



Moose!

By Eric Andrews-Katz

“Show tunes.”

The words thundered in my ears. I might have still been a little stoned from the joint earlier in the evening, but over the pulsing music of the bar and through the screaming conversation of its patrons, I thought I heard correctly. I asked this handsome man I had just met, whom I only knew as Alan, a simple question. “What kind of music do you listen to?”

His answer: “Show tunes”. His needle-in-a-haystack answer hit dead on, freezing me in my tracks. With a coy and sheepishly embarrassed grin he cast his eyes downward and leaned in to speak. “You’re gonna run away now, aren’t you?”

I stood in complete shock. If my brown hair were not already in a flattop-cut, it would have stood on end. My mouth hung open until I smiled wickedly, knowing my goatee would invoke impish images.

I spoke with a chortle. “It’s your *lucky* day!”

His response was a curious mixture of excitement and hesitation. “Really?”

“Let’s just say, when you look up ‘Show Queen’ in a slang dictionary, it’s *my* picture giving you an ovation. It’s my dirty little secret.” I winked.

Alan’s grin widened in his boy-next-door face. The blinking lights cast a multi-colored glow on his skin, letting his clean-cut, apple-pie image shine. We appeared the same height, five feet-ten inches, but his chest was much broader than my average build. He wore a long-sleeved white shirt, with the cuffs unbuttoned and rolled halfway up his forearms. A white tee shirt was worn underneath. As we resumed dancing, my inner voice summed up my impression:

“He should be a good fuck for the night.”

When the music changed we took a break and headed over to one of the side service bars. I wiped my hands on my blue jeans and tugged on my long sleeve, striped shirt trying to cool myself down.

“Where’s your friend?” Alan asked.

“I don’t know,” I was suddenly aware he was nowhere in sight. I dismissed him with a shrug. “Doesn’t matter, I’ll walk home.”

“Is he your roommate?” The question was leading.

“Actually, he’s the roommate of my ex-boyfriend. *That* ended amicably right before New Year’s Eve, so I took it as a sign to start the new millennium single and happy to be so.”

“And how’s that working out for you?” He leaned onto the bar, resting on one elbow; a playful interest aroused.

I held up an empty left hand. “Three weeks and no ring!”

“I’ll drink to that.” And we did.

“So I take it you’re not with that guy you were dancing with?”

He looked shocked. “Oh God no! He was trying to pick me up when I saw you staring.”

“Sorry to interrupt you.”

Alan scoffed. “I wasn’t interested in *him*.”

“Then it’s a lucky day for both of us.” I raised my vodka-cranberry to his and we clinked glasses. “Are you really a musical theater fan?”

Alan stood erect at full height, his brown hair crossing the top of his forehead. He blinked his eyes and slowed his grin. “I’m not a *huge* fan or anything.”

I interrupted, “I am.” My smile appeared contagious as I saw it appear on his face.

A taller man, pear shaped and dressed in a leather vest over a white tee shirt, approached and stood next to Alan waiting to be introduced.

“This is Eric,” Alan finished the introductions.

“You’re The Massage Guy,” his roommate said.

“Do you know each other?” Alan asked.

“Not really,” the roommate volunteered to my quizzical look. “I gave a boyfriend a ride to and from your office, for an appointment. We met briefly.”

“Story of my life.” The comment went ignored or unheard.

“How long have you been doing massage?” Alan asked.

“About eight years.”

“Alan,” the roommate interrupted again. “Sorry to say it, but we need to go. I have to be up early tomorrow.”

An awkward pause hung in the air as heads turned towards one another forming a triangle. Alan slowly faced me, his head cocked on angle as if debating and then succumbing to a decision.

“I have to go.” Even over the music, I heard the hint of disappointment. “A friend of mine just had a baby yesterday and I’m making her split-pea soup to kind of help out a little. It’s in a Crock-Pot, but I need to put it in the ‘fridge.”

Wondering if this was an excuse, I cast a sideways glance at the roommate expecting him to speak up and volunteer to do the chore. He did his best to avoid my eyes.

I finally offered. “I walked here but I can drive you home, later.”

Alan's smile rewarded my answer. "You're sure? Ok. Thanks."

Goodbyes were exchanged and the roommate disappeared. Then we were alone: in a room full of men. We stared at each other, trying not to look too hard as our smiles matched each other. When I put my cocktail back down, I made sure to place it close to Alan's hand, allowing our fingers to touch. The look in his eyes caused me to wonder how long it would take me to get him to my home before his.

"Want to go for a walk?" His eyes were imploring. "We can chat for a bit and I'll catch a cab. You don't need to drive me."

"How about if I walk with you and we worry about the cab later?" I wasn't ready yet to let him walk away. I always believed that clever repartee was the basis for excellent foreplay. This would give me time to prove it.

"Let me grab my jacket from coat-check and we can go."

The biting January winds of Seattle seemed unusually tame. Frost was in the air, but a thick layer of clouds kept in what little heat the city released; the cold was bearable, without the usual bitter chill. We stood on the corner in front of the club, allowing the subtle warmth of alcohol and good company to take effect.

"It'll be easier if we go to Pine and Broadway to catch a cab," Alan suggested, leading down the hill.

"Okay. I'll keep an eye out for one."

Alan's smile brightened his face. He walked slowly, with a small hitch.

"Do you want me to walk on the curb?" I suggested, nodding to the gait in his step.

"No," Alan said. "It's just a slight twist in my ankle. Besides, a gentleman always walks between his escort and the road."

"I'm not an escort."

"Good. I don't pay for things that I can get for free." He looked ahead, his expression smug, and continued his step.

"So you have a sense of humor?"

"Why so surprised?"

"Well, most men don't seem to share my wit."

"I've never been one to be like 'most men'."

"That's saying something." I let the compliment settle. "You know what I do for work, but what about you?" Small talk came easily as we walked. My apartment was only half a mile away.

"I'm in school." A tone of pride and self-confidence entered his voice.

"Ambitious for..." I stopped walking to study his face. "Thirty three years old?" I put him one year older than myself.

"Close. I'm thirty four and I'm going *back* to school, smartass."

"Ah," I said in a faux Asian accent. "It is better to be a smart ass, than a dumb prick."

Alan's smile crept up the edges of his lips. "And if you are what you eat, which are you?"

I found myself in a rare situation; a total loss for words. As he stood facing me, his back to the street, wearing his smugness with pride, I saw a cab drive by at an intersection behind.

"Well," I said after the cab was out of sight. "I guess you told me." I felt a slight vindication as we continued on our way. "Do you read lot?" I asked in a bad segue subject change.

"Constantly," he replied. "I usually don't go to bed without reading a chapter of something. What are you reading?"

I smiled at his assumption that I read with regularity. "Right now, I'm reading a collection of short stories. I've been really busy with work, so short stories are about all I have time for."

"Is it an anthology or a collection?"

"It's a collection of stories by Truman Capote. Have you read anything by him?"

"Years ago," Alan said, his tone implying his opinion.

"You didn't like his work?"

"I only read **In Cold Blood** and I'm just not a fan of the 'murder for entertainment' aspect that's associated with it."

"That's only one part," I defended. "If you knew what it was about, why did you read it?"

"My book club voted on it."

I tried to steal a look at Alan as we passed underneath a streetlamp. The boyish charm that I first noticed seemed to have shifted in a more natural setting and I noticed adult gray flecks at his temples. His eyes were green and when he looked directly into mine, I felt color touching my

cheeks. I hoped he'd think it was the air's chill. We came to the crosswalk where I would turn towards my apartment. Without comment we continued past.

"Capote's short stories are a different animal from his novels." I felt the need to defend one of my favorite authors. "He's a pompous writer who uses words to show off his intelligence, but he tells a good tale. With the short stories he doesn't have time to display his great French vocabulary as much." I smiled, conjuring the author's image in my mind. "He was an ego-centric queen; gossipy and demanding." I let out a heavy sigh dismissing the spirit. "We would have been *such* good friends."

Alan let out a small chuckle. "Have you ever seen that movie by Neil Simon, *Murder By Death*? Where Truman plays the host of a murder mystery?"

"That's the one with the take-offs of all the famous detectives?"

"Right!" Alan's face lit up becoming animated. His boyish delight gave way to handsome features with a playful sparkle. "I love the scene where he's talking behind the mounted moose's head on the wall."

I stopped walking, caught up in the excited shared memory. "And the 'Charlie Chan' character says, 'Cow on wall speak'. Then the head screams out..."

Our voices squealed in unscripted unison, each of us doing our best impersonation of the high toned, nasal, elfish voice of Truman Capote.

"*'Moose! It's a Moose, damn it'!*"

The impressions turned into laughter. The sounds of our joy rolled down the street. Neither of us cared if the passersby heard us or what they must have thought. Neither of us seemed to notice. There was something different about him that I began to notice. His affection for reading and knowledge for movies ignited a flame of kinship between us. I undid the top of my coat's zipper, feeling the refreshing cold night brushing around my throat. I stood still, staring at him, trying to decide whether I should kiss him. Another orange cab pulled around the corner and I made up my mind.

I leaned in and was met half way. Our lips touched and pressed together without opening. I could hear his breath and feel it mix with mine. Reaching out to touch his shoulder, I felt his arm tremble as I took hold and I involuntarily flinched when his hand went to my waist. Our lips parted but we kept close. I felt his body's heat and felt warm surrounded by Seattle winter's cold. I looked over his shoulder to make sure the cab had disappeared.

I nearly choked when Alan whispered. "Why is it that you can never find a cab when you need one?"

"Do you need one? I told you I'd drive you home."

He gently tugged on my arm, leading me on another meandering around the main intersections of Broadway Avenue. "If we see one before we get to your apartment, we'll deal with it then. Where do you live, anyway?"

I pointed over my shoulder. "About three blocks back that way."

His look was incredulous. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"Good company is hard to find. Good conversation harder." I gave his hand a squeeze. "And if there is one thing I *am* a snob about, it's good conversation."

As if on cue, a taxi pulled around the corner. To my disappointment, the vacancy light was on. Alan jumped off the curb, raising his arm and shouting for the cab. The driver pulled up and waited. Alan walked to the rear door.

"Thanks for the company," he started.

The awkward pause fell between us as we both waited for the other to say something more.

"Here." I fished my card from my wallet. "Give me a call."

"You going to give me a massage?" His implication was ambiguous.

"No." I sharply answered. "It's my only phone and hopefully you can think of another reason to call."

His smile spread across his face. "Ok," he nodded. He leaned and gave me a quick kiss goodnight, letting our lips touch and linger. I stopped him just before he closed the door.

"What made you answer 'show tunes'?"

"What?"

"In the bar. When we first met. I asked 'what kind of music do you like' and you answered 'show tunes'. If you're not that big a fan, why'd you say that?"

Alan's face blazed. His grin widened until his front teeth were showing. He looked up into my face, ready to answer and then stopped to laugh to himself. Resigned in telling me, he took a deep breath and answered.

"Usually, it freaks guys out being a stereotype and all. It's a defense mechanism and keeps people at a distance." His sheepish grin was boyishly attractive.

"Hate to tell ya," I said slowly. "That's gonna bite you in the ass."

“Well, I guess that makes us even considering this is the third cab that’s passed us and you didn’t say a word.” He swung his legs into the car and slammed the door. Winking safely from behind glass, he smiled as the taxi pulled away.

I waited until the cab was out of sight before lowering my waving hand. Still staring afterwards, I remained motionless except to zip up my coat, suddenly feeling the cold. Putting my hands in my coat pockets, I started for home, humming as I went.

I was half way home before I realized the song I was humming was Rodger’s and Hammerstein’s, *A Cockeyed Optimist*. The song has a strong effect on me; it fills me equally with inspiration and hesitation for the same personal reasons.

I stood looking out at the kind of day most Seattleites don’t like outsiders to know about. There were few clouds floating by welcoming brief shade to an otherwise blue, late July sky. A distant but clear Mount Rainer stood witness and the Seattle skyline served as a backdrop across the waters of Puget Sound. My eyes weren’t on the city’s sights as were most others: mine were on the backs of the seated guests.

Nervously, I looked away glancing over the buffet table and the welcoming setting with embossed napkins. Centered across their white background was blue, metallic-looking lettering that clearly read:

Mr. Alan Andrews
Mr. Eric Katz
July 26, 2003

In addition, below, a little larger than the rest, the single word: “Moose!”

Only a few of our intimate circle of friends knew the details on how we met. Most of the seated guests had no clue of what ‘Moose’ meant when they saw the napkins and an explanation would be inevitable. That wasn’t a problem. In the three-and-a-half years of being a couple, the alternative meaning had become special and after all, this day was for us.

The lyrics of “*Unexpected Song*” from the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Song and Dance* hit the air. That was the cue for us to appear.

“Do *you* have butterflies?” Alan asked from behind me.

I turned around and he stood proudly smiling. His boyish charm shined bright. He wore a black shirt, opposite my dark teal and we both wore beige linen pants for the outdoor ceremony.

“Feels more like *Mothra*,” I answered. “But, they’re playing our song.”

“Isn’t that’s from a different musical.” Alan replied with a wink. “What? I did know *something* about musicals before we met. Come on. Let’s go.” He turned to leave.

“One moment.” I grabbed his arm. “You *do* understand that this is ‘Thunderdome’?” His curious expression made me continue. “Two men enter, only one walks away.”

Alan’s face lit up with a broad, reassuring smile. He hugged me around the waist and gave me a kiss on the lips.

“You’ve made that *very* clear,” he whispered with a soft chuckle. “Let’s get married.”

As we stood before both our biological and extended families, Alan took my hands in his and we faced each other. Winning the private coin toss, he would say his vows first. I noticed his bottom lip began to quiver and could feel his palms begin to sweat. He took a deep breath and with a trembling voice began to speak.

“Never did I think that the words ‘Show tunes’ and ‘Moose’ would change my life.’

While everyone laughed at my proceeding reputation, I stood across from this incredibly handsome and wonderful man trying not to cry in public.

With a smile, I silently thanked the Gods of Fate for musical theatre and Truman Capote.

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