

A Sip...



A Torquere Press Short

A Taste of Darkness
By A.R. Moler

Asking a guy you've met exactly once to go on a date with you is an awkward proposition at best. At least email saves you the humiliation of getting shot down in public.

From: btownsend @ yahell.com
To: blake_t @ nypd.gov
Subject: Beer tasting

Tristan

I'm not sure we ever actually got around to exchanging names at the party. I'm the demon, was the demon... anyway you get my point or maybe that was points? I was wondering if you would be interested in going to a beer tasting with me. It's at a place called Hops-n-Scotch (3688 Carlisle Ave). The event is on the 29th of November at 7:30. I could swing by and pick you up or we could meet there.

Brian Townsend

A week ago, on Halloween night, Brian had been to a party thrown by Alicia, where he and Zorro had shared a seriously memorable quickie of sorts in Alicia's backyard. Then Zorro had been called away by his job. Only some queries to the hostess and her hubby had been able to produce a name other than "Zorro." With a certain amount of trepidation, Brian hit the button to send. Fingers crossed, he hoped he was sending it to right person and the right address.

A reply came the following day.

From: blake_t @ nypd.gov
To: btownsend @ yahell.com
Subject: Re: Beer tasting

Some detective I make. Walking out without so much as a name from you. Don't tell my Captain, he'll be tempted to revoke my gold shield and handcuffs. The beer tasting sounds interesting. I better plan to meet you there. My schedule is always whacked. Any chance I could get you to send me a description of what you look like without the make-up? If I show up looking for a guy with red skin, gold hair, and horns, the establishment is probably going to think I've already had too much to drink.

Tristan

From: btownsend @ yahell.com
To: blake_t @ nypd.gov
Subject: Re: Beer tasting

5'10", ash blond hair, blue eyes, no fangs. I'll wear my T-shirt that says -- I like my water with barley and hops in it

The sign board in Hops-n-Scotch read:
Obovoid -- oak aged stout
Franziskaner -- hefe weissen
Oerbier Special Reserve De Dolle Brouwers
St. Bernardus Christmas Ale
Ridgeway's Santa's Butt
Xingu Black Beer

Samuel Smith's Winter Welcome

Which one did he want to try first? Brian glanced down the list of beers written on the chalkboard. They all sounded worth trying, and it was probably a good thing he had taken a cab to the shop. He glanced at his watch. 7:40. No sign of Tristan yet. Was the guy going to stand him up? There hadn't been anybody in his life since Kyle had dumped him. Had he come across as too damn desperate? One heavy duty make-out session at a party didn't really even qualify as the start of a relationship. Sex was just... sex.

He heard the tinkle of the bell on the shop door and saw a few people coming in that he was vaguely acquainted with. He had just about turned back toward the sign board to pick something to try when he caught a glimpse of a tall, dark-haired figure. Tristan. He'd know that mouth anywhere. The detective wore dark slacks and a suit jacket, and he was busily wrenching his tie loose. Nervously, Brian walked toward him.

"Tristan?" he asked. The man turned toward him and smiled.

"Brian Townsend?" Brian nodded and the detective held out a hand, saying "Guess we're both a little uncertain in our civvies. Sorry I'm late. Work just never lets up."

"It's fine. More dead bodies?"

"Um... yeah." Tristan's tone was guarded and Brian decided maybe he'd better keep away from that topic.

"So on to the beer then?"

"I'm trusting you to make suggestions."

"Oh, really? That's a dangerous line." Brian said with a smile. "I think that led to tasting something rich and thick last time."

Tristan pressed his lips together for a moment, looking like he was trying to avoid laughing. "Oh, Lord, why do I walk into set ups like that?" he asked. "Okay, suggest a beer for me to try."

"Have you ever had the Sammy Smith Winter Welcome?"

"Nope. You like it?"

"Always. It's a seasonal thing. You generally can't get it except from about November to January. It's sort of dark but not as dark as a stout."

"Okay, sounds good," replied Tristan. They headed back toward the counter where one of the shop employees was pouring samples.

“Oh, shit, that stuff tastes horrible! It looks like a charcoal briquette dissolved in water and tastes about like it, too,” said Tristan with a gag, after taking a sip of the Xingu. “You actually like it?”

“It’s an acquired taste.”

“Unh, yeah. Steer me clear of that.”

“Moo,” said Brian. Tristan blinked, and then groaned. “I’ll *steak* my reputation that the Franziskaner is a *brand* you might like better. It’s udderly unforgettable.” Tristan groaned and Brian continued, “I’ll be back in a minute, I need to hoof it to the bathroom.” The other man just shook his head.

On his way back from the restroom, Brian snagged a handful of unshelled peanuts from the snack table, and walked back toward Tristan cracking them. He tossed the empty shells into a nearby trashcan.

“So, did you get a sample of the Franziskaner?”

“Yeah, it’s not bad.”

“Cool.” Brian tossed the now shelled peanuts into his mouth, then realizing there were crumbs clinging to his fingers, stuck a thumb in his mouth, too. “Grea’ now my han’s tas’e like peanuth,” he muttered with his mouth full. Tristan promptly choked on the beer he had taken a sip of.

“Tastes like...?” asked Tristan, still coughing.

“Peanuts,” said Brian, swallowing. “What did you think I said?”

“Oh, God, you don’t want to know,” said Tristan. His face flushed bright pink. Suddenly, Brian made the connection and started giggling.

“Even I don’t usually come up with one that bad!”

“Unh, well, the bad cow puns reminded me that I’m starving. Lunch was a sandwich at eleven this morning. Would you be interested in looking for a place to eat? I’m sure there’s got to be something within walking distance,” said Tristan.

“Yeah, sure. Since you’re going with the cow theme, I’m guessing you want a burger or a steak or something along that line.”

“A T-bone, a salad, and a baked potato would be magnificent, but I’d settle for just about anything that qualifies as real food.”

An Irish-pub-wannabe about two blocks away fit the bill close enough. Brian and Tristan sat in a quiet corner booth, eating and talking. The detective was more than willing to talk about beer, Brian’s job, food -- essentially anything but his own life. Brian thought that was a little

weird, but maybe the guy was afraid of scaring him off with information about the violence of human nature.

“So what is that stuff you ordered?” Tristan asked.

“Bangers and mash.”

“Which translates into sausages and mashed potatoes, judging from the looks of it. You seemed awfully comfortable with rattling that off to the waitress.”

“I grew up eating them. Good ones are sort of hard to find in this country. Over there, you can go into most any supermarket and have about thirty different types to choose from.”

“You used to live in Ireland?” Tristan asked.

“No, England, and it was my parents, not me. They moved to the U.S. before I was born. Didn’t actually become U.S. citizens until I was almost in high school though.”

“But you’ve been there...?”

“Yeah, every couple years. I have some family over there,” Brian replied.

“Wow. I’ve never even been off the east coast.”

“It’s a cool place.” Brian took a breath and crossed some mental fingers. “Can I interest you in coming back to my place for a drink?”

“As opposed to one ounce samples out of little plastic cups?”

“Yeah, something like that,” Brian said with a laugh.

“No Xingu.”

“How ‘bout a Zuck-u?” asked Brian, and he felt his face flush hot. Jesus Christ, he really needed to install a lever to engage brain before mouth. It took a second for it to register with Tristan, who gave him a slow smile.

“I think I could maybe go for that,” replied the detective.

Almost as soon as the door was shut, Brian was backed up against it. Tristan pushed a hand against his chest and kissed him softly. He leaned his body weight on Brian, pressing him against the door. There was a certain desperate hunger in the way Tristan’s mouth met his.

“Sorry... been wanting that most of the night,” the detective mumbled, lips and teeth still nipping at Brian’s.

“Unless that’s your gun jammed so hard on my hip, maybe we should skip the beer part,” replied Brian. Suddenly, Tristan took a step back and turned away. Oh, God, what had he

done wrong? Brian wondered. Between the kiss and what they had gotten up to at the Halloween party, he had kind of assumed things were heading toward the bedroom, or at least the couch.

“I... um... kind of thought...” he said.

Tristan turned slowly back around. “Um, bad day at work,” he said carefully. “Your comment just... caught me off guard.”

“On second thought, maybe I should go grab a couple beers,” replied Brian. There was something tense in the way the detective was standing. Maybe if he gave the man a moment to pull it together... Brian headed into the narrow galley kitchen of his apartment and snagged a couple of bottles of Newcastle out of the refrigerator. “You want a glass?” he called out.

“Nope. Not unless it’s one of those types with the dregs in the bottom.”

“Lees, dude. They’re called lees.”

“Yeah, those things,” replied Tristan as Brian walked back out into the den. Brian handed him an open bottle. Tristan was standing by the window looking out into the night.

“I think it’s supposed to snow tomorrow,” said Brian.

“Great,” said Tristan, sounding seriously less than thrilled. He took a long drink from the bottle then set it on the glass topped coffee table. “So tell me about traveling in England.”

“What do you want to know? You drive on the left-hand side of the road, and I’ve had lunch in pubs older than this whole country.”

Tristan let out a snort of laughter and sat down on the sofa. He crooked a finger at Brian and gestured for him to sit down. Brian did so and placed his own beer on the table. Whatever had disturbed his date earlier seemed to be either forgotten now or at least put aside for the moment. The detective scooted forward and pulled a holster from the back of his waist. It was leather and had a flat J-shaped hook to hold it to a belt. In it was a hand gun, something small and sort of rectangular, not that Brian knew jack about guns. Tristan placed it under the coffee table, out of the way.

“No touching the gun,” said Tristan with deadly seriousness. Okay, so maybe it wasn’t forgotten...

“Got it.” Something about the way the other man said the words made Brian wonder what exactly had happened on the job. Had Tristan had to shoot someone? That would certainly be the sort of thing to make a guy skittish. The detective carefully clenched a hand in the front of Brian’s shirt and pulled him close.

“Anything else, you can grope any way you like.” Tristan’s voice had dropped to a low murmur, his face only inches from Brian’s. Brian curled his hand around the back of Tristan’s head and drew him into an open mouth kiss. He could taste the beer and hints of dinner, and the warm almost sweetness that he identified with Tristan. That mouth was just made for

kissing. No doubt about it. The slick heat of the tongue exploring the inside of his mouth was definitely turning Brian on.

Damn, Tristan was good at the kissing thing, thought Brian, memory momentarily flickering back to Halloween night. Brian let his hands slide around Tristan's body. The guy *had* invited him to “grope.” He leaned back across the sofa cushions and pulled Tristan down with him. Cupping both hands around Tristan's behind, Brian kneaded his fingers into the firm muscles there. The detective was grinding himself against Brian's hip, a slow rocking motion.

“I've got... a condom. You got... lube?” Tristan's words were broken by his relentlessly gentle assault.

“Bedroom,” Brian whispered. They left a trail of clothing in the narrow hallway back to the bedroom. Only when Brian lay sprawled across the bed, stripped to his black bikini briefs, did Tristan hesitate. He was kneeling over top on Brian staring down into his face.

“I... uh... didn't ask. Do you... Is it okay if I top?” It was an uncertain request. Something about the question struck Brian as raw and unsure. He reached up and drew his thumb across Tristan's lips.

“It's fine. I'm flexible,” he said with a smile.

“Good.” Then Tristan's mouth was on his again. A deep, hot kiss that sent suggestions bordering on commands straight to Brian's groin. Tristan's mouth worked its way south to Brian's hip bone, avoiding the obvious bulge of his erection, a path of small nips and licks that left Brian aching for more.

Brian twisted his body so he could hook his thumbs in Tristan's briefs. Shoving them down around the man's hips, Brian drank in the sight of the hard cock that bobbed free. Not overly long, but thick and flushed dark with arousal. The head was slicked with a shiny streak of wetness. Brian knew what that delicious cock tasted like, even if he had barely seen it in the darkness of the tool shed where they'd had their Halloween “encounter.” He wrapped his fingers around it and stroked Tristan slowly.

“Hold up. Haven't got you all the way naked yet,” said Tristan. It took another few seconds for both of them to finish shucking their underwear.

“If you're driving... You want me sunny side up or over easy?” Brian quipped. This brought a snicker of laughter from Tristan.

“I'll take you sunny side up,” replied Tristan with a grin, and then he sobered a little. “I want to see your face this time. No makeup.”

“Got it.”

“You said you had lube. Oh, damn, I left the condom in my pants which are... somewhere in the hall I think,” muttered Tristan.

“No problem. I have those, too. Though you might have to blow the dust off the box. It’s been a while since, well... my last partner.” Maybe he shouldn’t have said that. It made him sound like such a loser.

“Being choosy can be good,” said Tristan. His tone was wistful enough that Brian suspected someone had burned the detective pretty badly. Brian reached into the nightstand drawer and dug out the requested items. He had barely laid them on the bed when Tristan was on top of him again. Not that Brian was objecting. All that warm skin. Hard cocks rubbing against each other, deep delicious kisses and roaming hands.

After a number of minutes, Tristan slid downward, licking, kissing, sucking. Brian’s leg was put into a flexed position and he could feel cool, slick fingers pushing between his butt cheeks. Brian let out a moan of pleasure. It felt insanely good, and it had been way too long since his ex. More fingers twisting, stretching, mysteriously avoiding his prostate. Tristan’s mouth was doing delicious things at his hip and blowing warm little gusts of breath in the direction of his cock.

“God... please, just fuck me already,” Brian pleaded, and listened to the crinkle of foil. Tristan’s mouth dragged back upward across his belly, dipping a tongue in his navel. Brian stared upward into brown eyes as one leg was draped over Tristan’s shoulder. He gulped in a breath as the hard width of a cock pushed against his ass. That slight burn. *Unh. God.*

His own cock leaking against his belly, Brian could feel the exquisite sensation of his lover edging deeper with each thrust. The man above him was just gorgeous. Face flushed, pupils blown wide, lips parted, Tristan had braced his hands on either side of Brian’s body, and his teeth bit into his lip as he watched Brian’s face. He lifted Brian’s other leg and it changed the angle. Every thrust hit *that* spot, and it only took a few.

A guttural cry tore its way from Brian’s throat and he came hard, spurting thick fountains of semen between them. It must have stolen the last shred of control from his lover, because Tristan’s body slammed into Brian’s only a couple more times before his head was thrown back, the cords in his neck standing out as he rode out his own climax.

Tristan lowered himself on trembling arms to lay half on the bed, half still sprawled over Brian. They were both panting, hearts pounding. Brian handed him a wad of tissues for the condom. Tristan’s arms wound around him with a sort of shy hesitation and Brian willingly leaned into the embrace, their sweaty bodies pressing together. Who would have thought a cop would like to cuddle? He could feel some of the tension leave Tristan’s body when he relaxed into the snuggle. Tristan’s head lay on Brian’s chest, arms around Brian’s body, hips almost even with Brian’s knees. It was a curiously vulnerable position.

Brian ran his fingers through Tristan’s dark hair, feeling the man’s breath ghost across his skin. “You okay?” he asked softly. Tristan’s shoulders rose and fell as he took a slow deep breath. There was a slight hitch in the inhalation.

“Yeah... Thank you,” murmured Tristan. His arms were still wrapped around Brian and he was motionless. “I just want to listen to the sound of you breathing and your heart beating.” There was a hint of something in his careful words that made Brian think of anguish, or maybe it was sorrow.

Brian wrapped his arms around his lover and rested his cheek against the top of Tristan's head. "I remember you said you had a bad day at work. If you want to talk about it...?"

"I... can't," the detective said softly and he slowly pulled away. "I have to go." Brian swallowed hard. Evidently he had said the wrong thing. *Shit*. And yet Tristan's movements were unhurried. "Mind if I wash up?" he asked.

"There's washcloths and towels in the cabinet over the toilet," replied Brian. *Damn. Damn. Damn.* Why couldn't he learn to keep his mouth shut sometimes? The bathroom door was hanging open and he could see Tristan wiping off. Tristan gathered up his clothes from the trail that led from the den to the bedroom and sat on the bed to pull his underwear and slacks back on. Brian sat watching, his arms hugged loosely around his knees. Tristan shrugged into his shirt and buttoned it, then turned to face him. Brian was expecting some vague comment on the order of 'it was fun.'

"I'll call you. If you don't hear from me in a week, *call me*. I need something in my life besides my job."

"You don't have to go..." said Brian. This was confusing. The guy was leaving, but the words seemed to indicate it was a reluctant action.

"Yeah, I do." Tristan crawled across the bed toward Brian and curled a hand around his jaw, kissing him intensely. Then he stood up and walked out of the room. Brian heard the front door click shut.

Saturday morning was a good time to be depressed over a cup of coffee. Brian sat at his kitchen table idly reading the newspaper while he drank. He still couldn't decide if last night had been a good thing or an unmitigated disaster. The sex had been awesome, but then Tristan had gone. It wasn't the first time he'd had a one-nighter, but they usually ended with breakfast.

An article about the murder of a child caught his eye. Crap like that was never pleasant, but a certain morbid curiosity convinced Brian to read it. The four-year-old son of a known gang leader had been shot to death by his father. The man, drunk and under the influence of drugs, had killed the boy for knocking over his beer, said eye witnesses after the suspect had been questioned by Detective Tristan Blake... Oh, hell.

Brian laid his head down on the table. When Tristan had said he'd had a bad day at work... Brian could only just barely imagine having to watch some tiny corpse zipped into a body bag, having to demand answers for why a parent would kill his own child. And to discover how pathetically wretched the excuse was. God. No wonder the detective had been so hard to figure out last night.

Brian thought about his ill-fated joke about the gun, and the way Tristan had clung to him, listening to his heart beat. Should he call Tristan and apologize or just let the whole thing drop? The guy had all but begged Brian to call if he didn't hear from him in a reasonable amount of time, but still, Tristan had walked out. Banging his head on the kitchen table seemed a good idea about now.

It was pushing toward eleven when Brian decided he should check his email. Given a couple of the current projects ongoing at work, it would be just like a couple of the managerial types to have sent him messages at midnight last night. He sat down in front of the laptop in his den and popped open Outlook. Spam, spam, spam, chatty message from Alicia... blake_t @ nypd.gov. The subject heading said "Sorry." Nothing like getting dumped by email. Did Brian really even want to open the thing?

From: blake_t @ nypd.gov
To: btownsend @ yahell.com
Subject: Sorry

Brian,

I was a shit last night. I know you probably think I walked out because of something you did or didn't do. My bad. I have this case. A little kid got killed. That's not a good excuse, but I'm having a hard time getting it out of my head. The next few days are slammed for me, but could we maybe grab some lunch about 1-ish on Tues? If you'd rather not, I understand.

Tristan

Leaning back in his chair, Brian stared at the screen. He was floored. Apparently, sorry really did mean sorry, and it wasn't like the guy didn't have a fairly good excuse. Brian immediately reached in the direction of the cell phone laying on the desk, and then stopped. He had no clue what Tristan's phone number was. Despite the request to call him, the detective hadn't left a number. Guess email was going to have to do.

From: btownsend @ yahell.com
To: blake_t @ nypd.gov
Subject: Tuesday

Tristan,

I saw the article in the newspaper. Bad stuff. If you need someone to listen, or just plain to be there for you, tell me. I can probably take a late lunch Tuesday. Tell me where to meet you. Oh, and *please* send me a phone number where I can get hold of you.

Brian

If Tristan was willing to apologize without any prompting from Brian, maybe there *was* more than just sex between them.

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