



Sometimes a man just needed a fine woman and a flat surface.

Was that so much to ask?

Down and dirty, crude and volatile. The kind of carefree fucking that soaked the sheets and knocked pillows off the bed. That was real sex. The kind Alex Thompson preferred. Hot and heavy.

Toss in a touch of danger, and you had a real party. He'd never had any qualms with a quickie session between library bookshelves or with being jacked off beneath the table a restaurant or of touching a woman beneath the table...until she panted, red in the face.

Sex was sex. And dangerous sex was the best kind.

Risk was everything. Without risk where would he ever experience any excitement? Some of the only emotions he could experience lay in that one feeling--excitement. In the thrill of the bad and dangerous. He probably learned that little bit from his piece of shit father. Thanks dad.

Excitement, the kind he enjoyed, was something he rarely came by. And when he did, it came in the form of sex. The rush of pleasure.

As with all things in life, Alex had changed over the years. Inevitably breaking silence on certain topics, he'd do best to keep his mouth shut. Especially involving his opinions on a certain MacKellen family member who'd had his gut twisted into knots a few times.

Still, along his life's journey, he'd manage to make a few friends. One of these unlucky bastards was Gavin MacKellen, Alpha of the MacKellen pack located deep in the mountains of rugged, outback Oregon.

Tonight Alex had taken Gavin up on his offer to take a visit the pub, The Burly Bear Bar. Owned by Trish Friedman, a female with a temper and a quick shotgun response (loaded with silver bullets!) she was known for her tenacious attitude. Few messed with Trish, but everyone loved her company, her bar, and more importantly, her fair prices.

Tonight he'd really needed a cold brewski or two.

Gavin and his mate, Alicia, stood elbow to elbow, eyes engaged as they whispered back and forth. Small smiles sent to one another. The stark contrast between the alpha's deeply scarred face, where the skin had once been fileted off, butchered, and Alicia's smooth alabaster complexion was jarring. Yet, they looked perfect together. Like they belonged.

Alex's gaze wandered to the other side of the Saturday-night crowd and once again spotted Hanna MacKellen, younger sister to Gavin. And the source of all his troubling thoughts tonight. There she was. Standing in that dress. Toppling his equilibrium and bringing uncomfortable thoughts to the forefront of his mind.

What the hell was she thinking wearing a dress like that?

Form fitting didn't cover it. Heck, not much was covering her for that matter. Her red dress showcased a waist which had gotten steadily tighter since she ditched her dog of a husband. Her ex-mate, Tom couldn't keep his dick in his pants, and though his promises had landed himself back in Hanna's company for a while, she luckily smartened up and kicked his

ass to the curb. Not only that but the deal was final. She'd signed the divorce papers just two weeks ago.

And what had she done since then?

Only try to wreck his whole damn world.

Really, he was exaggerating, but that's not what it felt like every time he saw her. With her new and improved--and who knew *that* was a possibility--mouth-watering figure, Alex found it difficult to keep from steaming beneath the collar. Maybe his slight "infatuation" with her, the thought of which turned his grimace into an old man's sagging frown, existed in part because of that kiss. Yeah, he'd laid a kiss on Hanna MacKellen before.

That kiss might not have been a good idea. Of course, he didn't realize it at the time. At the time, he'd been pissed off and angry at her for falling back into the same-old trap with Tom. A trap he'd warned her specifically about. After all, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. So he'd come into this very same bar where they both occupied space, and he'd kissed her after fighting with her.

A hard kiss if ever there was one. And not half-bad either. Hell, it was pretty fucking amazing all things considered. Why else couldn't he forget about it?

What had he been hoping to accomplish with that kiss anyway? He could wonder about that now, months after the fact. But, back then, what the *hell* had he been thinking?

Now, it seemed like hardly a day passed that he didn't think about that kiss.

Heh. She leaned across the bar and the material of her dress gripped her curvaceous ass like a glove. He choked on a swallow of his brew. Nearly spewing the liquid across the table. Next to him, his friend Gavin MacKellen clapped him hard enough on the back to break teeth, which didn't help much. Hiding his pained wince, Alex thanked his friend for the "help".

"You know if you keep looking at her like that, you might burn a hole through her!" Alicia said with a saucy grin.

Alex carefully didn't blink as Gavin turned to watch his response shrewdly. Gavin was known to be protective of his family, especially his sisters. Just one--of the many--reasons why Alex had always stayed far, far away from the MacKellen sisters. Yet, in the next moment he found himself staring at the back of Hanna in that pretty red dress as he had been for much of the night. She looked nice, really nice. Too fucking nice. He liked it enough to wish she'd never worn that in public. Hated it so much his hand cracked the glass of his mug.

"I'm not staring."

Alicia, a beauty herself with ravishing dark-brown hair and eyebrows, and an exquisite body, not that he was looking, bubbled with excitement. Like she'd just stumbled upon the winning lottery ticket. "You were too! I saw you. See! Right there, your eyes drifted back to Hanna. What's all that about, Alex? You diggin' my sister-in-law?"

Not enjoying being the center-of-attention, Alex wished he could slink away to the shadows to finish his brew in peace. Instead, he tossed back the rest of the brew's contents, readying to make his escape.

"Listen, I don't like her." The lie had him biting his tongue--not entirely truthful.

“Never said you did,” she quipped smartly.

“Good.” Alex glared at her. “Because I don’t.” He said the statement with such stone-cold potency he knew she couldn’t mistake his meaning.

Gavin suddenly shouldered forward, hanging above Alex like a giant. Damn the man was big, not that Alex was small by any means. One didn’t grow to be six-foot-two and two-hundred plus pounds without a lot of hard, dedicated work lifting heavy objects and sparring with the pack soldiers or fighting off the occasional criminal. Though that topic would be saved for another day.

“You checkin’ out my sister, bro? Since when do you have an interest in Hanna?”

Alex did not point out that he wasn’t the only man admiring Hanna’s backside in that dress. There were all kinds of single males (and non-singles) in the bar eyeing that dress and it wasn’t ‘cause it was pretty and red.

Ah and there it was. “*My sister.*” Of course Gavin had to assert his protective verbiage into the convo. Alex could almost hear the don’t-touch-my-sister-talk coming already and he had zero plans to lay a finger on her.

And what was she doing? Ms. Accountant. Ms. Recently Single. Ms. Too-Good-For-Me. She was wrapped in another man’s arms, swooning like she hadn’t had this much fun in ages.

She was such a princess.

“Nope. Not interested.”

There, a simple answer.

Gavin cocked an eyebrow like a watchful predator. “Good. Let’s keep it that way.”

Alicia rolled her eyes and elbowed Gavin. “Who is she here with anyway? I haven’t moseyed my way over there to find out.” The gleam in her eye said she’d likely be doing so soon.

“That there is Remi Gerioux. A lykaen from the French-Canadian pack north of us. They’re an old-school pack,” Gavin explained. “Remi is well-respected far as I know. He’s the only nephew of the Queen of Gerioux Pack and the only heir to the throne. An out-right real prince.”

That was the kind of men Hanna MacKellen dated. Princes. High-class with a fresh-faced complexion. The nephew to a queen. Hell.

What a pansy.

It was difficult to explain, but Remi Gerioux was somehow lacking standing next to the stunning Hanna. He didn’t look like this gorgeous woman should be draped over him; he looked like he should be serving her drinks instead. He had a pale complexion with short, ginger-red hair and pale eyes. He wore a gold watch on his left wrist and a gold necklace around his neck, buried beneath the crisp white starch of his collared shirt.

What kind of man wore a suit to a bar? Not only that but an expensive suit, not something found used off the rack at a Salvation Army.

Alex could tell a man's character based on his appearance. He prided himself on that fact. This Remi guy had spoiled written all over him; he'd likely never worked a day in his life. Hands were probably soft as a baby's ass.

What a joke. He'd laugh if anything of this were actually funny and not utterly irritating.

Alex tossed back a shot of whiskey, allowing the burn in his throat to transfer to his grimace.

Mr. Suit was entirely too impeccable. His smile generous and, Alex shuddered, *attractive*. He was likely Hanna's type too. She was a college grad, smart, always had been great in school.

What had he done, instead? When Alex was sixteen he'd gotten the last beating he'd ever get from good old dad. By that time he'd already stopped going to school. Thirty days later, when his father threw his fist in a drunken rage once more, Alex would catch it--fight back--and win. His dad never hit him again and when he died, it wasn't grief Alex felt when they buried his father's cold body, but relief. Relief, that, finally, it was over. The bastard was dead.

"Hey bro, you okay?"

Alex jolted from his thoughts, stuck in the moment. Then he realized he was looking up into the concerned face of his friend Gavin. God, he had to get out of here. *Now*.

"Yeah, man. Hey, I need to run. I ain't feelin' this tonight."

Gavin nodded and whispered something into Alicia's ear. "Alright, I'll walk you out. We need to talk."

Fuuck. Just what he needed. A lecture about looking at his sister. Alex didn't say anything though, just gritted his teeth as his friend followed him out of the bar.

The night air hit Alex in the face with fresh oxygen. He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes as the loud bar noise evaporated and only the sound of dimmed conversations and chirping crickets greeted him in the dusty parking lot.

Gavin looked out over the land, lights from houses they'd built together visible in the distance. "Listen, I don't know how else to say it--"

Alex wished he wouldn't. His feet wanted to move--like away from his friend and in the direction of his motorcycle. He could see the black-and-chrome bike parked right where he left it, shining like a beacon of hope. He edged in that direction.

"But I have to. Listen, I'm looking..." Gavin hesitated. "Well, Hart and I are looking for someone to help us out with pack matters. Specialty work, pack related, I guess you can think of it as a unique position working beside us. We want someone non-family, you know? Someone we can trust and we think you're it."

Alex screwed his jaw closed and thanked the stars this wasn't some conversation revolving Hanna. Because if it had been...Gavin would be smelling burnt rubber about now.

"What are you talking about?"

Gavin crossed his arms, looking like the powerful alpha he was, face horribly scarred from a fateful incident.

“Ever since the chaos with the Graham brothers being banished and with brother William...” His voice trailed off. William--the youngest MacKellen--had done something atrocious. Now he was imprisoned, having participated in the brutality done to Gavin’s face and in kidnapping and hurting Alicia. It had been unthinkable to consider their own family member could turn against them. But he had, for one reason or another.

Gavin cleared his throat before continuing. “With William in the penitentiary, we want someone extra to help keep the peace around here. We’ll have other jobs come up from time to time depending on the situation.”

Alex was listening. “Like what?”

“Keep an ear out, report anything to me directly. Or to Hart. We would feel more comfortable reaching out to you than anyone else. We might have missions for you, work to do, but it wouldn’t be anything you couldn’t handle.”

Alex didn’t have to consider it. “I’d be honored to help. Of course.”

Gavin grinned and clapped him on the back. “Good news.”

The bar door swung open followed by a gaggle of giggling. Alex recognized one of those voices; it set his jaw on edge. Hanna tip-toed in those ridiculously tall high heels, clearly displaying she didn’t wear them often enough, on the arm of Mr. Suit. She looked cute as hell. Mr. Suit of course owned the most expensive car in the lot. Who drove a Benz to a rickety-dink bar like this?

“I’ve got a beautiful woman waiting on me inside. I’ll see you tomorrow in my office bright and early. So we can discuss more about this new job.”

“Fine,” Alex mumbled, his eyes locked like lasers on Hanna and her ‘friend’. A fucking prince. Alex rolled his eyes while shaking his head in disbelief.

“You do have an interest in Hanna.”

Gavin’s sudden statement, made Alex chuckle. “Nah, nah. It’s not like that.”

His friend’s expression didn’t look so believing.

Alex tossed his hands up. “Whatever. I’m out of here, man.”

Alex shook his head and hopped on his bike as Gavin waved him off and headed inside. Across the lot, Mercedes-prince drove away--alone and Hanna hopped into her car. His gaze narrowed. He’d counted at least two glasses of wine she’d drank tonight. He’d caught her drinking and driving in the past.

And that was all the reasoning he needed to follow Hanna out of the parking lot, keeping some distance behind her. It was for her safety, of course. He didn’t want her driving into a tree for God’s sakes.

Minutes later, she pulled down the main street to her house. She was headed up to her house, keys swinging from pink-painted fingernails when Alex pulled up, the roar of his engine catching her attention.

She turned and faced him in surprise. “Alex Thompson. What are you doing? Following me home?”

Here he was wearing his leathers, his heavy-rubber boots scraping the rough asphalt, and she made him feel like a schoolboy being scolded by his teacher.

“I wanted to make sure you made it safe. You have this habit of drinking and driving.”

One hand cocked on her hip as her stance turned aggressive. That was the only way to describe it. “And how many beers did you have tonight, Alex?” she retorted sharply.

A muscle in his cheek twitched. “Two.” Plus that final shot of whiskey. That part he kept to himself.

Her eyes lit up, practically sparkling. “Well I only had two as well. I am not drunk. So there! Now goodnight!”

He revved his engine out of anger. It was a vapid, inane thing to do but he hadn’t been able to help it.

Her jaw dropped. “Did you just rev your engine at me?”

He had. Not that he meant to. It was as if the muscles in his hand had flexed at her attitude.

Damn it, now he looked as though he cared.

But instead he said, “No.” His eye twitched. And he was certain a migraine was growing in his right temple, throbbing incessantly.

“Get inside the house. I wanna see you safely inside before I go.”

Her keys jingled as she paced around, both hands on her hips. Those saucy hips...with the sway from her tall heels, he felt warm sensations tighten in his belly.

“So you were watching me tonight, were you? How else could you have known I only had two glasses of wine,” she said, her words strung together like a song. She was joyful tonight and free. Something he’d never seen her be while mated to Tom. Now that she’d truly cut him free, she was like a different person. No, not different. But the good parts of her that he’d always seen were now amplified ten-fold.

Someone needed to rein her in because she was dangerous like this.

“I was not watching you,” he lied. “How did you know I drank two beers?”

A slender, rounded eyebrow rose delicately. Like a young queen about to make a vow before court. She even stood straighter, her chin raising and poising just so. Again, his cheek convulsed.

“I might have happened to glance your way. I waved at Gavin and Alicia earlier. So what if I saw anything?”

“So what indeed.”

“You are such a sour-sport. You’re ruining my happy buzz. Leave, will you!” she made a shooing motion as if trying to rid herself of a pesky fly.

“Whatever happened to Mercedes-boy?”

Sharp as lasers, her gaze slammed into him. Twenty-odd feet apart and the tension between them was like channeled electricity, zapping and crackling between them.

“You mean Remi?”

He almost rolled his eyes at the name. *Remi*. So fuckin’ stupid.

He gritted the words. "Yeah, Remi."

She smiled coyly. "He is staying at a nice hotel in the city. I'll be seeing him again next weekend while he's in town on business for the Gerioux pack. We've gone a few dates. He's very fun."

He's very fun.

For some reason, her description filled Alex with an emotion akin to disgust. Right, that's because it was disgust, moron.

"You don't have to look so pale. Are you going to vomit?" Her voice was soft and painfully sweet, like sugarcoated sugar. "You're not...*jealous*. Are you, Alex?"

Alex roared his engine with the flick of his wrist. Another involuntary spasm.

"Oooh!" she cooed, pretending to be awed over his bike. "Very impressive." She spoke slowly like a parent congratulating their child's incomprehensible artwork.

God, she could make him feel so small. A part of him wanted to toss his head back and laugh, but he couldn't manage it. He also couldn't quit thinking about Mr. Suit and the way he smiled at Hanna with that lusty look in his eyes. Fuck. This was no good. No good at all.

"Don't worry. I'm not jealous, sweetheart. Good to know you care though."

The light dimmed from her gaze. Good, she needed to be taken down a peg or two. Alex walked his bike forward a few steps as the engine idled.

He actually managed to flash her a grin. "Just making sure you got home safe. Now that that's done." With the roar of his engine, Alex sped off down the street without a single goodbye.

It was only in his side view mirror, as he looked back at her, that he caught a glimpse of her raised middle finger aimed at him, waving through the air flipping him off.

Finally, he let the laughter come.

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