

## We're in this Together

Synopsis: In the cold, desolate night of a big city--love, passion and adventure bloom in the most unusual way.

A long arduous journey in the snow calls for something to take the edge off of my nerves. A hot meal and a warm bed sounds idealistic, but at a time like this, I don't think I can either sleep nor eat. Therefore, instead, I ignore the sign 'Please check in here' and I head over to the hotel's bar.

It was dark, musty and quiet. I take in the place, observing my surroundings of cobble stone floors, wooden walls and rickety old tables and chairs. The place was devoid of any patrons and I was thankful because it will give me some time to think about what's to come.

"Hey there, stranger," calls out the barkeep.

He stood in front of a jagged old mirrored backdrop, adorned with uneven shelves of mix-matched bottles and jars of my savior this evening: alcohol.

I amble over to the bar and glance around.

"Pretty quiet for a cold winter night."

"Yep. Not many travelers this time of year. What brings you to these parts?"

I reach into my travel bag and pull out a coil of rope.

"Oh. Well then, the first round is on me."

"Thanks. But I'm gonna need more than one round for tonight."

I pull up a stool that's lopsided and worn, but it feels good to finally sit down.

The barkeep pours my drink but stops in the middle of it. I was about to protest when I saw her in the reflection of the mirror. I slowly turn in my stool as I hear the barkeep continue to pour my drink.

"Best wishes to ya. I'll leave you two," he whispers then I hear him walk away.

Still looking at her and she at me, I reach for my drink and down its entire contents.

"You must be Xander," she chokes.

"I am. And you must be Chloe. That's a pretty name."

"Thank you," she blushes, lowering her head.

"Please, come sit down."

I pat the stool beside me. I realize the barkeep left the bottle so I pour another while I watch her get on the stool. My, she is something! Big brown eyes and a slim nose. She's perfect. But I frown at the circumstances we have to meet in.

Chloe doesn't say a word, but looks down and plays with her own coil of rope. I reach over and take it from her. She gives me a stunned expression.

"Let's not worry about this now. I'm not too happy about it either, but it's what they want. It's tradition."

“Oh, forget tradition, Xander!”

She surprises me with her zeal; those big brown eyes widen making her look even more beautiful.

“Really? But don’t you understand if we don’t do this, there are consequences? Big consequences. Do you remember what happened to Gunner and Phoebe?”

“Yes. I unfortunately do remember. But that was years ago.”

Her eyes lost their vibrancy once I mentioned about those two. She lowers her head again. It occurs to me she feels the way I do, but she is the one who had the gumption to express herself, unlike me. I admire that in her so much. This makes me feel bad for quashing that fire she possesses. Not knowing what else to do, I pour her a drink.

“Here, this should help. At least for now.”

Without a word, she reaches for the glass and downs it in one gulp, much like I did. Wow. A female who is expressive AND likes her liquor. I can get used to this. But can she? I am a traditionalist yes and was raised in this civilization, but I don’t like having anyone do something against their will. I have witnessed this over the years and although the pairing rituals were as exciting and lively as a funeral at dawn, seeing friends and family leave town after everything is said and done rips my heart to the core. Suddenly, I hear a distant rumbling sound. We both look up at each other, motionless. It can’t be thunder because I have never heard thunder accompany a snow storm. Then, without warning, the entire hotel bar shakes and shimmies, knocking some of the bottles and jars off their shelves crashing to the floor. Chloe drops her empty glass as she tries to brace herself against the bar, as I do the same. The shakes get stronger and stronger as we both try to climb over the bar. She falls, but I instinctively catch her. The rumbles fade as I hold her, our eyes meet. We are nose to nose, liquored breath to liquored breath.

“Thank you,” she whispers softly.

“You are my partner. It is my duty to save you.”

I gently place her down as we both continue our heavy eye contact.

“Everything all right out there?” the barkeep calls out.

“Yes,” we both say in unison.

“That darn subway,” I hear him say as he emerges from the back and begins to clean up the mess.

“Maybe tradition isn’t so bad,” she says.

“Oh forget tradition,” I say as I pull her close to me.

Her kiss is sweet, light and lovely.

“Awe. Isn’t that nice?” I hear the barkeep say quietly.

We pull apart from each other. I take my coil of rope, then she takes hers. We both give each other a wicked smile. We turn to look over at the bartender whose busying himself with cleaning.

Without a word, we scamper out of the hotel bar, laughing in sheer delight.

“Hey, you forgot your rope,” bellows the barkeep.

We run and run like our lives depended on it. Through the subway, dodging heavy foot falls of the humans left and right. Past the underground vendors, being swatted by a shop keeper’s broom.

“Ewe! Get out of here you filthy mice!”

Then up the steps and back out into the cold, snowy night. But we didn’t care, for excitement and passion fuels and warms us. Forget tradition, forget consequences.