

TOUGH LOVE

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. QUAD-DAY

ALEX, 19, is walking across the Quad on a beautiful day. Alex has a facade of innocence, but underneath she's tough as nails. She's quick-witted and doesn't put up with anything she deems as bullshit. She has her headphones in her ears. The MUSIC she's listening to is playing LOUDY in the background, a Fall Out Boy Song. Alex nods her head to the music as she walks along.

From behind comes CHASE, 20, a boy who would be handsome if not for the mischievous glint to his dark eyes. He walks with a sort of self-importance, like he expects people to move out of his way. He taps Alex on the shoulder. She takes out an earbud. The MUSIC becomes SOFTER. Alex sees who it is, then rolls her eyes.

CHASE  
Hey Alex. What's up?

ALEX  
(snaps)  
Stop pretending like you care. What do you want, Chase?

CHASE  
(feigning innocence)  
Can't a guy ask a girl what's up?

ALEX  
You're not *just* some random guy.

Chase raises an eyebrow and smirks. Alex looks at him and rolls her eyes, her mouth slightly open.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
What do you want?

Chase looks her up and down.

CHASE  
(priming her)  
Damn, you look good Alex.

ALEX  
(snapping, fed up)  
God, I hate you.

CHASE  
(put off)  
Thought girls liked compliments.

ALEX  
I'm not *just* some random girl.

CHASE  
True.

There's a pause.

CHASE (CONT'D)  
What are you doing tonight?

ALEX  
(casual)  
Probably watching a movie with  
Haley-

CHASE  
(quickly)  
Lie.

Alex stops walking and so does Chase.

ALEX  
*Excuse* me?

CHASE  
I said that's a lie. I heard you  
talking with her earlier, you said  
you had no plans.

ALEX  
How did you...?

CHASE  
I'm your neighbor, remember? You  
never shut your windows. I walk by  
your apartment, I hear things.

Alex groans. She clearly wants out of this conversation.

ALEX  
Alright Chase, you caught me. Happy  
now?

She tries to walk, but he grabs her by the wrist.

CHASE  
Not so fast.

ALEX  
(still fed up; ordering)  
Let go of me.

CHASE

Not until you listen to me.

She yanks her wrist out of his grasp, a clear sign of defiance. However, she doesn't walk away and crosses her arms. Chase takes this as a cue to present his case.

CHASE (CONT'D)

My frat is having an event tonight.  
I need a date.

ALEX

(dumbfounded)

Why, of *all people*, would you want *me* to go as your date? Am I the only girl on campus that'll put up with your bullshit?

CHASE

(offended)

No, there are plenty of girls willing to tolerate my amazing personality.

Alex rolls her eyes and makes a move to leave. Chase quickly walks in front of her and blocks her path. He starts talking before she can get a word in edgewise.

CHASE (CONT'D)

All the other guys are bringing their girlfriends. I just need someone to pretend to like me for the night.

ALEX

(shrugs)

Should be easy considering I pretended to like you the entire time I was with you.

Chase laughs mockingly.

CHASE

Look who thinks she's *so* clever.

Alex gives him a smug smile right back.

ALEX

I'm not going.

She tries to push by him and put her ear bud in again, but he blocks her.

CHASE  
 (ordering)  
 Oh yes you are.

ALEX  
 Look, if I wanted to be fucked over  
 again by you, I would ask. Let me  
 go, I have class to get to-

She tries to push by again and this time he catches her with his hand on her upper arm. He looks down at her, trying to keep it together. Alex can tell she's pissing him off, something she loves to do.

CHASE  
 (threatening, hissing)  
 If you don't come with me, I'll  
 tell Haley what you did with her  
 boyfriend last year.

ALEX  
 (scared but still strong)  
 You wouldn't.

CHASE  
 (evily)  
 Try me.

ALEX  
 (snaps)  
 That was a year ago, Chase.

CHASE  
 And she's still with him.

For once, Alex has nothing to say.

CHASE (CONT'D)  
 (sneering)  
 Imagine how much your best friend's  
 heart would break if she knew about  
 you two.

Alex looks around as though Haley can hear him. She takes another look at Chase's smug face. He knows he has her. She shakes her head and yanks her arm out of his grasp.

ALEX  
 (scoffs quietly)  
 You're such a tool, Chase Jacky.

CHASE  
 (proud)  
 I know.

There's a pause.

ALEX  
Open bar at least?

CHASE  
(as though it's obvious)  
It's a frat, of course.

ALEX  
Alright good. If I'm gonna pretend  
to be your girlfriend, I can't be  
sober.

Chase snorts.

CHASE  
(snickering; shaking his  
head)  
Alex Watson, still a raging  
alcoholic.

She goes to push past him but Chase hands her a Post-It note.  
Alex breathes out through her nose, pissed off.

CHASE (CONT'D)  
Since you've blocked me from your  
phone, this has the attire on it.  
I'll pick you up around nine.

ALEX  
Nine?

She looks at her phone.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
That means I only have four hours  
to start drinking. I'd better get  
home.

Chase bites the inside of his cheek, trying to stop laughter.

CHASE  
Maybe some tequila in your system  
will make you friendlier.

ALEX  
Wouldn't count on it.

She puts an earbud back into her ear and shoves past him,  
hitting his shoulder with hers. She turns around and gives  
him the middle finger the same way one would wave goodbye.

Chase shakes his head, smiling and eyeing her as she turns her back and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. ALEX'S APARTMENT-EVENING

The living room of Alex's apartment is bare except for an American flag on the wall, a couch underneath it, and two chairs facing the couch. It looks like a house someone would temporarily reside in, not a home.

There's a KNOCK on the front door. Alex walks down the hallway wearing a sleek black dress and combat boots. Her makeup is done like she's going to the Oscars, her hair like she's going to Prom. She throws back the last of the drink in her hand before opening the door.

We see Chase in a suit with his hair nicely done. His look slightly resembles that of a boy band member. He looks Alex up and down.

CHASE  
You look good.

ALEX  
I know.

Alex grabs her purse from the kitchen table.

CHASE  
You sober?

ALEX  
You kidding?

The two exit. Door SLAMS.

CUT TO:

INT. FRAT HOUSE-NIGHT

The fraternity house front door SLAMS as Chase and Alex walk into the party. For a frat house, it's a classier affair. There are suit-wearing brothers with their dressed up dates, sipping bottled (not canned) beer. The girls are drinking badly mixed cocktails out of red cups. There's SOFT MUSIC playing in the background. The whole thing seems like little boys playing dress up. Alex clearly notices that vibe.

ALEX

It's weird to see a frat house  
without people passed out drunk on  
the floor.

Chase whirls around with a pissed off expression.

CHASE

(snaps quietly)  
Would you just-

Alex loudly clears her throat when she sees KYLE, 21, walking up to greet them. She smooths down her dress. It's clear from her expression she thinks the newcomer is attractive. Kyle gives off a boy-next-door vibe and he knows it. He's clearly important to the frat by the way he walks. Chase turns around from chastising Alex and straightens up. He looks like he's caught up in a dream.

KYLE

(friendly)  
Hey Chase! Good seein' ya.

He shakes Chase's hand and Alex sees Chase swallow nervously. Chase clears his throat.

CHASE

(sheepishly)  
H-hey Kyle. You too...

The handshake seems to go on for too long as Chase just gazes at Kyle's face. Alex elbows Chase in the arm. He snaps out of it and takes his hand out of Kyle's. Chase clears his throat again.

CHASE (CONT'D)

This is-

ALEX

(sticking her hand out)  
Alexandra Watson. Nice to meet you.

Kyle gives her a smile as he shakes her hand.

KYLE

Nice to meet you too. You look  
fantastic.

ALEX

(flattered; sweetly)  
Well thank you.



Chase obnoxiously clears his throat. Alex's head snaps to him. She realizes the look of apparent jealousy...Is Chase mad that she's getting more attention from Kyle than he is?

CHASE  
 (intently at Alex)  
 Hey Kyle, I'm going to get Alex a drink.

KYLE  
 (smiling)  
 Sounds good. Talk to you later, Chase.

Chase links his arm in Alex's. He wants to get her away from Kyle as soon as possible.

CHASE  
 (dreamily to Kyle)  
 Yeah see you later...

Chase smiles at Kyle, takes one last look at him, then leads Alex to the bar.

ALEX  
 (in a low voice)  
 Damn, he's hot.

CHASE  
 (back to rude tone)  
 Hey, I'm your date, eyes on me.

ALEX  
 Oh c'mon, you looked like you were enjoying the view too.

Chase lets go of Alex's arm and takes two drinks from the bar. He shifts uncomfortably where he stands.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
 (laughing)  
 What? I was just making a joke.

She takes a drink from his hand and sips it.

CHASE  
 (faintly)  
 Yeah...a joke.

Alex narrows her eyes.

ALEX  
 (slowly)  
 Wait...

Chase's expression slowly drops. Alex points to her drink.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
This needs more alcohol.

Chase looks relieved. When the BARTENDER turns his back, Alex grabs a random bottle and pours more into her cup. She silently puts it back and takes another swig. She smacks her lips like she's refreshed.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Much better.

Alex looks around, spies Kyle from across the room, and nods to him. She's appreciating being around Kyle's beauty.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
They don't make 'em like that anymore.

Chase turns and smiles a bit, all cockiness gone. He softens.

CHASE  
(longingly)  
No...No they don't...

Alex looks with her eyes from Chase to Kyle and back again. We see her eyes become huge and she covers her mouth with her free hand. A major lightbulb has gone off. Chase turns to her and widens his eyes along with her, knowing he's found out. Chase slowly starts to shake his head.

CHASE (CONT'D)  
(warningly; through his teeth)  
Alex...

Alex's eyes are the widest they've ever been-

CUT TO:

INT. FRAT BEDROOM-CONTINUOUS

Chase SLAMS the door to a random bedroom in the house which is dark and covered in posters. There's MUFFLED NOISE coming from downstairs. Once the door shuts, Chase sinks against it and watches Alex pace around the room, caught up in her revelation.

ALEX  
(loudly)  
Oh my God, it all makes sense now!

CHASE  
 (hissing through his  
 teeth)  
 Keep your voice down, Alex!

ALEX  
 (excited)  
 Is *this* why you're such a  
 douchebag, Chase? You're not  
 straight so you're just *acting* how  
 you think straight guys act? How  
 long do you think you can keep *that*  
 up?

CHASE  
 However long it takes, but Al-

ALEX  
 (fast-paced)  
 I can't *believe* I didn't see this  
 before...I mean, you always seemed  
 like you weren't having fun in bed.  
 I always assumed it was me so *phew*  
 that's a load off my back, huh???

Chase gets up and quickly walks over to her as he looks  
 around like someone may be listening.

CHASE  
 Holy *shit*, Alex, keep your *fucking*  
 voice down!

Alex whirls around and stops pacing to face him. She looks  
 somewhat horrified.

ALEX  
 (getting to the root of  
 it)  
 Is that why I'm not *just* a girl to  
 you? 'Cause I was the girl who made  
 you realize that you were-

CHASE  
 (finally bursting; loudly;  
 getting faster as he  
 goes)  
*Jesus Christ*, we're *still* talking  
 about this? Okay Alex, let me give  
 you the run down of my life. I've  
 always liked guys, okay? Always!  
 (MORE)

CHASE (CONT'D)

I just thought that maybe, just maybe, if I dated girls, I would convince myself I wasn't a huge disappointment to my father, my grandfather, and to the rest of my family.

There's silence as he looks at her in a pained way. He seems smaller like before when he was against the door. Finally...

CHASE (CONT'D)

So there, *there's* your explanation.

Alex sits down on the bed and puts her head in her hands.

ALEX

(muttering)

God, I'm not drunk enough for this.

Chase rolls his eyes and puts his hands in his pockets. He looks at the floor, ashamed.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Why me? Out of all the other exes, why the hell did you bring *me* here?

CHASE

(shrugging)

I just...I thought out of all of them, you would be the most understanding.

(he pauses)

Stupid, I know. Looking to *you* for sympathy.

Alex snorts through her nose, knowing he's right. There's more silence. Finally...

ALEX

(sighing)

Alright, what do we do?

CHASE

Well, you can't really do anything, Al.

ALEX

Chase, you obviously like Kyle. Maybe I can help you.

CHASE

(sarcastic)

Yeah 'cause you're the charmer of the century.

ALEX  
(scoffs)  
More charming than you, that's for  
damn sure.

For once, Chase can't think of anything to say. There's a  
pause.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Do we know *he's* gay?

CHASE  
I think so...I don't know,  
just...just, don't do anything, Al,  
okay? I like these guys, they're my  
brothers. Who knows what they'll  
say if they find out their favorite  
brother wants to hook up with the  
president?

ALEX  
Who says *you're* they're favorite  
brother?

CHASE  
(obviously)  
Everyone I've talked to.

ALEX  
(exasperated)  
My God, you're an idiot...Alright  
I'll keep my mouth shut. But you  
better talk to him or else I will.

CHASE  
(with a little smile)  
Deal.

Alex, stands, goes to leave, then thinks about something.

ALEX  
Chase?

He looks to her.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Good luck.

Chase smiles as the door closes.

CUT TO:

## INT. FRAT HOUSE-CONTINUOUS

Back downstairs, Alex is hanging out by the bar watching the game of pool that's going on between a few of the brothers. Their dates stand in the corner chatting. Alex clearly thinks herself to be above these ladies as she surveys them with a judgmental look.

In walks XANDER, 20, also handsome, also in a suit, who pours himself a drink. Xander is like Alex: quick-witted and snippy. Like Chase, he knows what Alex is going to say before she says it. He doesn't look at Alex and she doesn't look at him.

XANDER  
(turning to her;  
flirtatiously)  
Hey, can I get you anything-

They finally look at each other and their faces fall. Xander groans softly to himself.

XANDER (CONT'D)  
(tightly)  
Never thought I'd see *your* face  
again.

ALEX  
(trying to avoid eye  
contact)  
Likewise.

XANDER  
So, how's the Big Bad Bitch these  
days?

ALEX  
(makes eye contact now)  
I'm fantastic.

XANDER  
You still drinkin' jack straight  
up?

ALEX  
Goes down like water.

XANDER  
I remember how you tried to get  
Chase to drink it straight.

ALEX  
(muttering)  
That's not the only straight thing  
he couldn't do.

Xander looks somewhat confused. Alex realizes what she said  
and quickly tries to change the conversation.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
So where's the poor girl you call  
your date?

Xander looks around, not even trying, and shrugs.

XANDER  
Can't find her. I think she went  
home.

ALEX  
Sorry.

XANDER  
No you're not.

Alex shrugs and slyly takes a drink.

XANDER (CONT'D)  
I'm assuming you're Chase's date.

ALEX  
Yep.

XANDER  
Smells like bullshit to me.

ALEX  
Must just be you.

XANDER  
He'd never take you unless he was  
desperate.

ALEX  
He's just a douche, not a desperate  
douche.

XANDER  
Is he paying you?

She turns to fully face him.

ALEX  
Is it really *that* unbelievable to  
you that I'm with him?

XANDER  
Eh...judging by your guys's  
history, not really actually. You  
know what they say-

He sips his drink cockily as he gives her a side eye.

XANDER (CONT'D)  
-Third time's a charm.

Alex scoffs.

ALEX  
(sarcastically)  
Oh *bravo*, you Maestro. So quick  
with the lines.

XANDER  
(smug)  
Thank you.

There's a beat.

XANDER (CONT'D)  
What's the *real* reason why you're  
here, Alex?

ALEX  
I can't tell you that.

XANDER  
Oh so there's a reason other than  
Chase being desperate?

ALEX  
(fed up)  
No!

XANDER  
Ya know, I think I see what's goin'  
on here.

ALEX  
Your tiny mind can't comprehend  
what's going on here.

XANDER  
Yeah? Try me.

ALEX  
Alright, say it on three. One, two,  
three-





She clears her throat and flips her hair over her shoulder, turning on the fake charm.

ALEX

Excuse me, Kyle. May I talk to Chase for a moment?

KYLE

(still looking at Chase)  
One second.

ALEX

Great. Thanks.

Alex drags Chase by the arm to the opposite side of the room where Xander is waiting.

CHASE

(snapped out of the dream)  
What the hell Alex?

Xander slaps him on the chest with the back of his hand. Chase puts his hand to where he got slapped and rubs it.

CHASE (CONT'D)

Dude, what the fuck was that?!

XANDER

So you don't tell your best friend that you're gay, but you tell the Big Bad Bitch?

Chase looks incredulously at Alex. He drops his hand; his chest doesn't hurt so much anymore.

CHASE

(in lowered outrage)  
You told Xander?!

XANDER

(whispered)  
Dude, I've had my suspicions. You've hit on me before.

CHASE

(thinks, then responds in a whisper)  
No I haven't.

XANDER

(whispering back)  
How could you not have?

ALEX

(sternly)

Okay the both of you shut the fuck up.

CHASE

Why did you bring me over here other than to tell me you've ruined my life, Alex?

ALEX

(hushed)

If you would let me talk, I would be able to tell you!

The two boys finally shut up.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Alright, Mission One was getting drunk. I've more than accomplished that. Mission Two is getting you laid.

CHASE

Oh c'mon-

ALEX

(shushing him)

Ah-buh-buh-buh! Shut up! Look, the two of you are very clearly into each other. We just gotta get more alcohol in ya.

XANDER

When is your answer *not* drinking?

ALEX

After a few drinks, everyone's a bit looser. Should be easier to convince him to go back to your apartment.

XANDER

(obviously)

Or just go to his room. It's upstairs.

ALEX

The one with the posters?

XANDER

Yeah.

ALEX

(mutters)

Figures.

(normal volume)

You gotta start by flirting with him, dude.

CHASE

(somewhat helplessly)

Alex, I don't know...

XANDER

(admiring)

Dude, you're a good-looking guy and Kyle is too. He's got that swooped hair, those twinkly eyes, and that stubble on his chin...

(pauses; thinks for a second)

Maybe *I'm* gay...

ALEX

(shaking her head;  
exasperated)

That's not how that works.

Chase softly groans and looks back at Kyle, clearly nervous.

CHASE

(vulnerable)

What if he turns me down?

ALEX

(kind for once)

You never know until you try.

Chase heaves a sigh. Xander gives him a bro-y pat on the back.

XANDER

You got it, dude. Just be confident.

Chase nods, fixes the collar on his jacket, and nods again.

CHASE

Alright. I'm gonna do it.

He confidently walks over to Kyle, gets halfway there, then spins on his heel and speed-walks out of the front door all without Kyle noticing. Alex chases after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRAT HOUSE-NIGHT

Front door SLAMS. Chase goes onto the porch, his hands behind his head, and looks up at the sky. He looks like he's remembering how to breathe normally. He can't seem to stand still. There are people passing by the house on their way to other parties. They look like their freezing, but Chase doesn't notice the cold. Alex bursts out of the door after him.

ALEX

Chase what are you doing?! Get back in there!

CHASE

(exasperated)

My God, Alex would you *stop*? You don't fucking know how hard this is, okay? I *just* came out to you, you and Xander are the *only* people who know, and I'm not ready to just fuckin'...UGH!

He lets out an exaggerated groan and sits down on the front steps. Chase puts his head in his hands and looks at the sidewalk. Alex hugs herself, realizing what she's done. She sits down next to him and tentatively puts an arm around him. It's clear she rarely does this, if ever.

CHASE (CONT'D)

(softly)

What are you doing?

ALEX

(unsure)

Trying to comfort you...?

Chase snorts and Alex lets out a sound like she knows how ridiculous it is. She removes her arm. They're quiet. Then...

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Chase. I pushed you into the deep end without giving you a life saver.

CHASE

That's a breath mint, Alex.

ALEX

(mock offended)

You know what, I'm trying to comfort you here...

Chase laughs a bit.

CHASE  
(semi-smiling)  
Nah, I'm just bustin' you.

He finally looks at her with a small smile.

CHASE (CONT'D)  
I'm happy you came, Alex. I'm happy  
I finally told someone. It feels  
good to say it out loud.

ALEX  
Always happy to help.

Chase raises an eyebrow.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Well, maybe not *happy*, but you know  
what I mean.

CHASE  
*That* sounds more like the Alex I  
know.

ALEX  
(caring)  
Seriously though Chase, if you need  
anything, like guy advice or how  
not to look like an idiot, I'm  
here.

CHASE  
Will you unblock me from your  
phone?

ALEX  
(heaving a dramatic sigh)  
I guess if I have to.

Chase knocks her in the shoulder with his and the two of them  
start to laugh. For a second, they seem like friends. The  
moment is broken by Xander poking his head outside. The two  
turn to him.

XANDER  
Uh Chase? Kyle's looking for you.

Chase looks unsure back at Alex who raises an approving  
eyebrow. They share a look of understanding.

ALEX  
(happy for him; kind)  
Go get 'em, man.

Excited, Chase gets up. He fist bumps Xander on the way by and enters the house. Xander looks to Alex, surprised at the amount of confidence in Chase.

XANDER  
(almost admiring)  
What did you say to him?

ALEX  
Told him I was happy to help and he  
could talk to me about boy shit  
whenever he wants.

Xander looks impressed. He offers her his hand to help her up, but she stands up on her own. Alex gives him a raised eyebrow, looking from his hand to him. He puts his hand back in his pocket.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Since when are you a gentleman?

XANDER  
Since when does the Big Bad Bitch  
have a heart?

ALEX  
(half-hearted, but still  
hard)  
Fuck you Xander.

Xander laughs a little bit and she laughs too. Before they go back inside, Alex peers through the window of the house. From her POV, we see Chase and Kyle inside in the living room talking and laughing among the other brothers.

XANDER  
He would hate it if he knew we were  
spying on him.

ALEX  
Since when do we do anything that  
people actually like?

Xander nods in consideration and looks back in the window. Kyle and Chase are joking around and having a good time.

XANDER  
(conceding)  
You did well by him, all things  
considered.

Alex looks at him in mock shock.

ALEX  
(taken aback)  
Did you just *compliment* me?

He shrugs, clearly not wanting to admit it. Alex shakes her head and looks back at the window.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
It's funny, I know how to fix other people's lives, just not mine.

XANDER  
I think that's the case with most of us...And now we just gotta deal with that one.

He nods to Chase inside.

XANDER (CONT'D)  
I think we can do it though.

ALEX  
He doesn't need protection. He's always been fine on his own.

XANDER  
Just like you.

Xander and Alex share a look of understanding.

ALEX  
Yeah...just like me.

They look back inside and see Kyle and Chase drinking, laughing, and talking. Alex and Xander are both looking at Chase with pride, like he's their son who has finally found his place in the world.

END.