more exciting to fuck around than settle down.” Her current relationship with Mr. Vaeth notwithstanding, Alissa seems to understand Alan’s need for mischievous fun and his not-always-healthy flirtation with danger. They share a deep desire for veering close to the edge without ever going over it, and both have been burned in the past. Yet while Alissa seems to have worked out a lot of that, Alan still has a long way to go.

“Alan is a generous, caring man who refuses to be truly vulnerable,” she explains. “He’s a creative genius with no motivation. He’s narcissistic, demanding of attention, and deceptive. I think Alan sometimes loses his self in the characters he conjures up for the world’s befuddlement. He’s in desperate need of love, focus, and a little more self-respect.”

Mr. Vaeth echoes those sentiments, citing Alan’s “excessive self-scrutiny” and an “excessive generosity in relationships with a low value placed on his *own* gratification (inc. sexual) and self-respect,” but checks himself by adding, “This, too, is changing rapidly, perhaps in part due to Alan’s relationship with Church. With all of these changes, *initiated by Alan himself*, I see a developing period of transition.”

Alan looks at his watch and exclaims that it’s almost midnight. After taking in one last breath of sea air, he bids me adieu. We make plans to meet again at Hazel’s, a coffeehouse near his apartment in the South End. I shut the tape recorder off as he flags down a taxi.

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The man who still proclaims, “I can play any role,” seems to be trying on the guise of a normal human being. Towards that end, he will begin work on the concluding installment of his ‘diSenchAntMent; story. Released in March of 1997, (while Alan was in the Philippines on his Royal Rainbow World Tour) ‘diSenchAntMENT’ may be his best work, artistically and objectively speaking. Reviews called the writing “brilliant”, “fantastic” and “honest”. The racy, graphic tale was “thought provoking” and “disturbing” to some, who read about the escapades of an alcoholic hustler named Sam and equated the character with Alan.

“It was supposed to be uncomfortable reading,” says Alan as he slides into a wicker chair at Hazel’s. Tonight he wears dark-blue baggy jeans, a long-sleeved red V-neck shirt, and around his waist is tied a borderline-gaudy striped sweater; on his arm rests a black leather jacket. His hair is combed forward, and sticks up in the front. On his wrists are strings of wooden beads, along with a few hemp bracelets, and a number of silver charms.

“The main thing about ‘diSenchAntMent’ was that it was supposed to make people question if I was Sam. If people had to guess, then I considered that a successful writing achievement,” he says, sipping a cup of tea. “And for the record, I am *not* Sam.”

Although he has repeatedly made that denial, there are striking parallels between Alan and the protagonist of his story. Both come from middle-upper class families, both have sold themselves for sex at some point, both seem confused and unsure where they are heading, and both are unemployed. Of course, given Alan’s healthy joking attitude towards sexuality, it is unlikely that he has been raped in the Eagle Bar. Alan also does not have sex with women anymore, as opposed to Sam.

“I’ve always contended that Sam is not gay,” the author claims. “He is straight underneath it all, well, maybe a little bisexual, but for the most part Sam likes women, sexually-speaking. When the second part comes out you’ll get a better idea,” he says. It is a rare glimpse of Alan the artist at work, and it is

exhilarating to see him excited about something. For someone so often characterized as lacking ambition, drive, and, motivation, it is obvious that writing does inspire him.

Chris Vaeth points out the importance of artistic expression in Alan's life: "In his writing he explores (and exposes) his self ~ what he has been, what he never could be, and he one day might become."

Suzie Ko, Alan's longest-known-friend, sister-figure, and current Personal Manager, praises him as a "crazy artist". After having seen him through all of his written works, she sums him up as "eccentric, quirky, misunderstood, and underrated." Not only do the words ring true of Alan as an artist, but also of Alan as a human being. That artistic aspect would merge with the personal part in his most spectacular coup ~ his coming-out letter-to-the-editor.

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Most people now concede that it was Alan's crowning achievement ~ personally, professionally, and publicly. Alan himself proclaims it to be his "proudest accomplishment", but in the very beginning the notion was dismissed by those closest to him.

When he first considered the idea, he ran it by Suzie Ko and Kirsten Myhre, and both were opposed to it. Assuming that it was just a quick, unnecessary grab at the spotlight, and a transparent way of getting attention, each advised him not to write it. Both of Alan's parents, after reading the letter, were adamantly opposed to releasing it to the local newspaper. After an unsuccessful attempt at explaining himself to his friends and family, Alan spent two days "in hell" before going ahead and putting it in the paper against their wishes.

"I wouldn't have been able to live with myself if I hadn't done it," he says. In the end the risk paid off, as is often the case with Alan's life. The letter that almost no one wanted to see in print became *the* sensation of the summer of 1997, and a nifty culmination of the Royal Rainbow World Tour. Alan managed to pull it off with style *and* substance, and it remains to this day one of his greatest achievements. The resulting reaction was overwhelmingly positive. Letters and phone calls poured in, and those who found fault with the epistle either couldn't come up with a rational argument, or simply kept quiet. There was one response in particular that moved Alan, and it was the following letter that made the whole ordeal worth it:

"Dear Alan, Enclosed is a copy of a letter that I wanted to send to the Recorder in response to your letter on homosexuality. My son, a young man around your age, read my letter and begged me not to send it, as he said people would think he was "gay". I was startled by his reactions. But he was so upset, and so vehemently opposed, that out of respect for his feelings I promised that I would not submit it for publication and that I would remain anonymous.

I did decide, however, to at least express my thoughts to you, hopefully giving you a little encouragement, if not the public support I intended. I truly hope that you've received other support as well.  
'August 13, 1997

Dear Alan,

I admire your courage and honesty in coming out as a homosexual, especially in a small town like Amsterdam.

I detest that many homosexuals feel compelled to hide an essential part of who they are, in order to escape condemnation by society. I can't imagine the inner turmoil and struggle involved in coming to terms with and openly accepting this part of oneself. There are those who never do. The pain and suffering seems all so needless.

Some homosexuals marry and have families, trying to appear heterosexual, but they live a double life, bringing others into a situation that should not be.

Of course, one's sexual orientation is not a choice. When involved in such discussions I have asked my heterosexual counterparts when exactly they sat down and "chose" to be heterosexual. They never did. They and I were born that way, just as homosexuals were born thus. As far as the notion that homosexuality is immoral goes, where there is no choice, morality is not an issue.

Homosexuality needs to be accepted. Perhaps, in some small way, your letter has helped bring this about." – No signature."

Alan's coming-out letter-to-the-editor is widely regarded as the turning point in his evolution as a serious writer. It was tighter and less sprawling than the 'diSenchAntMent' work, and it showed off an increasing interest in social awareness. Suddenly, the Diva had Depth, and there was no turning back. It shows in his willingness to seriously discuss his sexuality, a topic that overshadows almost everything he does.

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“I didn’t really think I was gay until I went away to college. I was raised in a very conservative, Catholic family. I didn’t even know what “gay” was until I was almost ten ~ I knew it was bad, and it was a real put-down to call someone a “faggot”, but I had no idea what it really meant. Yes, I lived an exceedingly sheltered life,” Alan says with a laugh. “Keep in mind, we didn’t get MTV or cable until I was almost in high school ~ most of my friends grew up on that junk. I grew up playing in the backyard, swimming in the pool, and foraging the forest behind our house. There was a certain purity in the way I was brought up, but there was a sterility as well. My parents provided us with all the necessities ~ clothes, food, luxuries, and trips everywhere, but it was like this perfect painting, and there was no room for anything different or out of place. I love my parents dearly, and they did the best they knew, but I do wish we had been more open and free, instead of putting on this fake image of the “ideal family” taking its place in the front pew of St. Mary’s church. That sort of thing is hard for a kid to understand.”

It was that atmosphere which taught Alan all that he now knows about “image” and “appearance”, and it instilled in the little boy an early ability to manipulate and calculate.

“I learned at a very young age how to “act”, especially in public,” he confesses. His schoolmates agree wholeheartedly.

“Alan was always the favorite of all the teachers, even though he was a devil,” says a fellow high school student. “He had them all fooled with his knack for looking supremely interested in their every word, when all the while he was plotting and planning. It didn’t hurt that he looked innocent, with those big puppy-dog eyes, but we all knew he didn’t give a damn.”

Most of us take years before we begin to become jaded, some of us manage to retain our innocence for life. Alan kissed his ignorant bliss good-bye before he was even a teenager. As a youngster at McNulty elementary school, he was a favorite of his classmates, always ready with a joke or a laugh or an entertaining quip, but underneath it all was a world-weary-beyond-his-years apathy, and a chilling detachment that came from the darkest depths of the evil of his soul.

“I remember one time in fifth grade, this kid Shawn Cebula, who was a friend, did something to me ~ I don’t recall exactly what, but I knew it was supposed to hurt me,” Alan thinks back. “In truth, I really didn’t give a damn, and I wasn’t hurt in the least, but I pretended to be incredibly wounded, and he just looked so hurt that he had hurt me... It was then that I began to understand the power of emotional manipulation. I mean, I’m sure I laid a huge guilt-trip on the kid, and the fact was that I didn’t feel one Goddamn thing. I don’t think I got anything out of Shawn that day, other than his apologetic devotion, but in later years I certainly gained a lot,” he says somewhat viciously. “I’m not proud of that,” he covers, but it is too late.

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No one seems to know where such an absence of feeling originated. In the following collection of comments made about Alan, it seems impossible to figure out the man who lives such a life of complex contradiction:

“Basically, everything I have thought about Alan, every opinion, every ‘fact’, has changed back and forth over the ten years I have known him.”

“I’ll think one thing about Alan and his state of mind, but then he’ll say or do something to make me change my mind.”

“He is the most complex person I have ever known.”

“Sometimes my feelings go from disgust to love in a five minute phone call.”

“[Alan] can be selfish, cruel, manipulative and very insensitive. But this only upsets me because I, for some reason, still like Alan. Who knows why?”

“Despite his parents best attempts, Alan has always felt underloved, undervalued; his clothes and behavior are a way of attracting attention and the love he feels he has lacked – he has no idea that so many people care so deeply about him and does self-destructive things without care for anyone – he desires to forget through self-inflicted drama that he creates for himself.”

“He’s brilliant, bitchy, flamboyant, at-times-hard-to-understand, and honest.”

For all his intense self-examination, much remains unexplained as to who he really is. His sexual proclivity notwithstanding, lovers past and present point out disturbing inconsistencies: he talks a dirty game, but refuses to fully disrobe in front of them. Surely he has nothing to hide or be ashamed of, and we’ve all seen pictures of him sans clothing, but he maintains a strictly conservative stance towards nudity. It is jarringly juxtaposed against his past sexual history, especially considering the stories of hustling and his string of one-night-stands this past summer. Sexually, he is an enigma. The self-professed “100 percent

gay” man also admits that his best sexual experiences have thus far been with women, while simultaneously claiming that only men truly turn him on. Like so many other parts of his life, his sexual side is ripe with contradictions.

He is a man who has proudly professed his homosexuality in the local hometown newspaper, but who still feels “extremely uncomfortable” holding hands with a man in public, and rarely shows outward affection for his boyfriend when anyone is looking.

He has shown an uncanny skill for going through life alone, but has always fallen into co-dependency as soon as anyone showed him the least bit of interest in him. Alan is one of the only people I know who has lived alone for such a duration. (He is finishing his third year at the condo without a roommate.) Yet he is also one of the only people I know who invests so much into relationships so quickly. On one hand he wants nothing to do with anyone; on the other he is willing to give everything to the person who has his attention for the moment. Friends who have seen him through his problem-laced romantic past (Scott, Patrick, Kirsten, LeeMichael, George, Tony, Missy, and Tom) see this as one of his greatest faults, and some lay the blame on Alan more than the people he has dated.

“He needs to love himself deeply before he can have a healthy relationship. Alan can not look to a partner to make him feel loved, he needs to look to himself first.”

“Past relationships that have not succeeded are probably not Alan’s fault. He may not yet have found someone who deserved him, cheesy as it sounds... Alan should exercise patience and effort, and realize that it will come with time.”

“I don’t think Alan realized what a truly special person he is and that upsets me because he puts his life at risk due to that fact. He needs to cherish himself and his life.”

His current romance with Chris Church may be the catalyst to buck his unlucky trend, and it illuminates Alan’s current acceptance and love for himself. When Mr. Church walked into Alan’s life, it was at the end of a difficult, torturous journey that had begun at the start of 1998. Back then, Alan harbored a bitter self-hatred and insecurity that manifested itself in his lackluster “relationship” with Patrick, a trail of meaningless one-night-flings, a growing dependence on alcohol, and an increasing apathy towards his existence. It took the love and support of family and friends to pull him out of the darkness, and after years of working on it, Alan realized his own self-worth and was finally finding a healthy sense of self-esteem. It came just in time, for the summer of 1998 would put his emotional state to the test.

By the time Chris Church entered the scene, Alan had finally put his superficial shallowness to rest, come to terms with the death of Ann Agresta’s father, and had a clearer vision of what truly mattered in life. He was standing on his own at last, looking to the future and acknowledging the past. Only now was he ready to share things with another person.

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Those who have seen the two young men together admit it is the most invigorating and functional relationship Alan has had in a very long time, with Alan holding back in a way that would have been unthinkable a few short months ago.

“I think Chris Church has added something healthy and positive in Alan’s life,” Alissa says thoughtfully. “Al’s actually pondering issues of morality now.”

Christopher Vaeth also senses a deeper change, but hesitates to predict the way it will inform Alan’s life. He explains, “Alan has started to consider monogamy and fidelity since he has been with Church, but I still think it’s too soon to see whether he will be profoundly changed.”

Whatever the outcome, it is certain that Alan will be all right, and this relationship won’t ever incite him to slit his wrists or throw himself off some building. For the moment he is simply happy with the way things are. He speaks almost daily with “Church”, but the relationship doesn’t monopolize his life (a welcome change-of-pace from the melodramatic intensity of past performances). The fun, witty repertoire between them, coupled with their casual but caring concern for the relationship indicates a new maturity in the way Alan handles his affairs. He seems perfectly glad to continue in the same vein.

“What we have now is light, fun, and enjoyable,” he says, finishing the last of his tea. “There’s no need to get any more serious or heavy ~ if it’s meant to be, it will be.”

He enters the cool night air and pulls his leather coat tightly around him. Before hurrying off he invites me to dinner later that week. I watch him walk away, and in the cold darkness he looks like a little boy walking home from school.

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In the end, Alan remains a mystery. Even with all the writings, the projects, the self-expression, the interviews ~ we still don't know much about the man who likens his life to an open book. It may seem simple to someone who's been on the inside all these years, but for the rest of us he is irritatingly obtuse and oblivious to the confusion his complexity creates.

What to make of all of this? For me it is simply the path of a young man in search of meaning and truth to his existence. Even with all the foibles and fuck-ups (or perhaps *because* of them) Alan has retained a fascinating allure. His is the journey of a human being, with all its deep-seeded complexities and inherent contradictions.

As his god friend Chris Vaeth puts it, "Alan exhibits that rare trait of constantly trying to become a better human being. This sometimes has surprising manifestations which would lead an on-looker to other conclusions ~ but I am quite serious... A flair for drama is a flair for life, and I think Alan savors, at least these days, all that living a life requires. He is genuine in all interpersonal relations," Chris concludes, before adding facetiously, "especially when ripping on me."

In forcing us to reconcile all his apparently-opposing thoughts and behavior, Alan insists that we join him in the journey, and beckons us to go along for the whole ride. He never says it will be fun and merry all the time, but he promises that it will be honest and true. In so doing, he seems to have finally let go of his legendary superficiality and is now embracing what is truly meaningful to him. The act is over, the show is done, and for the very first time a human heart beats unencumbered. It is a heart full of passion and pain, anger and anguish, happiness and joy, and he wears it on his sleeve like some bright bauble from his past, a reminder of where he once was, and the unlocked secret of where he wants to be.

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*Editor's Note: Shortly after completing this interview, Christopher Church and I decided to end our romantic relationship and continue on as friends. Initially I was adamantly opposed to releasing this story, as much of the latter portions feature him so prominently. Then I thought about making a few severe edits, but still I remained skeptical. Finally I realized that even though some things may have changed and evolved, this was indisputably the truth of the moment, and by changing it any way I would be attempting to edit and perfect the past. As an artist, that is sometimes my job, but for this case it would detract from the whole point of trying to reveal myself. In some small way, I think the underlying currents of the piece portend the above-mentioned outcome, and it would be a great disservice to all involved if I were to deny those glimmers of foreshadowing to emerge.*

*As many of you know, this marks the umpteenth fizzling of an Autumn romance for me, but Chris is a wonderful man, and we remain close. I've always maintained that I make a much better friend than a lover, and for once it seems the world is in complete agreement. Maybe next Fall... ~ A.*

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