

A Boy Who Looks Like Horses, or A Horse Who Looks Like Boys

by Nathaniel Tower

He was born of mare and stallion.

Three days after the birth, he was adopted by Robert and Estella Patten and dubbed Michael Alex.

The foal would not feed from his mother's teat, nor did his mother offer. Cast aside, the foal waited in the corner of the stables for the nectar of life.

Estella did not breast feed Michael Alex because her breasts were dry of milk. Instead she provided the foal with formula milk. He seemed to enjoy it, sucking out of the bottle with a vampire-like hunger.

Michael Alex's parents taught him how to walk on two legs rather than four. They trained the other two legs as arms, and they taught him to manipulate his maldeveloped hooves into fully functional hands. Michael Alex was a very fast learner, which made sense considering his life expectancy was approximately one-tenth of a human-born child.

His body developed quickly. Michael Alex walked, jogged and galloped all by the age of four weeks. Robert discouraged him from galloping, but Estella said "Let him gallop."

"The other children will make fun of him if he gallops," Robert told his loving wife over dinner.

"Honey, we need Michael to be himself."

"No son of mine will gallop. I won't have it."

Michael Alex, sitting on the floor beside the table, didn't comprehend any of what they said, but somehow he knew they were talking about him. Saddened, he galloped away in the middle of the

night, instinctively finding his way back to the stable where his birthparents lived.

At the stable, Michael quickly learned that his father had returned to the racetrack and his mother had been put to sleep, whatever that meant. Michael Alex understood that it was a permanent condition, and he vowed never to allow anyone to put him to sleep. He also vowed, with the drunken stablehand as his witness, that he would abandon the horselife forever and become a full human.

Deep down, Michael always knew who he was, but he overcame the obstacles (and science) to become the top of his high school class. Although his body had not developed quite like the rest of his peers, he looked human enough, certainly more human than some of the hideous children. He at least looked human enough to garner the name "Horseman," a moniker he always attributed to his great speed and unusual gait rather than his horselike appearance. His long face, brown mane, leathery skin and buckteeth all gave him that look, but when he looked in the mirror, he just saw a pimply-faced teenager — in spite of the fact that he was barely three years old and a senior in high school.

Michael Alex had numerous scholarship offers, which was wonderful for him since no one from his family had ever attended college — or even lived past the age of six. His favorite sport was football, but he was clearly most gifted on the base paths of the ball diamond. He was more than fast enough in football, and there wasn't a soul who could tackle him, but he was notorious for fumbling at inopportune times. In baseball though, the boy played flawlessly, often reaching second safely on a lazy groundball hit to the second baseman. He rounded the bases like a natural, so it didn't matter much that he held the bat a little funny or couldn't swing for the fences. There had been a bit of controversy the first time he went up to bat; he didn't quite fit in the batter's box, and the helmet didn't sit squarely on his head. The coach of the other team even questioned whether or not he was human, but the umpire had heard this routine many times before. He explained to the coach that some people simply seemed to defy what humans were capable of;

he spouted off the names of dozens of professional ball players who seemed far from human. The coach shook his head and said that wasn't what he meant, but the umpire would have none of it and tossed him from the game. So Michael Alex went to bat and managed to turn a simple base hit into a triple. It was the first time in the history of baseball that a boy had gotten a triple in his very first trip to the plate.

The triple was certainly a harbinger of things to come, and Michael Alex went on to rack up every record there was to rack up. No matter how good he was though, there was something empty about the game of baseball. He felt too exposed, and deep down he knew that the coach of that team had been right. He wasn't really human, but on the football field it didn't matter since everyone seemed to call everyone else a beast or a monster or a tank all the time anyway. He laughed at the idea of a tank playing football.

On the day that Michael Alex was supposed to accept his baseball scholarship to Stanford, his girlfriend decided it was time they took their relationship to the next level.

"I'm so proud of you," she told him, stroking his coarse mane as he smiled his goofy grin at her.

"Thank you," he neighed even though he had taught himself not to neigh. It was a vulnerable moment for him. He had heard about sex from his friends, and although he was certainly confident about it for obvious reasons, he was also scared of the nakedness. Sure, he could disguise himself when he wore clothes, especially in a sports uniform, but when he stood before his girlfriend in the nude, surely she would notice that he looked like a horse.

"Well, let's do it, Horseman," she said, complicating the situation even further.

They were in the backseat of his Mustang at the time, parked in an inconspicuous spot that overlooked miles of open fields. He wasn't sure why his adoptive parents had gotten him such a car, but it sure did help to attract the ladies. Not that Michael Alex needed any help with all that he had going for him.

Michael Alex looked away from his beautiful girlfriend, out the window of the Mustang and into the open pasture. He looked back at his girlfriend, who had bared her breasts for him. They were certainly wonderful breasts, creamy and round, just the way he had heard they were supposed to be. He nuzzled the breasts with his face for a moment, his leathery skin and tangles of hair tickling her in the process. She laughed so hard that she backed away, and again he glanced out the window. The open pasture, with its luscious fields of green, was far more inviting than those perfect breasts. He knew then that he could never fully be a human; after all, what kind of human would pass up perfect breasts and teenage sex to chomp on grass?

His girlfriend closed her eyes and leaned in for a kiss. Michael Alex bolted out of the car, stripping off his clothes as he slowly transitioned from two legs to four, his hooves pounding violently on the rain-softened ground. His stride was clumsy at first, as if he were learning how to run properly for the first time, but soon his hooves struck with such force and confidence that the ground below must have feared his steps. Although he had originally escaped to have a bite at the grass, the run felt so perfect, like he was himself for the first time, that he just kept on going, his clothes now tattered rags yards away. It was the finest moment of his life, this freedom, and he knew he could never again try to be a human. He wasn't a Horseman after all — he was a Manhorse, and he was going to be the best Manhorse he could be.

From a distance, Michael Alex's girlfriend admired him from the Mustang, but deep down, she was glad that she hadn't gone any further with the boy.

