



alizin

Not the Wonderland you know. At least not yet.

KEVIN SAUNDER? HAYES

Ali2in

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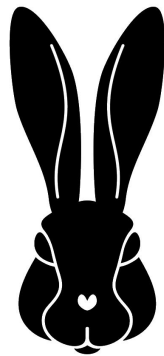
KEVIN SAUNDER2 HAYES

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For Victoria



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Well, that's kind of a no-brainer. Without one Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (the "g" is silent), life would be a much less magical place.

The people that keep track of this sort of stuff say that Charles (Lewis to you and me) was a very precise and punctual man who liked order, and made lists of everything he ate so as to "not have the same dishes too frequently."

My best guess is that after a long day of teaching math, preaching at his local church, and keeping track of how many helpings of Shepherd's Pie he'd had for lunch, Charles needed a little "me time" in Wonderland.

Whatever it was that took him down the rabbit hole, I'm grateful. I love his books. I took my first stab at writing music for them when I was 17. I then decided I'd wait until I got better at the music thing before finishing it. I didn't think I'd wait 50 years, but... what? Don't look at me that way, I was busy.

So yes, I did finally finish the music, and now you get to hear it. *AliZin* (this book and the music) is my riff on what happened in *The WonderHood* before Charles's little diversion from listing whatever fruits and vegetables he ate that day.

I've included links to the songs throughout the book so you can hear the music as you go. You're welcome.

We also have an Audiobook. It's pretty slick and almost (kinda sorta) like going to the live show.

Well, will you look at that? I really didn't plan on writing much of anything here, and in fact, I still may not have.

That's it. I'm not gonna get all mushy.

See ya ~ Kevin

CHAPTER I

A Little Piece Of Rock And Roll History



It looked like a nice day, what little of it AliZin could see through the greasy, dirt caked bus window. It had been another long night. The gig had gone long last night with two encores. AliZin didn't mind that. She loved singing and she would have stayed and sung all night if they let her. But there was always somebody with a headset standing in the wings waving frantically about going into overtime, or some noise ordinance the city had or something, and she would finally have to wave to the audience, tell her fans thank you and how much she appreciated singing for them.

And she did. For as long as she could remember, that's all she had ever wanted to do and all she had ever done. As soon as she got up in the morning she would be singing some tune or other that she had dreamed that

night. She would run into her parents bedroom and sing her dream song and ask them to tell her which of the vinyl discs in her father's collection she had heard it on.

She'd spend hours, sometimes the whole day, in her Dad's music room listening to the LPs that covered every wall (vinyl still sounded the best) or playing the old baby grand piano, or sitting on the carpet figuring out chords on the acoustic guitar with the big crack in it (why was F still so hard?).

As she got older, her parents started saying that they didn't recognise the dream songs she'd sing to them. They thought the songs were beautiful, but couldn't remember ever having heard them before.

Her Dad then started asking if she would sing her songs into the old reel-to-reel tape machine he had (which sounded almost as good as vinyl). He'd set up a microphone and she'd sing her dream songs, sometimes with the dream words that had come with it. They would do this most every morning, and pretty soon she would sing her dream songs and accompany herself on the piano or the cracked guitar, always avoiding the F chord when she could.

One morning her parents asked if she thought she might want to sing her songs to other people. AliZin loved singing for her Mom and Dad, and after considering it

for a minute, she thought singing to other people might be fun too.

“Milwaukee’s Got Talent” was holding auditions. Her Mom had read about it in the weekly Neighborhood Newsletter. The Newsletter was usually all about finding lost dogs, or how someone couldn’t believe how expensive canned peaches had gotten at the Piggly Wiggly, but that week, someone had started bragging about how their talented little Billy was sure to win with his amazing bird calls. I mean, they were just so real sounding that you’d swear whatever bird he whistled was standing right there in the room with you.

Her Mom knew little Billy, and his bird calls sucked. Even if the birds could understand what he was saying, she was certain the birds would say his accent was terrible.

She opened another browser, found the “Milwaukee’s Got Talent” website, and set up a 3:15pm appointment for AliZin to sing for the judges.

When they got there, AliZin was a little surprised that Milwaukee had that much talent. She had no idea how that woman could keep all those plates spinning up on those sticks, or how that guy knew exactly what card she had picked. Other than some kid who was squawking some horrible squawks that she thought were what he thought birds sounded like, Milwaukee was looking like

the kind of place where you could throw a rock and be pretty confident that you'd hit some talent.

She was reconsidering her “singing for other people” thing when they called her name.

AliZin walked nervously out to the piano someone had rolled out on stage and said her name, as the frantic girl with the clipboard told her to do. There were four or five people sitting behind a table at the front of the stage. She could barely see them because the stage lights were shining so brightly in her eyes. But what she could see gave her the impression that none of them seemed all that friendly. There was even some fat guy at the far end of the table smoking a cigar. It stunk. Weren't there child endangerment laws about that?

Some lady barked a question about what she was going to do, and AliZin told them she was going to play the piano and sing one of her songs.

The lady barked, “Whenever you're ready dear.” AliZin always remembered how terrified she had been. She almost couldn't remember where to put her fingers on the piano. After what seemed like forever, her fingers found the chord, and as soon as she pressed down on the keys, everything was okay. It was like being in the music room. Just her and the piano and her song. She played, she sang, and everything disappeared. No stage. No lights. No disgusting cigar.

When she finished, it took her a second to realize she wasn't in the music room. But soon, the stage lights had started hurting her eyes again, and that gross cigar was about to make her throw up.

She looked out to the table and everyone was quiet. She thinks the barking lady might have been crying. Well, this awkward silence was even more nerve wracking than walking out on stage had been, but just before AliZin was about to puke from the smell of that cigar, people started clapping.

First the barking lady (who was awkwardly trying to clap and blow her nose at the same time), then her Mom and Dad, and then all the people sitting in the theater. The fat guy with the cigar was standing and clapping with this crazy stupid grin on his face.

Well that felt... good.

After that, things had started moving pretty fast.

Before she could even get off stage, the fat guy with the cigar was talking with her parents. There was a lot of smiling and laughing and pointing at her. It was weird.

Finally, her parents came over with the fat cigar guy, and started to introduce him. But before they could even finish telling her how proud they were of her, the fat

cigar guy reached out and took AliZin's hand with his "Stay Puft Marshmallow Man" hand, and shook it vigorously as he said, "Max-A-Million... Max-A-Million Shekelton at your service."

When a little of the smoke cleared, AliZin realized she had seen this guy before. In fact, if you lived in Milwaukee, it was hard not to be familiar with Max's face. It seemed like Max's grinning, cigar chomping face was on the back of every seat, of every bus stop, everywhere in town.

"Make a Million with Max." It was everywhere. A 13-week course that would have you rolling in dough, and it was only six easy payments of \$29.95 a month. Visa and Mastercard accepted.

To this day, AliZin was still not sure what those online courses were about. Real estate. Cryptocurrency. Franchises. It was a little vague.

Well apparently, Max was also something of an impresario in the entertainment industry.

His cover bands "Grateful Not Dead Yet" and "Not Quite The Eagles" were very popular tribute bands that played lots of weddings and bar mitzvahs in the Lansing and Ann Arbor area, and apparently his Pat Benatar Karaoke Drinking Game "Hit Me With Another Shot," was doing very well at the Toledo Elks Club on Thursday nights.

AliZin

Max had been very impressed with AliZin's performance and had warned her parents that there were a lot of dishonest people in the music business. Max had told them that they seemed like nice folks and he wanted to give them the benefit of his experience, for a very small percentage, and help make certain that no one took advantage of AliZin.

Her parents liked Max and thought that he must be pretty good at this. After all, that dollar sign necklace he wore was encrusted with real diamonds. You have to be pretty good at this to be able to afford that.

So, AliZin signed with Max.

Then things actually started moving pretty fast. She won "Milwaukee's Got Talent" (that poor bird kid had gotten "booed" off the stage), and then she appeared on America's Got Talent, and then she got a record deal with a label that Max's cousin owned. Then she recorded in a real recording studio, with a real band, and uploaded a couple of songs to Spotify. Almost immediately, someone on TikTok used her song on their video of a rabbit skateboarding in Times Square. She still didn't think that video was real, but it got an absolutely crazy number of likes. Then her songs started getting hundreds of plays, then thousands of plays, then millions.

People liked her songs and people liked to hear her sing.
Which was... nice.

Then Max got a bus, and they started performing at The Elks Lodge on Thursday night, then at some clubs, then some theaters, and now they were doing shows in these crazy big arenas.

It was exhausting. But it was amazing. She loved singing, and people seemed to love hearing her sing.

But even though they were playing some pretty big places now, for lots of people, for some reason they were still using the same bus. Max just would not get a better bus. Everytime she mentioned how cramped she was, and how the band were getting cricks in their necks from sleeping in bus seats, and how the crew had to take turns sleeping in the overhead luggage racks, he would launch into how this bus was a classic, and how Elvis and the Big Bopper and Richie Valens had toured in this bus, and how it was good luck, and that no luxurious 12 sleeper bus with kitchenette, mini-bar, wi-fi, satellite TV, bathroom, and a private room for her in the back, could replace the “awesome mojo” of this bus.

Besides, buses were expensive. This one was paid for.

Personally, AliZin was ready to risk losing all the awesome mojo, along with the grinding gears, farting bass players, snoring crew, and what had to be gasoline

fumes she smelled every night, for a little “Me Time” and a good night’s sleep. With a good night’s sleep, maybe she’d start hearing the dream songs again.

No matter how many times he reminded her that the backwards “S” had been his brilliant marketing idea, this time she was going to insist. This time she was for sure going to put her foot down. This time she... “BANG!”

It was the loudest “bang” AliZin had ever heard. The bus shook and swerved and filled with smoke. All of the crew guys fell out of the overhead racks, and the band was holding onto their instruments for dear life.

The ancient bus moaned like a large wounded animal, and AliZin would be very surprised if there were going to be any gears left to shift, as the driver ground every one of them in order to slow down and limp their little piece of rock and roll history safely off the road, and onto the patch of dirt and gravel that could barely be described as a “shoulder.”

Thankfully, and amazingly, no one had gotten hurt. Except for maybe the first crew guy that had fallen out of the overhead rack. All the other crew guys had fallen on top of him, and he thought he might have cracked a rib. They all sat there, not sure what to do next, until the bus started to fill with smoke. Then it was complete bedlam. Musicians grabbed instruments, crew guys grabbed whatever it is crew guys grab, and all of them

were trying to get down the stairs at once and past the bus driver (who was another cousin of Max's), who kept saying, "It's fine. Just a little smoke. Nothing to worry about."

Well it was more than a little smoke, and by the time AliZin had reached the door, you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Just as she was about to jump out the door, she stopped. The hat. Where was her hat? She had to save the hat.

Early on, Max had taken AliZin and her mother shopping. AliZin was gonna be a rockstar and she needed to start dressing like one. So they got her a bunch of rockstar clothes. Nothing too revealing. Her mother was having none of that. But the stuff they did get was cool. An awesome jacket like the ones drum majors wear, gloves with no fingers in them, a multicolored bandana that she tied around her neck like an ascot, boy shorts, badass motorcycle boots with cool chunky buckles on them, stockings with red bows sewn on the thighs, and the hat.

The hat had become something of a trademark for her. Girls and their mothers would show up at her concerts wearing their version of "the hat." From the stage, it was an ocean of funky, ornately decorated top hats for as far as you could see.

AliZin

She had to have the hat. Everyone expected her to have the hat.

Choking and trying to wave away the billows of thick smoke, AliZin was panicked. The Hat wasn't on the seat where she'd left it. She flailed around. It had to be here somewhere. She also knew she was gonna pass out if she didn't leave like right now, when her fingers felt the familiar rim of the hat under the seat in front of her. It must have fallen off during all the bus's lurching and gear crunching.

AliZin grabbed the hat and ran for the door.

When she stopped choking up disgusting bus smoke, she realized she had been right. It was a beautiful day.

They stood in a line alongside their smoking little piece of rock and roll history, choking and sneezing, and pretty sure the dilapidated bus was now even more lopsided than usual.

There was nothing there. Not a house, not a lamp post, not a road sign. They were on the side of some ancient two-lane back road "short cut" that wasn't even on the map.

Max's cousin had said he would be sure to get them to their gig an hour early. They were in the middle of nowhere.

Everyone then started taking out their cell phones. There wasn't much reception. In fact, the only person that could get even half a bar was Max's cousin, who finally got through to Max's cousin at the repair shop. After everyone stopped asking him what phone service he used, Max's cousin proceeded to tell Max's cousin what had happened.

Turns out AliZin used the same phone service as Max's cousin. Max had included her in their family plan. And with her half a bar and the 6% of battery she had left, she called Max. She got his phone machine. Max still used a phone machine. She wasn't sure how you could even hook up a phone machine anymore.

The phone machine squeaked its annoying squeakity "tone" and she started to give him what for. She what-forded him for the broken down lopped-sided bus, and about the huge scary "bang!", and the choking smoke, and the grinding gears, and the cracked rib, and how she almost lost the hat!

And mostly she what-forded him about how everyone was pretty scared, and that now they were gonna be late for their gig, and who the hell was The Big Bopper anyway. AliZin was just about to launch into the speech she'd prepared about putting her foot down and getting a new bus with high-speed internet, when the machine beeped and hung up on her.

AliZin tried calling back with the 1% battery she had left but didn't get any further than, "Hi, thanks for calling 'Make-a-Million with Max'" when her phone went dead.

AliZin was pissed.

Max's cousin was still on the phone with Max's other cousin when she rejoined the group. Max's cousin didn't have an Instagram account, which explained why he had so much battery left. He had opened the hood of the engine and kept pointing and jiggling different parts, and shaking his head, and every now and then smoke would come billowing out from under the engine, and everyone would take a step back to put just a little more distance between them and whatever might happen.

He finally hung up and slowly walked back over to the group, who had decided to move even farther away from the engine part of the bus, and pile their luggage and instruments and tool boxes closer to the row of hedges that lined the road. Just in case.

It didn't look good, Max's cousin told them. They'd stopped making parts for this bus in 1958. The bus manufacturer had been bought by some other bus manufacturer years ago, who now made those luxury 12 sleeper buses, and Max's other cousin wasn't holding out much hope of finding any parts, on any shelves, in any warehouse, anywhere.

AliZin was pissed.

This is when the crew jumped into action. The crew seemed to relish this kind of challenge. They all ran to their tool boxes and pulled out wrenches and wires and hammers and all the gaff tape they could find. They had a lot of gaff tape. AliZin didn't know how they slept in the overhead compartments, let alone how they slept in the overhead compartments with their tool boxes.

Everyone could tell AliZin was upset. This is something they'd never really seen before. Disappointed, sure. She always seemed a little disappointed when she finished the last song of the night, but never upset. Never. She was a great boss. They really liked AliZin, and they didn't want her to be upset.

The crew suggested that perhaps she should go have a little walk and clear her head. They would get under the hood of this dinosaur and figure out some way to get it working. Everyone knew that it had been scientifically proven that the proper application of gaff tape could fix anything. They were sure gaff tape would not let them down now, and that they would get her to the gig on time.

AliZin

CHAPTER II

Nowhere



AliZin asked how long, and the crew said that it was hard to say...