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Personal Essay

The average American falls in love for the first time between the ages of 15 and 18, and for the first time in my below average life I had finally done something in the right time bracket. But hold on, not only was I average in falling in love, six weeks before my seventeenth birthday, I was a cliché. I had fell in love over the summer, and even worse, for the “bad boy”. Like every other young girl falling for the rebel, I had my heartbroken, but that’s not important, what is important is what I learned after.

Summer vacation had officially started, and I planned to spend my days at the beach reading and my nights with my best friends at bonfires. Of course I should have known, nothing ever goes as planned. My nephew who is two years older than me had finished high school and was graduating. A difficult feat for him as he’d been kicked out of seven schools in four years, even spending a week in juvie. Of course my mother, his grandma, had to see him walk across the stage in a cheap ugly robe. My nephew and I were close; in fact, he was like an older brother to me. However, when my mother came to tell me I would be spending the summer in California, I was not happy. But family always came first, no matter what.

My mom did not stay long after my nephew graduated. Only a few days to celebrate and to get me settled, and when she left I cried but not because I would be missing out on the summer festivities back in Michigan but because I hated to be away from my mother. It was a known fact among my friends, that while I had a “little problem”, for the most part I was the definition of a "good girl". I loved my family, I made decent grades, I went to church every

Wednesday night, if I did something wrong I owned up to it, and most of my down time was spent in my room reading books, and watching Gilmore Girls or Roswell.

I met Vinny the very day my mother left. My nephew trying to cheer me up insisted I go with him to his friend's house. There I met my nephews group of friends, the five of them went everywhere together and did everything together, my nephew the leader and Vinny second in command. Although this seemed to be because he was closest to my nephew if nothing else. Vinny was broody, with dark eyes, dark hair, tan skin, mysterious, quiet and his hands were always marked with different colors. I was instantly intrigued and attracted to him. Like a moth drawn to a flame, I had always had a thing for bad boys. But it wasn't till then that any of them ever liked me back.

We all piled into a hot pink room, but it smelled of guy and there was so much graffiti on the door you could barely tell it was painted white underneath. The guys played video games passing around blunts and bags of chips. It wasn't until they were passed to Vinny that I was offered anything and it was the first time he'd spoken to me. In fact, other than my nephew he was the only one who ever addressed me directly. I had a sneaking suspicion my nephew told them not to talk to me, and when Vinny did my nephew looked at him strangely but didn't say anything. Vinny talked quietly to me throughout the day. Later that night after we'd gone to a kickback at Vinny's sisters house, my nephew left with a girl and told Vinny to get me home safely.

We were walking through an alley and music could be heard from a house party a few blocks away. Something slow was playing and he asked if I wanted to dance. Suddenly my life was becoming one of the young adult romance novels I loved and I couldn't be happier. The rest of summer would be filled with moments like that one. Most of adventures together would take

place in the middle of the night; running through sprinklers fully clothed, getting high looking at the stars, stealing his parent's cars going for joy rides, him taking me along while he tagged on sides of buildings while I played lookout, getting drunk in baseball fields. Reckless and carefree.

Of course, for every high there must be a low. Throughout the summer I would watch him struggle with his demons. There would be times when we sat on his front porch, me holding him as he cried because his mom probably wouldn't make it to see his next birthday due to cancer. There would be times when I would try to talk him out of doing home invasions and car hopping, not that I ever managed to stop him. There would be my own tears when I found out he was talking to someone else other than me. There would be times that I watched silently as he fought other guys just to amuse himself and his friends. And there would be times where I would listen to his plans to kill himself because he couldn't find a reason to live. In those moments my heart would begin to break.

How could someone who claims to love me want to kill their self? How could he do all these things that could hurt me, or hurt him? How could his supposed love and my love for him not be enough? I never asked him these questions though. I believed that because someone loved him, he would eventually find his way. I suppose he must have asked himself the same questions about me. I should mention I wasn't the perfect summer romance partner. In fact, some of my demons came out to play as well. Vinny would be lucky number three to realize that I, at the tender age of sixteen had a drinking problem. And number one to realize I suffered from panic attacks, due to abuse when I was younger. Vinny would continuously watch me carefully those summer nights, making sure I got home safely, reminding me of things that happen because I couldn't remember, telling me that I was funny and interesting even without the liquor coursing

through my veins, and making sure no one got close enough to make me feel threatened or unsafe.

After a summer full of adventure and first love, I went home back to Michigan. It's funny how a little bit of distance, or 1816.84 miles to be exact, can give you some perspective. I realized something important. Just because you love someone doesn't mean you can save them. I tried to help Vinny that summer. Talking to him about going back to school, staying out of trouble, telling him it was okay to be scared and lost, and that just because he had nothing did not mean that he couldn't have things and be somebody. I couldn't save Vinny though, just like he couldn't save me. When I realized this something clicked for me, the only person who can save somebody is themselves. They have to be their own hero because if someone wants something, really wants something, they'll do everything in their power to get to that place. That summer would shape the rest of my life, in many ways. But learning I couldn't save anyone and that I could only save myself had the biggest impact. Not only was it a huge relief, but it gave me direction. I stopped drinking after that, my group of friends changed, I did better in school, I made plans to leave the town who viewed me as the "party girl", because I was the only one who could change my life. I had to save myself, become my own hero, and eventually I did just that.