

The Good Wife never had a leading man

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

March 30, 2014

This weekend, I went and saw *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. It was good. It also failed the [Bechdel test](#) spectacularly: I don't think two female characters ever spoke to each other at all, much less about something other than a man.

Later, I watched the new episode of *The Good Wife*. Now there's a show that aces the Bechdel test, week after week. If someone wanted to develop a test specifically for TV shows with strong female protagonists and supporting characters, they could call it The Alicia Test, With Kalinda and Diane. (If you're behind on this show, you might want to stop reading now.)

So it's been odd to see the reaction to the plot twist at the center of the last two episodes. Will—Alicia's former boss and former lover—dies suddenly. And viewers *just could not believe this was happening*. Various reviewers turned in copy that mostly just expressed shock and sadness repeatedly. Twitter fell apart, its servers soaked with tears of rage. [Breia Brissey said](#) she "can't imagine this show without Will Gardner." *TV Guide* called him "[the show's leading man](#)."

He wasn't. *The Good Wife* doesn't have a leading man; never has. A love triangle, yes. But Alicia Florrick is not just a third of that triangle, and she's not just the first among equals in an ensemble cast. She's the whole damn point, the only face in the opening credits. The show's *title* refers to her. Not even Walter White could say that.

Showrunners Robert and Michelle King [put it predictably well](#): "*The Good Wife*, at its heart, is the 'Education of Alicia Florrick'.... Will's death propels Alicia into her newest incarnation." Julianna Margulies, who plays Alicia and is a producer on the show, also rightly [describes the move in Alicia-centric terms](#).

I liked Josh Charles in *Sports Night*, and I liked him in *The Good Wife*. Will was an interesting character—well-intentioned, flawed, [a bit bro-ish](#). But as Charles has been suggesting in the aftermath of his character's death, the show's better than ever, and it's hard to see this plot twist slowing it down at all. So why is it so shocking?

[The best thing I've read on this](#) is from Kirthana Ramiseti:

The past five seasons have seen [Alicia] progress from a smart but insecure first-year associate to a partner at Lockhart Gardner to the head of her own fledgling law firm. She also has strong, multifaceted ties to many other characters on the show—such as her complex relationships with Diane and Kalinda, her professional partnership and friendship with Cary, and her fierce devotion to her children. Perhaps more than any other TV protagonist, Alicia's world is populated with vibrant people—friends and antagonists alike—who offer tremendous story potential for seasons to come.

Since Will's farewell aired, some of the show's fans have said they'll stop watching *The Good Wife*. But to tune out now would be to say that Alicia has no value as a character beyond her romantic storylines.

I also appreciate [Sonia Saraiya's comment](#) on a weirdly funny scene from last night's episode. (For context, in case you don't know the show and are somehow still reading: Alicia is the first lady of Illinois.)

Eli takes the podium to save Alicia the trouble of introducing the governor right after she's heard the devastating news, but it means that his remarks aren't prepared, and he finds himself reading Alicia's monologue, which makes a lot of jokes about being the governor's (female) wife. And in the middle of mourning Will, the viewer's attention is drawn to a totally pointless digression: Are those hacky jokes about diapers and dresses really the best material Peter's staff could come up with for Alicia Florrick?

It's very Robert and Michelle King to slip social commentary in the most unexpected quarters.

Yes, and the subtle plot point about the governor's staff expecting Alicia to make dumb domestic jokes from the dais is not at all pointless. The Kings have created a show that's fundamentally, unapologetically about a woman. Somehow, at some level, this seems to elude people. In any case, it's the best drama on TV—with or without supporting character Will Gardner.