

what the night can do

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what the night can do

by [elevenhurricanes](#)

Summary

In which Pacific Northwest Stories celebrates fifty years on air (and Strand takes advantage of their choice in venue).

Notes

Title taken from Steve Winwood's *Don't You Know What the Night Can Do?* which makes an appearance in [the playlist I made for this fic](#) (because of course I did).

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“I’m going to take this knife and cut my feet off before the end of the night.”

As if to back up her claim, Alex picks the blade up off the table for emphasis, turning it so it sparkles under the overhead lights.

“It’d be a lot less bloody if you cut off the shoes instead.” Next to her, Nic stuffs an hors d’oeuvre into his mouth, chewing quickly to continue, “And besides, why are you wearing heels anyway? You’re a serial ballet flats-er.”

“You can’t wear flats with this dress.”

“So, it has nothing to do with you trying to compensate for your date being over a foot taller than you?”

“No,” Alex retorts, brandishing the knife again when Nic shakes his head and chuckles.

“Where’s he at, anyway?”

“He has open office hours on Fridays.”

“Ahh. So, he didn’t want to spend the *entire* night hanging off your arm while you schmooze the donors.”

She huffs out a sigh, blowing a wayward curl out of the way as she does. “Yeah, pretty much.”

For their annual donor function, the station executives had rented out the forty-third floor’s event space of the Concord downtown. No one on the lower part of the PNWS totem pole really knew how they afforded it, but there was a rumor amongst the interns that one of the marketing directors was having an affair with the owner. Alex didn’t have the heart to tell the interns that even the best sex in the world wouldn’t equal the down payment on such a venue.

The hotel is lavish for lavish’s sake.

Built sometime in the early 1900s, it’s one of the oldest skyscrapers in the city. In the ballroom, four tiers of crown molding sculpt the edges of the tray ceilings. Six massive chandeliers hang from above, their crystal prisms gleaming. If a surface isn’t marble, then it’s gold, and if it isn’t gold, then it’s glass. It’s an old money hotel, one that didn’t feel the need to join the industrial-loft design craze that swept through the rest of downtown in the late 2000s.

There were rumors that Frank Colacurcio owned a share of the place in the sixties, and that he used the underground tunnels from the Prohibition era to move escorts into and out of the hotel for ‘special’ guests (most being politicians and city councilmen, in order for them to keep their noses out of whatever else he had running at the time).

At the other end of the ballroom, the live band is playing jazz versions of modern pop songs. The interns are already on the dance floor, their moves a little too exaggerated for how slow the song is. Their phones are suctioned to their hands as they snap photos of the party. Alex let them have full reign of the official Twitter account, figuring it would be something fun for them to do (and so she doesn't have to do it herself while she's making her rounds of the room).

Per the memo Terry sent out, each PNWS employee was to wear some sort of article colored gold. With this being the station's fiftieth anniversary, he wanted to 'unify the team' and 'show that success comes from working together' and other mottos he googled.

Spotting the real gold pieces that some of the donors are wearing, Alex resists the urge to adjust the hair comb at the back of her head. She found it in a jewelry box in the back of her closet, having bought it on a whim back in college during one of her and Amalia's 10 p.m. Target runs. Some of the color had since tarnished on the faux pearls that dotted it, but Alex strategically dabbed white eyeshadow on to give them their sheen back.

Nic went with some golden oxfords that kept trailing glitter wherever he went.

They were certainly a pair, the two of them.

"Okay, I think we've hid behind the food long enough," Alex tells him, to which he whines. "I know – I don't want to rub elbows any more than you do, but we have to."

"We could always join the interns," Nic suggests as he sips at his martini.

"Dancing as an avoidance strategy." She considers it, then nods. "I like it."

"If you wouldn't mind, I would like to have the first dance."

They both turn to see Strand leaning against the bar, a whiskey already in his hand. Alex wonders how long he's been there, waiting for the perfect opportunity for some suave interjection.

What a dork.

He leaves his glass on the bar and holds out a hand, drawing Alex into his gravitational pull. Tucking a loose curl behind her ear, he drops a kiss to her cheek. His eyes are on her lips, though, and she shoots him a warning glance, a wordless reminder that they're still at her work event, no matter the setting or attire.

And then of course there's the whole thing about their relationship being a secret. It's for a myriad of reasons – one of them being the security of her podcast, another being Strand's overprotective nature (as if evil henchmen are going to swoop in and kidnap her for making their relationship status Facebook Official – never mind that he doesn't even have an account). Alex's rule is if they're at work, there's no funny business – which means absolutely no kissing. Hugs were okay, but then those typically lead to kissing, so they were ruled out, too.

Nic and the interns already have a betting pool going around to see how long before they're discovered. Last Alex heard, everyone changed their bets to tonight.

"You look beautiful." One of his hands has already found the open back of her dress. She warms to his touch as he runs his fingertips over her skin.

Oh, inviting Strand was a very bad idea.

"So do you." She admires the navy suit he wears, the way it brings out his blue eyes. Then she catches sight of the golden tie clip and grins. "You got the memo, too?"

"I think your producers frequently forget that I'm not an employee."

Reaching between them, she smooths an invisible wrinkle out of his tie. "Sometimes I'm thankful you aren't."

A single eyebrow lifts. "Hmm? How so?"

"No romantic fraternizing amongst employees is allowed."

Alex holds his gaze as his lips stretch into a smirk.

"My daddy always said two's company and three's an eavesdropper." They both turn to Nic, twin expressions of confusion on their faces. "It's uh – it's a quote from a, uh, cartoon. Anyway, yeah, I'll start making the rounds while you two dance."

With that, Nic departs from their safe space behind the bar and out into the room. Three guests immediately flock to him, reaching out for his hand to shake. It reminds Alex of watching a piece of meat be tossed overboard into shark-infested waters.

"Shall we?" Strand asks, shifting to give her his arm. She takes it, letting him lead her out onto the dance floor.

They dance for the better part of the next half-hour, as the band moves on from jazz to swing, then back to jazz.

Alex follows Strand's lead, letting him whirl her around the floor. Unbeknownst to her, a few people approach to cut in, but they're quickly shot down by Strand's patented glare. By the third Sinatra cover, Alex's head rests against his chest, enjoying the vibrations as Strand hums along. They're barely dancing now – more swaying than anything, tucked away into the center of floor, hidden from curious eyes with over half of Seattle's arts and broadcasting scene in attendance. His palm skates up and down her back, tickling the bare skin there. Suppressing a shiver at the sensation, Alex nuzzles closer, shifting to press a kiss to where his heart beats under the layers of fabric. This close, she feels the catch in his breath.

The spell between them is broken by the song fading to a close. The band announces a break, and the playlist they switch on is some sort of techno-pop that brings all of the interns from the far corners of the room.

Sharing a glance, Alex and Strand abandon the dance floor. They spend the next twenty minutes slowly making their way towards the bar across the room, getting stopped and roped into conversations every few feet (*I heard it's in its fourth season now, isn't that right? and I just couldn't believe that finale! How are you going to explain all that, then? and of course I got a pair of those socks and let me tell you how comfortable they are!*). Repeat ad nauseam.

Strand grabs them two drinks from the bar and they escape into the adjoining room, where the silent auction is being held. They both exhale a tandem sigh of relief at finding the place less populated than the ballroom. Couples and groups form tight clusters as they drift from table to table, hemming and hawing over various items.

"I didn't have a chance to mention it back there, but you're a regular Gene Kelly."

Strand frowns at tickets to a pedal brew bar crawl, as if their existence offends him. "I don't think you'd want to see me tap dance."

"No, no, give you an umbrella, a couple light poles, and an empty street, and I think you've got a shot."

"I think they call that planking, now."

Frozen in her tracks, Alex can't help but stare at the concert tickets on the table in front of her, as if they'll offer an explanation. "What?"

Strand shifts at her confusion, trying to decide which line he wants to straddle: whether he's completely fucked up the pop culture reference or if he knows something Alex doesn't for once. It's usually the former.

"When he jumps off the poles and railings. You know, planking."

"Oh, Richard."

Well, it's definitely the former.

Taking a healthy sip of his drink, he heads for another table, pretending to be extremely interested in a hot air balloon ride in Couer d'Alene as Alex trails behind him, trying to explain the differences between planking and parkour. He continues down the *Outdoor Adventures!* table, reading over a whale watching trip in the San Juan Islands or a private cave exploration in Metaline Falls. He's debating whether Alex will want to drag him through Colville National Forest, given it's only an hour south from the cave, when she lets out a strangled laugh from across the room.

"Richard, come here. Please – I found something you have to get."

Scribbling down his bid, he obediently crosses the hall, stopping short when he spots Alex's find.

“No.”

Emboldened by the five glasses of wine she’s had over the course of the evening, Alex pretends to pout for a moment, but her need to giggle wins out. “Oh, please, you have to.”

“This is possibly the ugliest—”

“Oh, no, no, it is. It definitely is, but that means you have to get it.”

The object of her desire is a painting, square, about twelve by twelve inches. Inside a cat’s open mouth, a family of four sit at a dining table. The medium appears to be crayon, followed with paint that was applied with aluminum foil. The cat’s fur is a hideous orange-and-yellow paisley pattern, its teeth dripping down the canvas as if made from candle wax. Below the painting, the title card reads: *The Family Pet*. “You were talking about needing some art to hang between the windows in the dining room.”

“Which I would never use again, because my appetite would cease to exist every time I looked at this.”

Not one to give up, Alex perches on top of the table to wave a hand over the painting, as if to entice him into purchasing it. Using what little she remembers from that one brief semester of being an art major, she points out the various design choices, saying things like *avant-garde* and *fauvism* and *mixed media*.

Strand makes all the appropriate noises of someone who is listening, when in fact his attention is on the miles of bare thigh revealed by the high slit in her dress. The hand he has around her waist to keep her steady on the table skims down her hip, where the bodice’s gold embellishments float down in glittering trails across the semi-sheer skirt. Brushing two fingers up the exposed skin, he’s pleased when she shivers at his touch. He’s even more pleased when she shifts to let the fabric part higher, revealing even more skin. She smirks up at him around her wine glass, stained with the burgundy lipstick she wears.

He’s never been so envious of cheap glassware in his entire life.

“There you guys are!” Nic greets as he bumbles up to them, Amalia following in his wake.

Strand returns his hand to his pocket as Alex hops down from the table, her dress swaying closed at the movement. He tries to keep his expression neutral, as if he just hadn’t been fantasizing about having his way with her against the *Local Artwork!* table. From the faint blush coloring her skin, he would bet the same thoughts are plaguing Alex.

“Our apologies if we were interrupting anything,” Amalia says with that throaty drawl of hers, her smirk firmly in place as her gaze ticks back and forth between the two of them.

“Just trying to convince Strand into buying this one-of-a-kind art piece.”

At their instantaneous disgust towards the painting, he feels his point has been made.

“As much as we hate to distract from the local art appreciation,” Nic says with a glance back towards the ballroom, “we have a problem.”

Alex wordlessly raises an eyebrow.

“Fitzpatrick just showed up.”

Strand watches her expression fold into annoyance, her brows knitting together as the corners of her lips curl downward.

“As the resident non-employee of PNWS, would someone care to expl—”

“Brett Fitzpatrick,” Amalia supplies. “He’s a local media mogul.”

“A sleazy, misogynistic media mogul,” Nic adds for benefit.

“Who,” Alex finishes, “preys on the interns every year.”

“Then why—”

“His company makes a large donation each year to the studio.”

Amalia nods, rolling her eyes as she does. “The sum of which is not nearly enough for what we have to deal with when he shows up to these events.”

Pushing out a breath, Alex hands her glass off to Strand and takes his bourbon. Without pausing, she tosses it back and sets the empty glass down. At a loss, Strand glances between Amalia and Nic for guidance, but their expressions read nothing but sympathy for her.

“Okay.” Alex straightens her shoulders and checks the straps of her dress before nodding once. “I’ll head him off at the pass, keep him busy until he caves and leaves.”

“If he were into dudes, I’d take one for the team, but...” Nic finishes with a shrug, stepping aside as Alex heads for the door.

Shoving her abandoned wine glass into Amalia’s hand, Strand slips through the crowd and into the ballroom. The heels Alex is wearing give him an advantage; he spots her moving towards the front of the room, snagging a champagne flute from a waiter as she goes. Scanning the crowd as he follows, he identifies the man in question: he’s clean-shaven, younger than Strand and not nearly as tall, wearing a brown pinstripe suit shot through with pale blue. It brings to mind one of those sci-fi shows Alex watches, the one with the loud Englishman.

Getting closer, Strand can hear the nasally laugh he emits. He has Intern A trapped between him and a table. As if she senses the rescue squad arriving, her head shoots up and her eyes widen with relief when she spots Alex barreling straight towards them.

“There she is,” Fitzpatrick grins as Alex approaches, his glance dipping down to her breasts twice as she does. “The woman of the hour.”

Strand takes a moment to relish the thought of his hand knocking the lecherous grin off. Knowing she wants to handle this herself, he hangs back, still in Alex’s line of vision in the event she does require him.

She gives the intern some menial task as an excuse to get away. To her credit, she does hesitate, looking between Alex and Fitzpatrick, but the former's glare finally gets her moving.

"How are you, Brett?"

"Better," Fitzpatrick says, beaming down at her. "Now that you're here, of course."

Strand chokes on his drink, trying to stifle his coughs, thankful for the live band throwing themselves into the second chorus to drown him out.

Skilled in the art of steering a conversation where she wants it to go (which he can attest to, having been on the other side for four seasons of her podcast), Alex gets Fitzpatrick started on the latest happenings with his media company. It's like watching a stone roll down a hill: the man talks and talks, gaining momentum when Alex doesn't stop to ask questions, only nodding her head and urging him on with perfectly-timed hums.

She waves away the two attempts of Fitzpatrick trying to get her over to the bar to refresh her drink, holding it up to him to show how little she's drank of it. The creep won't back down, though, and tries a different tactic.

"That was probably the worst martini I've ever had," he complains, setting the empty glass down next to Alex, his wrist brushing her bare shoulder. "What do you say we get out of here, find somewhere else to drink?"

"My champagne tastes fine." As if to prove her point, she takes a sip. "And this is a work event, so I'd rather stay here, make sure everything continues running smooth."

"Then can you point me in the direction of that cute little intern of yours? Because she seemed like she was interested—"

"She wasn't," Alex declares, cutting him off.

Fitzpatrick shifts backwards at the tone, cocking his head to the side. "No offense, honey, but you shouldn't be ruining her chance just because you're jealous that men are interested in younger women—"

Alex takes a step closer, shifting so the spike of her heel presses on top of his foot. He lets out a pathetic little grunt at the stab of pain.

"The studio appreciates your annual donation," she tells him, her tone implying anything but, as she increases the pressure, "but my interns aren't your consolation prize. They aren't interested, and they don't deserve to be harassed by you or any other sleazy cretin that thinks relentlessly pursuing women until they cave out of fear equals consent."

Fitzpatrick moves. Crowding her against the table, his arms trap her from escaping.

Shooting up from his seat, Strand crosses the ten feet in two strides and digs his grip into his shoulder, dragging him backwards.

“Hey, hey!” Fitzpatrick shouts as he struggles to escape the tight hold, but Strand doesn’t let go. “Buddy, chill out! We were just—”

“You are going to listen to me,” Strand declares, leaning over the smaller man, feeling that unbecoming, testosterone-filled sort of delight when he sees fear flash through his wide eyes. “You are going to apologize to Alex, and then you are going to leave, and you will never attend another event with this studio.”

“Listen, I give—”

“Was I not clear with my instructions, young man?”

The card he plays works, and soon Fitzpatrick is turning tail and storming off to the exit. Strand turns back to Alex, reading the frustration in the set of her brows, and clears his throat.

“I apologize for stepping in. I know you could’ve handled him yourself—”

She sucks in a breath, then quickly lets it out with a shrug. “It’s always nice to have help. And I know how much you like to flex.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“You know, I don’t really either,” she admits with a sigh, laughing a little at the relief that must be on his face that he isn’t the only one out of the loop.

Behind them, the band starts up another song and the work event rages onward. The line of her shoulders loosens when he moves to stand beside her, his arm brushing her shoulder. That caveman urge to touch her, to press his lips to hers, to publicly mark her as his is strong. He tips the last of his drink up to give himself something else to focus on, to give his hands something else to handle when he wants nothing more than for that thing to be *her*.

“How much longer do you have to ‘make an appearance’?” he finally asks.

“Oh, I’m more than ready to get out of here.”

It’s the best thing he’s heard all night.

Helping her gather her things, he waits as she says goodbye to various staff (and reminds the interns to quit posting under the studio’s account if they’ve had more than three drinks). They exit the ballroom, the double doors click shut behind them, and the cool air of the hallway greets them. Alex tips her head back and breathes a sigh of relief at the muffled noise. Strand takes the opportunity to place a hand at the small of her back and urge her forward to the elevator bank.

Once they’re settled inside with a few fellow event-goers, he selects the forty-first floor, earning a noise of interest from Alex. His hands itch to gather her close, especially when she shuts her eyes for the short ride and tips her head onto his shoulder. He keeps civil, though, and guides her out when the doors blessedly open.

“We could’ve just gone home, you know,” she points out, the skirt of her dress brushing against him as they head down the long corridor. “I’m a Lyft ride away.”

Arriving at their suite, Strand swipes them into the room, holding the door open for Alex as she steps inside.

“This is easier,” he tells her as he lets the door fall shut, “because I won’t have to wait to do this.”

Reaching for her, he takes her into his arms and walks her backwards until she’s pressed to the door. His lips meet hers, insistent and demanding, his fingers digging into the intricate design she’s created with her hair. Bobby pins ring as they bounce across the tiled floor, as Strand works his way through the coiffure. Work Alex fades from sight, replaced by Real Alex, who glances down at the mess he’s made of her hair and snorts, before dragging him back down for another kiss. She pushes insistently at his suit jacket and tosses it against the wall, uncaring when it lands onto the floor. Her hands are too busy with his tie to care.

Abandoning her lips, he moves south, nipping at the edge of her jaw, then on down to the soft skin of her throat, mouthing at the rise of her collarbone until she resembles his own clinometric map, the slopes and ridges of her body laid out for him, flushed from his attentions.

He likes maps.

For as long as he can remember, he’s always had a map or two or five, stretched and pinned across his walls. They’re all pockmarked with thumbtacks and notes and newspaper clippings (he isn’t so ridiculous as to use string, but only because he hasn’t connected anything worthwhile in several weeks, so the string lays in his desk drawer, unused).

His celestial maps show the stars and their names, each and every one that’s visible from Earth. In the darkness between them is where the unknown lurks, waiting to be discovered. And when that darkness comes closer, when it threatens to seize his beliefs and his sanity, that is when he looks to Alex, his Polaris, his guide out of the dark and back to home.

Maps are important. Look, they say. Look at the wide expanse of the world. He’d told Alex during their first interview that there was enough wonder and beauty in the world already. And here was all of it: neatly trimmed into a 50x32 size, framed in lacquered oak. All of humanity fit into a uniform grid, set neatly into latitude and longitude. Their homes and friends and colleagues all situated at 47.6062° N and 122.3321° W.

His favorite map, though, is Alex. The three moles near the base of her throat, the two lines at the corners of her eyes, the birthmark on her ribs that looks like Belize, though she thinks it looks like a stretched-out mitten (he feels like his assessment is more sound, though, given he’s the one who has his mouth on it).

Trailing wet kisses back up her neck, his teeth gently scrape against the flesh of her ear, earning him another small gasp. Her fingers dig into his biceps. He’s going for gold, though; after hearing her refer to him as Doctor Strand all night, he wants his given name coming out of those painted lips of hers.

“The audacity of you,” he murmurs, grinning when a shiver works through her. “Making me wait so long to have you. It was torture.”

Skimming a hand down her dress, the beaded bodice and crisp fabric tickle his palm. He finds the skirt’s opening with ease, running his fingertips across her smooth skin, gripping tight like he wanted to earlier in the auction room. Alex has already read his mind, though. She swings her leg up and around the back of his thighs, pulling him closer, driving her hips into his. He groans against her mouth, the sound of it deep and primal.

“Torture,” she tells him, making quick work of his buttons in between kisses, “was seeing people look you up and down all night and not being able to claim you as mine.”

The admission is a pleasant shock to his system, his nerve endings tingling at the knowledge of her possessiveness. It’s no surprise that it’s usually him putting his hand on the small of her back, or shifting to walk closer to her when the city crowds against them. He wants his signals to be read – hell, he’d strap a cache of light bulbs to his back and become a walking marquee that would read *Fuck Off*, so even the imbeciles who move beyond careless flirting take the hint.

Alex’s possessive streak is possibly the only subtle thing about her, something she keeps under wraps until she feels the need to extend her claws. He won’t admit it to anyone else but her, but it makes him a little weak-kneed when it happens, in those few and far between moments.

“The feeling is mutual,” he says, his breath catching when she leans forward to mouth at his exposed chest. Heat simmers just under the surface of his skin, goosebumps rising where her tongue dips into the slight grooves of his muscles. He isn’t in perfect shape – he’s closer to sixty than he is fifty – but he takes care of himself, if not for his own health, but for the pleasure he feels when he watches Alex catching an eyeful of him.

Her dark eyes flash underneath those long lashes of hers. It’s all the warning he has before she makes a sudden detour, her lips brushing against his nipple. Then she bites down, quick and gentle, driving a nail of heat through his skull. Fire licks down his body. He’s helpless against the growl he releases. Fumbling, he drops his hand from the wall above her head to cradle her jaw, urging her mouth up to meet his.

There’s no refinement to their kisses, now. They’re hot and messy and bruising, each of them fighting to gain the upper-hand.

Strand decides to fight fire with fire. Slipping both his hands around her waist, he continues down until he’s cupping her ass, hauling her close to grind against her. Alex gasps, the noise of surprise quickly turning into a laugh as she tries to work her other leg around his hip.

Grabbing two handfuls of the dress, he shoves the fabric up until it bunches around her hips, exposing the delicate lines of her calves and thighs. She closes her hands over the fabric and yanks it from his grip, so Strand can use his hands for other (better) things.

His smirk widens, using the sudden freedom to slide the straps of her dress down her shoulders. The low-cut vee at the front parts for him, like a present unwrapping itself. He

leans down, towering with his height, and presses a kiss to the smattering of freckles that decorate the valley between her breasts.

Alex sighs underneath him, knowing his next move. She arches up towards him, begging to be touched.

So, instead, he drops to his knees.

She emits a questioning hum, then a noise of frustration, nudging him in the side with her heel. Ignoring her, he runs his hands up her legs, his fingers leaving white-hot trails over her flushed skin. She is the sun, burning hot above the horizon, glowing in the warm light of the room, and everything else is candles.

Like a good communicant, he kneels before her, as the Akkadian people would've done for their Ishtar, their own goddess of love and desire. His hand inches higher, drawing sweet little breaths from her until he reaches her sex. She's wearing nothing more than a scrap of lace, so thin and pretty that it tears easily under his touch.

"You mean I could've easily had you all night, and yet you never told me?" he teases as he peppers kisses up the inside of her thighs.

"I was trying to tell you. It just took you forever to listen." Alex squirms, arching her back and parting her legs wider. Her fists clench around the dress fabric.

He can tell from the fire in her gaze that she's itching to grab hold of his hair and force him where she wants him.

"I promise to be a better listener from now on."

And with that he takes her right leg, drapes it over his shoulder, and licks a long stripe along the seam of her. A strangled moan escapes her, her heel digging into his back. Her left leg shifts, then shifts again, the heel of her shoe scraping along the tiled floor.

"Okay – wait, wait, wait," Alex grumbles, huffing out a sigh.

Retreating, he places his hands on the neutral territory of her thighs and gazes up at her with concern. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's – well, okay, listen I *have* to take off these shoes," she tells him, unable to suppress an embarrassed grin when her admission startles a chuckle out of him. "I'm serious! I get they're sexy and I'm almost a foot taller with them on–"

"–I wouldn't call four inches a foot–"

"–and I'll be so short you'll probably have to *lay down* on the floor to eat me out, but I absolutely have to have them off."

Tracing the dainty straps at her ankles, he helps her out of the shoes. The moan of pleasure she emits is almost enough to rival her earlier one. It only serves to spur Strand on to make

sure her next one makes it pale in comparison. He strikes, working two fingers into her as his tongue sweeps across her clit.

Reaching for him, her fingers twist into his hair, her other hand desperately trying to keep hold of as much of the dress as she can. Emboldened by her reaction, Strand presses open-mouthed kisses along her, making lazy, imprecise circles with his tongue. It's enough to kick up the heat in her veins, but not enough to get her where she wants to go – which he knows by the desperate whine she lets loose.

She cuts it short with another gasp, her grip on his hair tightening as he sinks his fingers in deeper, twisting them to graze along that certain spot.

“I always forget,” he murmurs against her skin, leaning back to watch her hips move in time with his ministrations. Above him, Alex makes a questioning noise, her painted lips parting and her eyes clenching shut as he picks up the pace. “How good you taste.”

As if to remind himself, he dips his head back between her legs. He lets her feel the scratch of his stubble against her thigh, enjoys that little hitch in her body's movement when he drops a kiss to her curls. He savors the sweetness of her, right where his body meets hers, where she clenches around him.

“*Richard*,” she cries out.

He savors that, too. That it's his name she calls, in ecstasy or in elation; in anger or in amusement.

“How good you sound,” he continues. Giving in to her siren calls, he circles her sensitive bud with the flat of his tongue and increases his pressure. “Just like that, darling.”

Her grip stutters along his head, her hips soon following suit with their own jerking rhythm as she comes with a ragged gasp.

“Oh, my god.” Alex slumps back against the wall, catching her breath. Her dress falls in a wave to the floor when she drops it to run a shaky hand through her hair. “Oh, shit, sorry,” she laughs after the apology when Strand struggles out of the endless layers of fabric.

Standing to give his aching knees a brief respite, he gathers her close, running his palms down her bare arms. Without her shoes, she's forced to her old habit of stretching up to meet him for a kiss. “See? I wasn't joking about the foot I had on you with those on.”

He raises an eyebrow in question, to which she vehemently shakes her head. “Oh, no, I'm not putting them back on. You can come down and meet me at my level for once.”

“I have another idea.”

Alex squeaks in surprise, her startled noise turning into throaty laughter as Strand picks her up and moves them into the suite. He gives the furniture a cursory glance, ignoring the rich jewel tones, the pomp and circumstance. Spotting the closest horizontal surface that suits his purpose, he carries her over to it.

Setting Alex down on top of the ornate desk, satisfaction curls in his gut as he admires the way her pale skin contrasts against the glossy shade of walnut. Eager to see how she will look spread out before him, he paws at the back of her dress, distracted in his search for the zipper when she drags him down for a kiss. Her legs come up to fit around his waist; his hands skitter uselessly down her back when she grinds her hips against his. Arousal churns through him, syrupy and sweet. It takes all his willpower not to just have her, right here on the desk.

Taking pity on his momentary lapse of coordination (though how she expects him to be able to concentrate when she's moving her body against his like that is beyond him), Alex reaches behind her back and performs some sort of sorcery. With a little shimmy, the tight lines of her dress loosen, and she sits naked before him, all that pretty fabric pooled at his feet.

Those magic fingers of hers clutch his waist, guiding him closer. His blood feels fever-warm as he lists forward to feast on the naked expanse of her skin, unable to stop his deep huff of approval at the noises she makes in response. He's adrift, thrown out to sea, battered with waves of sensation and greed. Capturing a nipple with his lips, he makes long, slow sweeps across the stiff peak, driven to near-madness when Alex stretches back to let him feast. Underneath his steady grip, she glows, drawing him to shore.

"Oh, fuck," she whimpers. Her hips move in time with his and this is all going to be over too soon, with him still wearing most of his clothing, if he doesn't change directions. His hands go to lift her up – the bed is only a few more paces away, he can surely make it – when she shakes her head. "No – here, Richard, fuck me here."

As far as their history is concerned, he's never really been able to say no to her. Why would now be an exception to the record?

The noise he makes at her demand is something akin to a growl, something he would never claim to be capable of under normal circumstances – but he sees the way it lights something behind her eyes.

Whatever the sound is, it acts as their tipping point. Their critical mass having been reached, everything else descends into chaos. He forgoes bothering with his last few buttons, instead tearing the shirt up and over his head; she makes quick work of his belt and zipper, shoving them to settle down around his thighs, uncaring if they make it all the way off. They trade bruising kisses, for a time against swollen lips, then trailing them down across newly-exposed skin.

Her steady grip goes around him, teasing at first, then faster, tighter at his noise of impatience (that she never fails to chuckle at, their current situation no different). In retaliation, he seeks out that spot just underneath her ear and bites down. The effect is immediate: the line of her body tightens, her spine arching as a frisson of energy travels through her. It's mesmerizing, like watching the path of rain as it approaches.

Strand uses her reaction to his advantage, urging her to continue backwards until she's spread out across the desk before him.

"Gorgeous," he murmurs, leaning down to drop a path of kisses from her stomach to the hollow of her throat. Between her legs, he presses the flat of his palm and rubs tight circles

against her. He smirks at the sound she makes, at the way her hips cant up to meet his movements, at the bloom of white across her fingers as she clenches the edge of the desk. Her lips part as he slips two fingers inside her, pumping them in and out in time with her racing breath. Casting a critical eye over her, Strand takes in the arch of her brows and the slight turn of her nose and the flare of her pupils, thoroughly overcome with the whole of her. A comfortable sensation tightens in his chest at the thought of their circumstances leading them both to here.

Beneath his gaze, Alex bites down on her lower lip, silencing the desperate noises that want to escape.

“No, none of that,” he tells her, dragging a thumb across her mouth in encouragement, pleased when she lets it fall open. “Let me hear you.”

“We could have curious neighbors,” she reasons, even as she grins. “We should probably keep it down.”

“I paid enough for this room to warrant whatever noise level I deem appropriate.”

“Well, we at least have to *pretend* we were trying to be quiet when the hotel staff come knocking.”

He hums at her response, as if considering. “But what if I *want* everyone to hear what I do to you?”

Ever the reigning queen of the quick-witted reply, Strand can’t help the smug feeling at her lack of response.

Until, that is, she twists up to nip at his stubble, then at the crook of his neck. Her legs draw him in as her free hand reaches down to stroke his cock, threatening to send him to his knees with her slow, deliberate motions.

“Then let them hear.”

In a disjointed sequence that he won’t recall, she’s suddenly splayed out across the wood. Her hair slips off her bare shoulders, her hands trapped underneath his where he pins her to the desk. He rolls his hips out and then back in, fucking her, taking her, his rhythm swift and measured like the tide. The desk knocks against the wall in time with his thrusts. They trade clumsy kisses, their lips barely meeting as he mutters encouragements, his breath hot on her skin.

“Richard,” she begs, choking on her next words when he returns his hands to her hips and lifts her against him, changing the angle.

“Again,” he demands with a sharp roll of his hips. “Say it again.”

A few moments pass where Alex can do nothing but writhe under him. She sobs out a breath when he works his thumb against her clit, but then: his name, repeated again and again, a spillover of praise as he brings her to the brink and pushes her over. He tries to keep on, tries

to endure the sensation of her, but it's too much. Like with all things in his life, once Alex takes hold of him, he's done for.

Trying to avoid gracelessly collapsing on top of her, Strand opts to pull out and land somewhere between her and the edge. Alex leans over to drop a kiss to his cheek, and then his lips. She pulls away suddenly, cocking her head before her lips squirm with confined mirth. Before he has a chance to ask, she bursts out laughing. It takes him a moment to catch on, but then he locates the source of her amusement.

From the other side of the wall comes the slightly-muffled roar of *Dateline NBC*'s theme.

"We should probably move to the actual bed."

Alex shrugs at his suggestion, snuggling closer atop the vintage piece. He resists the urge to roll his eyes at how she can make herself comfortable in any environment.

"I'm glad you came," she tells him, trailing lazy, sated kisses along his arm.

"Is that a double entendre?"

"If you have to ask, it ruins the joke."

"Well, I'm pleased I came, too. Have Terry keep me on the email list, that way I know what color tie pin to choose for next year's event."

"I don't know if there's a specific color for a fifty-first anniversary. I think fifty-fifth is emerald."

"Then sign me up for that one."

"That'll be five years from now, you know."

"I know."

"Okay." Then, after a slow, sweet kiss: "I'll put you down."

End Notes

My HC is that Strand never really learns the Interns' names, so he calls them the letters of the alphabet in his head (and probably aloud too, let's be real).

Terms / allusions / general quote citations:

"My daddy always said two's company and three's an eavesdropper." Quote from Rogue from X-Men the animated series.

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