

# After 1934 Reasons

Leena Nadella

I shivered as the cold breeze of winter air brushed past me. I can end everything, all my sorrows and pain, a burden for those taking care of me, everything, in one small step. My favourite place, the beach is going to be the end of me. It was all just a step away. My legs wobbled as I made myself a little more closer to the edge of the cliff.

I wanted this, my life to end. I'd rather fall into a black pit of nothingness than feel like I'm getting sucked into a black hole of worthlessness. I want to go live with my grandmother in heaven, not in an orphanage where no one would adopt me. Being 17, everyone has their opinions of a teenager and I didn't fit into anyone's plans apparently.

"Come on Hazel. You can do this." I told myself, feigning confidence.

I moved my right foot, letting it dangle in the air. I touched my face and realised I was crying, tears gliding down my cheeks with freedom I wish I had in my life.

All of a sudden, I was on the ground, pulled by an unknown force, laying on top of me. I opened my eyes and noticed I was a few meters away from the edge I was standing on a few seconds ago.

I looked up to see a familiar face with the most delicate features.

Alan Lexon.

He was known for his handsome face, exceptional emerald green eyes, and for being the most isolated popular male in the school. Everyone in my grade wanted to either be his friend or girlfriend. Most were curious about his generosity despite being closed off to only having a close knitted group he has known since first grade. People say that he never dated anyone because he doesn't want to lead girls on and he's waiting for the right one.

To me, and a few others, he was mysterious and we deemed him fake.

"What in hells' name do you think you're doing?" he screamed at me.

Dust from the ground I was laying on and my tears kept me from seeing clearly. I pushed him off and wiped my eyes in frustration.

“I thought it was just your brains, or are you blind too?” I seethed as I stood, brushing the dirt off my clothes.

“Did you think I’ll just watch you jump off a cliff?” Alan asked me, not surprised by the comment I made.

“So he can see then.” I retorted, he scoffed. “You don’t know half a pea about me. If I want to die, I die.”

I turned around to walk back to the edge and warned him. “I’ll give you 5 seconds to run. Or you’ll be stuck as witness to my bloody dead body in the bottom of the sea.”

Alan stood still, not uttering a syllable.

“Fine. I cautioned you. Bye Lexon.” I snapped at him and walked to the edge. Just as I was about to let go, I felt a tug pulling me backwards by my waist.

“What is wrong with you? Let me go!” I yelled, tears streaming down my cheeks.

“I’m not letting you die.” Came the hoarse reply.

“You don’t even know me! Why do you even care? Leave me alo-” I was cut off by his reply.

“You are Hazel Timber, the bookworm that sits in front of me in AP Literature, History and Spanish. Give me 3 days.”

“What?” I spat at him trying to get away from his grasp.

“Give me 3 days and I’ll give you 3 reasons to not die. If you don’t have a change of heart by then, I will personally get you here and you can jump off the cliff.” He said in a suspiciously calm manner.

“You don’t even mean that” I snapped at him.

“Three days Hazel. Do we have a deal?”

I narrowed my eyes at him. “Why?”

“Do we have a deal?” He repeated.

“Deal”.

“Day 1” I whispered looking at myself in the only broken mirror in the huge mansion.

“Hayelle!! Pancakes!” Noah came to me. He’s only 4 and for some reason cannot say my name despite my effort.

“Pancakes today? Mother Ally is always making them isn’t she?” I smiled at the little boy who became my brother in the place I learnt to call home.

“Hayelle....” he whined tugging at my shirt.

“Okay okay. Let’s go.” I picked him up and went to the kitchen.

“Good Morning Mother Ally.” I wished the woman who took care of me since I showed up here more than a decade ago.

“Good Morning Hazel! Good Morning Noah!” she chirped. She always seemed so happy.

“Hey there Hazel. Ready for day 1?” I heard a familiar voice.

“What are you doing here Alan? How did you even know I stay here?” I asked surprised.

“Alan?” Noah looked at him curiously. He walked slowly towards him and said, “I’m Noah and I’m four!” He showed 4 fingers indicating his age.

“He tells me he’s a friend of yours. Glad to see you’re finally socializing Hazel.” Mother Ally said, looking at me.

“We aren’t exac-” I began to say, but Alan interrupted me by saying, “I know right! It took me almost 4 years.”

I glared at him but Noah tugged at my shirt again pointing at his breakfast. “Pancakes Hayelle!”

I smiled at him and everything else faded away.

“Here comes the magic dust! Open up Noah!” I fed him his pancakes. He giggled.

I was about to feed him again when he stopped me. I frowned before he pushed the piece towards me and into my mouth. I smiled at him softly, tears welling up in my eyes. He was my only family other than Mother Ally of course.

After finishing his breakfast, Noah went to play with his lego I bought when he turned four. Alan helped me clean up the dishes. I totally forgot he was even here.

“Reason 1, Noah.” he said, and I felt my shoulders tense at his words.

After spending some time playing with Noah and studying History, Alan left. What he said remained in my head through the night.

School was never my happy place after Danielle left for Hamilton in Canada before 9th grade. She was my best friend. Her and Lexi. High school is all about popularity and how good you look so, Lexi went for the “it crowd” leaving me to blend in the background.

“Day 2, my lady.” Alan greeted me. “Why hello to you too Lexon.” I replied.

“We are on a last name basis, are we Timber?” he retorted playfully. I slapped his arm.

“Ouch woman that hurt.” he rubbed his arm. When I didn’t say anything, he looked at me. I was looking at everyone staring at us.

“Don’t look at them. They are only surprised to see me talking to someone who isn’t Harry or Kyle.” he whispered. I nodded and we walked to Spanish together.

Mrs. Morgado, our Spanish teacher had given us a particularly different task today. Speak to a partner about what your dreams are. Everything seems way too optimistic to me. Alan and I decided to be partners since he didn’t know anyone else in the class.

“Are we really doing this?” Alan asked me.

“Sí.” I answered him.

“Bien. Tú primero.” He does know his spanish.

“Siempre he querido ser cantante. A mis padres les encantaba la música y mi madre me compró mi primera guitarra. Todavía lo tengo. Dejé de jugar hace 3 años.” I replied, remembering exactly when and why I stopped.

“Por qué se detuvo?” He asked me, looking into my eyes to try to read my expression.

“Mi mejor amiga, Danielle, se fue. Ella estaba ahí para mí cuando nadie más lo estaba. Siempre me recordó que mis padres me escuchan cuando yo canta y ella amaba mi voz. Su familia se mudó a Canadá. Me ayudó a conectarme con mis padres y fue la última a la que canté. ‘Photograph’ era nuestra canción.” He wiped my cheeks with the pad of his thumb and I realised I was crying.

“Sorry” I apologized. He shook his head and said, “No. Necesitas cantar. Necesitas tocar la guitarra. No para tus padres. No para Danielle. Es para ti. Danielle no te ayudó a dejar de jugar. El hecho de que todos los que cuidabas se fueron es lo que te asusta. La música te conecta con ellos. También te conecta contigo mismo. Te ayudará a amarte a ti mismo.”

I nodded wiping tears that escaped their cages and fell onto my cheeks.

“Reason 2 Music.” He whispered. I looked into his eyes and realised he was right again.

After a rather normal day, I went back home.

How does he know all this? How is he able to give me hope after all these years? How does he even know so much about my past? I never told him where I lived. He doesn’t even know my parents died and Mother Ally didn’t seem to question him when he came by the other day. I kept questioning him and myself. And before I knew it, the morning of Day 3 shined upon me.

I went to school and Harry, Alan’s best friend came up to me. “Hey Hazel, right?”

“Yeah.” I answered.

“Alan asked me to give this to you.” He gave me a paper that had coordinates.

“What’s this?” I asked him.

“I have no idea. But he did tell me a lot about you. Please don’t die. You’re all he has.” The last part confused me but, before I could ask, Harry left.

I am all he has? What does that mean?

Alan didn’t show up today. Before I walked out, Harry asked me to check where the coordinates point to.

“It’s the countryside.” I said, zooming into the map that showed it was a huge field.

“Let’s go.” Harry pulled me towards his car. I had a feeling he knew where and why we were going. I followed.

“He’s a coward for not coming today. It’s Day 3 isn’t it?” he asked me while driving. I wasn’t surprised he knew. They were best friends after all.

“Yeah.” I was disappointed he didn’t come today.

It was a quiet drive with soft music in the background. I was feeling content until I saw where we were going. Panic set in.

“You have to go on your own now.” Harry said.

I got down and walked towards the site. Chunks of rusted metal still lay there after 11 years. It was a crash site. It was where everything ended all those years ago. I looked at the broken aeroplane. The very aeroplane I sat in with my parents. For the last time. Very few passengers survived. I was one of them. With me, a boy and his mother. That’s all I could remember from the night that took my world away from me so I cried. I fell onto the grass beneath me and cried my heart out. Before I knew it, a pair of arms encircled around me holding me close.

“11 years ago, a family was travelling back from vacation. A boy and his mother were the only survivors along with a girl holding her toy lion close. The girl lost her parents. The boy was crying. He lost his father. His mother lost a daughter growing inside of her and the love of her life. The girl came to the boy and said, ‘Don’t be sad. He’s always there with you. My ma and pa are inside me in my heart. You can have Simba if you want. He lost his father too.’ And she gave me her toy lion.” Alan whispered.

Me?Him? What?

He then showed me a tattered Simba. My simba.

“Simba, you. Your father?” I asked.

He nodded. “I couldn’t find a reason. The last reason. I stayed up all night thinking. And I couldn’t show up at school without a reason. My mother died of depression and alcohol poisoning 4 years ago. She couldn’t take the death of my unborn sister and my father. She killed herself.” A lone tear escaped his eye.

“You told me, Simba would help me. Because, his father died too, and he became king in the end. He was my solace when I didn’t understand why mother kept crying. My nana took care of me. She lost gramps and her son. She knew what death felt like. But then I lost her too. But I had emancipated myself on my 16th birthday. And since then, I looked for my Nala. I found you. For me, you were the reason. My reason to not die after everything, but more than you, the reason was the bravery you showed me when you were only 7 years old. I needed to be strong. And here I am.” He revealed.

I was surprised and my voice couldn’t be trusted. So I hugged him as tightly as I could tears threatening to fall again.

“Thank you.” I said.

“I think the most important reason I can give you now is, you. You are the reason you should live. Your dreams are the reasons you should live. If I could help you find 3 reasons in 3 days that you could live with for your entire life, you can find a reason every single day. That is a reason added to the list every single day of your life. Live. Live to find those reasons. Live to love you, and everything around you.” Alan told me, holding me close.

I decided then, that I will live and 1934 days and reasons later, Alan became my most important reason to live.

---