

Luck of the Not So Irish

For TJ

By TheSpiralledEye

Alex spends St Patricks Day at an Irish pub with Trish and their old college friends and Alex struggles to find his place within the group of women.

~

March 17th

After living in this strange Hallmark-esque universe for several months, Alex could almost forget he now lived in a world powered by film logic. Then something would happen to slap him in the metaphorical face and he'd be reminded of it, and irritated, all over again. Something like, for example, walking into an Irish pub on St Patrick's day and standing frozen in shock as the most stereotypical scene played out before him.

The air was thick with the smell of beer and whiskey, and the sound of live, poorly played music filled every nook and cranny. The walls were adorned with shamrocks, green ribbons, and Irish flags to the point that it was probably considered inappropriate. The noise level was deafening, with people shouting over one another to be heard. The band on stage played fiddles and drums, and the crowd clapped and sang along, the lyrics slurring together in their excitement. The bartenders were in a frenzy, trying to keep up with the demand for drinks. Pints of Guinness, shots of Jameson, and glasses of green beer flew over the bar, and the customers cheered each time a fresh round was delivered. It was insanity incarnate.

The smell of alcohol was nose on his nose and Alex felt his face twist into a grimace as he placed a hand atop his small belly. Keeping the baby still weighed heavily on his mind. After the honeymoon period of excitement came and went he was starting to almost second guess the choice. His belly was visible now, small enough to be deniable or hidden with the right outfit, but for him it already felt like a massive new weight.

From across the room a voice cried out and he spotted Trish sitting with a group of other women their age. He twisted the grimace into his most convincing smile. He'd had a stressful few days stalking through social media and old year books to 'remember' who all these women were. Apparently Trish and Alexandra had a close knit group in college and when life got busy they promised to catch up once a year on St. Patrick's day in memory of 'the incident'. What said incident actually was, he was yet to figure out due to their frustrating habit of simply saying 'the incident' and nothing else.

“Hi girls!” He greeted, slipping into the booth awkwardly, trying not to bump his belly against the table. The area was squashed, really not made for pregnant women at all. Were he a few more months along he probably wouldn’t have been able to fit at all.

“Oh Alex!” Cooed the one with dark brown hair and a beauty spot on her left cheek, “It feels like forever, we’re practically strangers.”

‘You don’t know the half of it.’ Alex thought darkly.

This one was Marie according to his research, the short girl with the curls was Daisy and the pale one with the awful black dye job had to be Morgan. Though it was hard to tell, since Morgan’s hair colour changed in almost every one of her social media pictures.

“It’s great to see you all.” He smiled warmly, it wasn’t really a lie.

In his old life he didn’t have any friends outside of work colleagues really, he’d been too focused on his career. Kwanzaa had taught him one thing; that balance was important and since connecting with Davy and later on Trish he wanted to do it more. These women had been Alexandra’s friends, they could be his too. He was just in the awkward position of being thrust into an old friendship with none of the memories.

“It’s not like you to be late.” Daisy grinned, “We thought perhaps you ran into a...parking attendant?”

All four of the other women burst into laughter while Alex glanced around confused for a moment before joining in. He had no idea what the joke was, clearly an inside one of some kind that he was expected to know.

“God I haven’t thought about that in years!” Trish giggled, “What a day that was.”

“Tell me about it.” Alex said jokingly, half hoping somebody actually would. They didn’t of course.

They all got to their feet and ran to the bar Alex sat glumly as mojito’s and cosmopolitan orders were taken while he sipped on his water.

“Get her a virgin gin and tonic.” Morgan said, pointing to Alex sitting alone in the booth.

“So...tonic?” Said the confused bartender.

Alex gave a sad smile and nodded, indicating to his stomach before the bartender nodded and went about making everybody’s drinks. He tried not to sound sarcastic as he thanked Morgan when she handed over his glass.

“Most virginal thing about you, huh?” She teased.

Her face was warm while she said it, her eyes bright and happy. It wasn’t supposed to be a dig, but a fun joke between friends. He did his best to giggle good naturedly but internally, Alex couldn’t help but wonder just how promiscuous Alexandra had been, if this was how her friends teased her.

For the first time, Alex felt a deep longing for his old life. For the jokes and memories of his old college friends. Even the work colleagues he used to hang out with. Sometimes they’d go down to the shady pub after work and swap stories of the horror shows that had been their day. There was an undeniable difference between hanging out with exclusively men compared to exclusively women and he found himself mourning the latter. At least then he would understand the in-jokes and maybe even be able to make a few; he wouldn’t be so tense and trying to act as if he knew everybody when in reality they were strangers to him.

“Hey, come on,” Trish elbowed him in the side making Alex wince. “I know being sober on St Patrick’s Day isn’t the best but with that face you’d think somebody died.”

This set off another titter among the other girls and Alex’s grip on his glass increased and he forced a few hollow giggles out. Did these women do nothing but reference old jokes he didn’t understand? Would it kill them to actually talk about something happening in their lives right now?

There was a buzzing at his side where his purse was resting and he drew out his phone after several moments of rummaging. Why women’s clothes never came with pockets he would never understand. He used to think it was silly, women spending money on a little bag just to carry around their wallets, keys and phone but now he understood they didn’t have much of a choice. The first time he’d encountered fake pockets on a pair of jeans he’d just about blown a gasket.

'Hope you're having fun, let me know if you want me to come get you early.'

It was so tempting to take him up on his offer but Alex resisted. He really did want to feel at home here and that meant fitting into Alexandra's life as much as possible. He really did want to like these girls but he couldn't stop feeling like the new girl at school who'd been foisted upon an already established group of friends. He was about to text back when suddenly, the phone was snatched from his hands.

"Oh no you don't! You know the rules!"

'No I don't.' He thought, feeling his blood boil.

"No phones and definitely no boyfriends during girls night!" Daisy finished, placing his phone in the centre of the table. "Next round is on you!"

Alex felt his stomach drop.

"But you're all drinking cocktails!"

His mind quickly did the sums, each of those fancy drinks was anywhere from nine to fifteen dollars! If he had to buy a whole round that was basically all his money for the full night. Daisy just shrugged and all the other girls nodded.

"That's what you get for breaking one of the sacred tenets of the sisterhood." Trish said dramatically, "Besides, it was you that came up with that rule in the first place."

Alex grit his teeth; he knew it wasn't their fault but he was barely able to hold back his fury. That wasn't fair, none of this was fair! The least that damn cab driver could have done for him was give him the memories of this life, or at the very least just changed him and nothing else. At least then he could be awkwardly chatting with the guys down at a dive bar after work rather than forking out a fifty to pay for three sugary cocktails.

Alex slumped in his seat as much as the bump would allow and watched on sourly as the other three cheered margaritas. He laid a hand on his belly, trying to remind himself that it would all be worth it in the end. Morgan pulled a sad face and cooed at him.

"Sorry, I didn't think. It must suck being sober."

“Yeah, it’s not great.” Alex admitted looking around the room to all the happy revellers.

“I’m surprised you’re even keeping it considering-”

Daisy elbowed Morgan hard in the side and shot her a furious look, harshly hissing something Alex couldn’t hear about the crowd. The others all gave him a sympathetic look and he just blinked. All three of the women had a look on their face that told him he was once again missing something; there was some sort of secret, silent conversation happening and he couldn’t hear a word.

“Sorry.” Morgan mumbled, “That was a shit thing to bring up. Let’s just get back to drinking.”

“Okay.” Alex replied slowly.

This wasn’t like the other in jokes, this was something serious and he was chomping at the bit to understand. Clearly something serious had happened in the past that he no longer knew about.

“On the plus side, maybe I can finally pick somebody up tonight!” Daisy said a little too brightly, “With our beautiful Alex finally off the market maybe I have a chance to be the centre of attention.”

“Oh, I am sure you have plenty of guys interested.” Alex replied sweetly and Daisy actually laughed.

“Guys always say they want to be taller, but the second they see my short ass they decide they don’t want to bend down every time they want a kiss.” She grumbled, “Especially not when miss ten out of 10 is sitting right there.”

Alex felt himself blushing; he’d never been considered a ten out of ten before. He had to admit, it felt nice. Trish launched into a tale from years ago, telling the apparently well known story of how she and Alex had spent all night cramming for a test only to sleep through their alarm.

“Of course Alex somehow made it, she ran straight for the exam hall in her pyjamas and sat the test just like that! And she got a near perfect score of course.” Trish rolled her eyes, “I turned up half an hour late and had to bribe the teacher to let me in and even then I only wound up with a lousy C. All that cramming, wasted.”

“It wasn't wasted if you learned something.” Alex pointed out, Trish made a face and they all burst into giggles.

Things were actually starting to feel...fun. The jovial air of the overly decorated pub started to feel welcoming. The constant loop of Irish music brought a smile to his face; especially when Morgan and Daisy decided to try and sing along while Marie desperately begged them to stop.

“Please, girls, my heart can't take the embarrassment.” She slurred, downing her fourth cocktail. “This is New Years 2016 all over again...”

That comment made Trish laugh so hard margarita came out her nose, which in turn made the rest of them lose it.

“I'll get her some napkins.” Alex giggled, getting to his feet and squeezing his way through the crowd to the bar, earning him one or two dirty looks from people who saw his belly. He made a mental note to wave the very much not alcoholic paper towels in their face as he walked back.

“Hey, babe, been a while.”

It's funny, even in this crowd full of a dozen different voices, Alex still knew that line was directed at him. He turned to see a handsome man with a strong jaw smiling at him; his eyes sparkled and his teeth were brilliant white; a hottie by any measure and yet his heart began to thump nervously. There was something in that face that was familiar, that set him on edge.

For a moment he thought perhaps he did have a few of Alexandra's memories locked away but then he realised where he'd seen this face before; or at least a younger version of it. In a prom photo he found back at his parents house; this was his old highschool boyfriend, Harris Johnson.

Panic flooded his system; he had no idea how to handle this situation. In this universe, did they have an amicable breakup? Was their relationship even good? Was this one of those hug and say 'it's so good to see you doing well' situations? Or should she slap

him and tell him to fuck off because things ended badly? He had no way of knowing and a scant few seconds to decide how to play it.

“Hi yourself.” He replied awkwardly after a few minutes, “I...didn't expect to see you here.”

“Well you know how I love St Patrick's Day.”

Was St. Patrick's Day a bigger thing in this universe or something? He really felt like he was missing a piece of the puzzle so he laughed good naturedly, hoping that would help ease the tension.

It didn't.

Harris leaned over the bar, almost pinning him, the man was so close Alex could feel his shirt pressing against his pregnant belly. The idea of this man anywhere near his and Davy's child made him shiver; it felt wrong.

“I miss you.”

“I have a boyfriend.”

“So?”

Well that answered the questions as to whether or not this had been a good relationship; what had Alexandra ever seen in this creep? The stench of Guinness on his breath made Alex's lip curl and his stomach churn. He pushed past, forgetting about the napkins and sliding back into the booth with the girls, one eyes looking back to see if Harris was following.

“Is that...Harris?” Marie said in awe, “Your old highschool sweetheart?”

“Wow, running into an old flame is always awkward.” Daisy added, “But running into them while pregnant. Wow.”

“Alex! Baby wait up.” Harris drunkenly called across the room, stumbling over to their table and sitting himself down as though he had been invited.

“This is a private gathering.” Morgan hissed, “Buzz off.”

“Yeah!” Trish downed the last of her cocktail, “Bzzzzzzzz offffff. Like a beeeeee.”

Alex groaned and rolled his eyes; she was trying, bless her soul but it was hard to be threatening as a petite blonde woman who was half a dozen drinks in the hole.

“Come on,” Harris threw an arm around Alex and he stiffened. “Alex, babe, I am so glad I ran into you. I miss you so much.”

Gross, he may not have Alexandra’s memories but he knew from what he had pieced together that Harris and her broke up right at the start of college. That was almost a decade ago now, who the hell carries a torch for that long except creeps and weirdos?

“Go away, Harris.” He shoved him off as best he could, squashing closer to Morgan, “I have a boyfriend and he isn’t you.”

“Show ‘em girl!” Trish hiccuped.

“Just let me buy you a drink.” Harris insisted, “We should catch up.”

“In case you somehow missed it, I’m pregnant.” Alex was right at the end of his tether now, “and even if I wasn’t I wouldn’t get a drink with you.”

He remembered what Davy had told him at Kwanzaa; how Harris had been the thing to ruin their friendship. His blood boiled at the thought; Alexandra was an idiot, picking this jerk over Davy for so long. His hands curled into fists as he glared at the arrogant asshole, still grinning and looking cool as a cucumber.

“Aw, you always were so cute when you were angry.” He cooed, “You don’t know what you’re saying-”

“Yes I do! Get. Out!”

There was an awkward lull in noise as his yell echoed over the room. Patrons stopped their revelry and stared and Alex realised he was standing, awkwardly leaning on the table in their booth and glaring down at Harris with malice.

“I don’t want you near me. I am taken. I am pregnant. Fuck. Off.”

He couldn’t make things much clearer. Alex watched as Harris’ eyes darted about, clearly taking in the stares, especially those from the security staff. He didn’t even have the decency to look embarrassed or ashamed, simply shrugging as he stood.

“Jeez, all I did was offer you a drink. Some women, am I right?” I chuckled, moving back into the crowd, a few drunken, presumably single, guys cheering and laughing at his ‘joke’ as he went.

Alex ground his teeth together; god he wanted to punch that guy. He was almost tempted to follow and let some of the frustration that had been building all night out on the guy’s chin when Trish made a low groaning sound. He turned to see her leaning back on the booth looking green in the face; though that might have just been the paper shamrocks sticky taped over most of the lights.

“I don’ feel so good.” She mumbled, “Maybe double shots were a bad idea.”

“Wait, you got extra shot cocktails?” Daisy gaped, “How many of those drinks were double strength?”

“Ummmmm..all of them?” Trish said before bursting into giggles, “Whooooopsie.”

Alex quickly did the maths in his head and face palmed in frustration.

“She’s officially pickled.” He groaned, “We should take her home.”

“Yes!” Daisy stood and immediately lost her balance in her heels and fell over, Morgan and Marie bursting into laughter at the sight. Alex just sighed and said to nobody in particular.

“I guess I’ll take her home then.”

~

“Do you think chipmunks and squirrels are rivals?”

“I don’t know, Trish.”

“B-because they are both like...little furry nut eating things right, pfffft ha! Nut eating.”

“Yes, very funny Trish.”

“You’d know a thing or two about that wouldn’t you Aaaaaaaaalex.”

“You know, we’d get to your apartment a lot faster if you’d stop pressing the button for every floor.”

Alex officially hated being the designated sober person in the group now. It had taken almost twice as long to find a taxi and get home because Trish had zero impulse control left. She was normally pretty outgoing and loud but with this much alcohol in her system she was positively hyper. Wasn’t alcohol supposed to make you groggy?

Two taxi’s had refused to take them because they were afraid Trish was seconds away from throwing up, which fortunately, was so far incorrect. They finally made it to her floor and stumbled out into the hallway. Trish had one arm slung around Alex’s shoulders as she slumped and stumbled along. Alex was glad he wasn’t further along in the pregnancy yet or the extra weight may very well have toppled him.

It took an embarrassingly long time for Trish to find her keys but eventually they managed to get into her apartment and Alex let her slump onto the couch. He slopped down into the armchair by the window and sighed; his ears were still ringing from the sounds from the Irish pub and his feet ached. More than anything he wanted to go up to his own apartment and curl up with Socks; maybe call Davy to come over and cuddle.

But then he looked over to Trish who had finally stopped giggling and was turning grey in the face. He couldn’t leave her like this. He knew for a fact if their positions were reversed Trish wouldn’t leave him; yes he had spent the better part of the evening being irritated at her and their ‘friends’ but the woman meant well. He probably still owed her for the emergency Valentine’s Day dress shopping trip.

“Alex?”

“Mmm?”

“...I think I’m gonna throw up.”

A vision of himself on his hands and knees scrubbing the carpet flashed in his mind and Alex was on his feet, looping an arm around Trish’s waist and practically flying to the bathroom. They were just in time as Trish was retching the moment she touched the toilet bowl.

Alex scrunched up his nose as the acidic smell; it would be bad enough normally but with his super sensitive sense of smell it was even more. Thanks baby. Still, he held his breath and knelt down on the cold tile floor, pulling back Trish’s blonde hair and rubbing her back. The action came naturally and for a moment, Alex let himself marvel at just how different a few months in this reality had made him. The old Alex would have been halfway to his own apartment by now. The idea made his brow furrow; had he really been that selfish once?

Fortunately, all Trish had in her stomach was alcohol which was fairly easy to get rid of and soon she was flushing the toilet and stumbling over to the sink to wash out her mouth. Alex tried to stand but found himself stuck on the floor, sandwiched between the toilet and the sink in the tiny ensuite. Trish looked down for a moment but rather than helping him up, slid down to join him.

“Sorry about that.” She mumbled, “God, maybe life hasn’t changed that much from college after all.”

“Was I really that promiscuous?” Alex tried to make his tone joking, “I don’t feel like I was.”

“Nah, you were just popular. Daisy was always so jealous.” Trish sighed, leaning her head on his shoulder, “Who could blame her, who wouldn’t want this hair.”

A hand pawed at his afro and Alex snorted. Normally he wasn’t a fan of people touching his hair; the tight curls were such a pain to unknot, but Trish didn’t mean any harm. In fact she almost reminded him of a cat batting at a ball of yarn. It was cute in a strange way.

“I can’t believe I dated that guy.” Alex sighed in genuine disbelief.

“Hmmm, I remember when we moved in together, you guys had just broken up.” Trish sighed, “I thought I got a sweet deal, a two bedroom dorm all to myself but then all of a sudden, a new girl needed a place to stay and I lost my party room.”

“Sorry.”

“No you’re not, and you shouldn’t be.”

There was a beat of silence and then Alex felt something brushing against his bump. He almost jumped out of his skin imagining a spider or rat but it turned out to be Trish’s hand.

“Sorry. That’s rude isn’t it? Touching a preggos belly.”

“I’m pretty sure calling somebody a preggio is as well.” Alex teased, “But I’ll let it slide this time. Since you’re drunk.”

“Am not.”

“Trish, stand up right now without wobbling.”

“...You win this round.”

The two women giggled and Trish continued to rub small circles on his belly.

“Does it feel weird?”

“Sometimes, but they haven’t started kicking yet or anything.”

“It’s so...weird seeing you pregnant. Y’know after...that.”

“That?”

Alex’s heart began to beat faster; that thing alluded to back at the bar. The one Morgan almost spoke about, this had to be it.

“You know, the pregnancy. Back in college.”

Alex felt as though he'd been struck by lightning. He-uh, Alexandra, had been pregnant before? He was desperate for details but unable to think of a good way to ask. There was no choice but to take the plunge and hope that Trish's inherited state wouldn't let her think too much into it.

"I don't remember it much, I think I blocked it out." He said slowly, "What do you remember of it?"

"Crying mostly, you crying a lot." Trish sounded genuinely emotional about it, "You weren't the sort to have one night stands but I encouraged you to get out there, forget Harris y'know. Then when your period was late you acted as if the world was ending."

"It probably felt like it was." He pointed out, Trish shrugged.

"I remember feeling selfish, because that was when we really started to become friends. You were too scared to tell anybody else and you sorta...clung to me." Trish's voice was sombre, "I remember wondering if we would ever have become friends if you hadn't needed a hand to hold during that time."

"We would have." Alex assured her.

"You were so quiet after the procedure, I expected you to be a ball of emotions but you were so cold."

"I was?"

"You always said it was just luck, that a flip of the coin had just decided the direction of your life and you were never going to let something like that happen again."

Alex was reeling; he'd had an abortion in this life? No wonder he and Trish were so close, that was the sort of secret that bonded you together for life. He hummed in thought; had that been the moment for his other self? When she decided to pursue work about all other things, including love and relationships? He tried to think if there had been a corresponding moment in his old life. He certainly hadn't ever knocked a girl up, at least not to his knowledge. For him there had been no incident, it had just been a slow snowball, gradually pulling further and further away from everybody. At least this version of him had an excuse.

“I was dramatic back then.” He said finally, Trish snorted.

“You say that like it’s a bad thing. I’m dramatic right now.”

“And we all love you for it.”

“Damn straight you do.”

Alex laughed, feeling guilty for his resentment earlier. Yes, he missed hanging out with ‘the boys’ at the pub and talking work but there had never been anything like this. No meaningful, deep conversations or history. It had all been so surface level and he realised suddenly that he had been viewing that gathering all wrong. He should have embraced the idea of getting to know Morgan, Marie and Daisy rather than being frustrated they weren’t exactly the people he wanted. He made a mental note to text each of them tomorrow and organise another catch up.

He liked this female companionship, the closeness, the ability to be raw, emotional and open with one another without judgement. It was almost like being with Davy, but different. Less romantic and more companionable.

“Hey Alex?”

“Yeah?”

“My butt’s asleep.”

“Mine too.”

Leaning heavily on one another the two women got to their feet, slowly making their way out into the apartment proper. Trish flopped dramatically across the couch, eyes already sliding closed as she pointed to the bedroom.

“You sleep there.” She said with a grunt.

“What? No, Trish I can’t take your bed!”

“Preg’n’t.” She mumbled, snuggling into the lump cushions and promptly passing out.

Alex just rolled his eyes; he could just go up to his own apartment but it wouldn't be right to leave her here alone. He rummaged around in the cupboards for a moment until he found the aspirin and placed one down with a glass of water on the coffee table before heading to the bedroom. He stripped off the jeans and shirt and slipped under the blankets in just his underwear, an arm snaking around his middle to hug his small belly.

He rested his phone on the bedside table, finally opening up that message and replying; telling Davy where he was and not to worry when his phone inevitably died. Even though it was close to midnight Davy responded right away, a little heart emoji making Alex's own beat that tiny bit faster.

He closed his eyes and imagined himself as Alexandra way back when. He could see himself, curled just like this in his dorm room, on the verge of tears as she rubbed her flat stomach, terrified that there may be a life growing there. It wasn't unlike how he had felt a few weeks back; how he still felt to some degree. But there was one major difference now. He wasn't alone. Davy was with him now and he was going to be there every step of the way from this point on.

He still didn't feel totally ready for this baby and maybe he never would, but he was sure that with Davy by his side everything would work out. It always does in the movies after all.