



AT THE WEDDING

an epilogue to Good Bones

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(an epilogue to *Good Bones*)

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In the darkness of the hotel ballroom, trailed by a twinkling red spotlight, the couple swayed in each other's arms and shared a private joke, savoring this moment together that was so long in coming.

Zane McDonnell took another long pull from his beer as he watched his little brother and his new wife continue their first dance in the ballroom of this old hotel on the Plaza.

Meanwhile, his date was sitting across the room with Helen McDonnell, who had captured Ace Hoffman's ear and wasn't letting go. So Zane found himself with nothing to do but drink his beer and watch the dancers.

But honestly, apart from giving the toast before the dancing began, Zane's job as best man didn't entail much activity during the reception anyway. Even during the ceremony itself, he had only a few assignments: Produce the rings when the minister said the word "rings." Don't trip. And don't make Adele cry – or get the church giggles.

Which meant he tried to refrain from making any eye contact with his new sister-in-law at all. Because they learned all too well during the rehearsal that it didn't take much to set her off, one way or the other.

And Zane didn't need to aggravate his father today with any hint of tomfoolery. It felt like he was walking on eggshells around that man anyway, considering who Zane's date was tonight.

A date who looked really hot in that suit.

They were definitely going to need to find a little private space before the end of the night.

Zane ended up tuning out most of the ceremony. He didn't need to hear the words to know what this day meant for two of the people he loved most in the world. He was so damn proud of his brother and so grateful for the very existence of Adele in the world, but if he thought about it too much, he'd be the one fighting tears.

He had always told himself that marriage didn't mean that much. It was just a ritual, a big show, one of those customs more honored in the breach than the observance and so forth. Of course, that was before he could have ever dreamed that he might want to stand where his brother, Brody, did. That was before one beautiful blond man turned his life upside down.

As he stood next to Brody on that altar, Zane suddenly understood why anyone would want

to go through a wedding – would want the fuss and the planning and the tuxes. Because he found that he wanted to stand up in front of everyone he loved – hell, in front of everyone in town – and announce that he had found his other, his one, his missing piece. He wanted the ritual and the official seal, even. He wanted it to be real for everybody, not just real in his head.

Zane could hardly believe those thoughts ever flirted with his mind. Where was the firmly solo, firmly detached guy from earlier this year?

At that moment in the ceremony, as if he could read Zane's mind, Ace caught Zane's eye from the audience and winked.

Oh yeah. That guy from before? Long gone.

Zane was getting ahead of himself. Again. Always. For a few months, he and Ace had been basking in the newness and discovery of a real relationship. And Ace had been there with reassurances when he'd lost some long-time clients in the wake of his coming out. It had helped that his chiropractic business was fielding calls from a few new patients. Ace grumbled that far too many of them were hot guys who didn't appear to be in much pain.

Not that Zane was at all tempted. He knew exactly how good his life was, even without skipping ahead. Marriage was definitely a ways down the road – and a couple of states away.

But for the first time in his life, he could see that road, and there was something to aim for. And there was someone to travel with along that road.

As the song was nearing its end, Zane felt warm hands snake around his waist. He sighed happily. He didn't need to turn around to know who was trying to sneak up on him.

Ace discreetly rubbed Zane's flank. "I love this song," he said into Zane's ear.

"This song is all Adele," Zane said. "If it were up to Brody, they'd be dancing to AC/DC right now."

Ace sighed mockingly. "Such a romantic."

"And accurate. I'm sure she *does* shake him all night long." Zane smiled and leaned back into Ace, bringing them as close together as he dared.

Across the dance floor, he caught his dad sending them a frown. Zane tamped down his frustration; the last thing the wedding reception needed was a family spat.

"I think we're venturing into PDA territory," Zane told Ace reluctantly. His dad was starting to come to terms with the bomb Zane dropped on him a few months ago, but, like his oldest son, it took baby steps to change. And physical evidence of homosexuality still unnerved Jack McDonnell.

"So, you're saying I *shouldn't* put my hands down your pants right now," Ace said, slowly sliding his hand down toward Zane's butt.

Zane nudged him and stepped away from the danger zone. "Saw you talking to my mom earlier," he said. "Looked suspiciously like conspiring."

“Your mom is a doll. I’ve never seen a woman hungrier for grandchildren. She was telling me about a woman in her bridge club whose nephew and his partner just adopted twins.”

Zane turned to him with a start. *Twins?*

“It sounded like she was giving me a primer,” Ace said. “I thought I should be taking notes.”

Zane struggled to keep his voice neutral. “Oh? Is that, um, something you’re wanting? Soon?” He cleared his throat. “Twins, I mean?”

Ace laughed loud at Zane’s failure to keep the alarm from his face. “Relax, big guy. Your mom is a lot like you, you know. Skipping way ahead.”

Zane let out a breath he’d been holding. “For the record, I’m not anti-kid or anything.”

That earned him a big smile. “Same here,” Ace said.

The dancing had switched to mother/son and father/daughter, serenaded by Nat King Cole. Zane tracked his father’s movement around the perimeter of the dance floor as Jack made his way over to where he and Ace were standing. He straightened himself unconsciously and stood taller.

Ace smiled at him with warm eyes. “Now, be a good boy,” he said low.

Zane rolled his eyes at Ace. His dad had met Ace last night for the first time at the rehearsal dinner, and it had gone about as well as he could have expected. Jack had been polite to Zane’s boyfriend, but a little distant, like he was trying to remove himself from the temptation to say something about their way of life.

Ace kept counseling Zane on the need for patience, particularly with fathers. But, naturally, Zane wanted the big happy family right away. And he was damned if he was going to hide his real self now, not after everything he’d gone through to find it.

Zane’s father reached out to shake both their hands as he approached. “That was a good speech you gave, son,” he said. “I was a little worried you’d tell the story about the chainsaw and then I’d have to explain the real story to everyone.”

Zane laughed. “I definitely considered it,” he said. “But Adele gave me a strict list of acceptable topics.”

Ace smiled. “Such a smart girl.”

“I suppose this is the last one of these things I’ll have to get all monkeyed up for,” Jack said, taking a long pull on his beer. “I have to say, I won’t miss the suit.”

“I don’t know about that, dad,” Zane said. “It’s a whole new world out there. Almost half of the country is treating homosexuals like real people and everything.”

“I didn’t say you weren’t –” Jack broke off and huffed.

Ace nudged Zane with a small frown, and Zane read the unspoken message: *Don’t stir things with dad tonight*. It was just so easy to revert to being a smartass teenager around his dad.

It didn't help that McDonnell Senior was looking at him with that same hint of disapproval that had chased him through his adolescence.

Jack cleared his throat and decided to change the subject. "You boys are lucky, you know? You don't have to dance at all those slow songs like the rest of us."

"What are you saying, Dad?" Zane said, unable to stop himself. "The fags aren't allowed to dance?"

Jack bristled visibly at Zane's choice of words and geared up to answer back.

"Actually, my dance card is already surprisingly full," Ace said brightly, trying to lighten the tension. "Between your wife and your new daughter-in-law, I doubt I'll lack for a partner on the floor."

Ace turned to smile at Zane, and Zane read a more insistent unspoken message: *Don't pick a fight, dumbass.*

"Besides," Ace said, "this is Adele's night. We don't want to steal the spotlight from the bride."

Which we would, Zane thought. The sight of two handsome men dancing close among all the cousins and co-workers would be all that anyone talked about when they mentioned Brody's wedding. Although he doubted Adele would mind the gossip, particularly as she considered herself responsible for their successful relationship in the first place.

Jack seemed to warm to Ace a little after that. Like most people, he approved of those who agreed with him.

The father/daughter and mother/son dances had ended, and the tempo of the music picked up immediately. The youngest members of the dance party – the flower girls and ring bearer and all the cousins' kids – instantly took to the floor. Adults were harder to convince, however, so Adele made it her mission to recruit dancers.

She started with Ace.

"Come on!" She grabbed his hand and pulled him onto the floor. "Time for positive peer pressure!"

Zane watched as Ace joined all the bridal party out there, while the groomsmen clung to the bar area.

"She sure does like Ace," Jack said.

"Most people do, once they've met him," Zane said. He finished his beer and turned to his father. "I hope you will someday, too."

Jack sighed loudly. "I don't dislike him, you know. It just seems like I keep running into landmines around you two these days."

"Those aren't his landmines, though. Those are all mine. I planted them in high school."

Jack gave a small grin. "I suppose so."

Zane let himself watch his partner tear up the dance floor for a long moment, as gratitude washed over him. His dad was trying, he knew that.

“So, how are you doing with all of this?” Zane kept the question vague, but both men knew what he was asking.

“Getting there, I guess. Your mother can’t stop talking about it. I think her bridge club is jealous of her cosmopolitan gay son.”

Zane barked a laugh. It figured that his mother would embrace this the way she did. Hell, anything for better gossip.

“You know, Mom was talking about having us for a visit,” Zane said, tentative. “Both of us.” He looked at his dad. “Would you be OK with that?”

Zane could see the discomfort bloom across Jack’s face, and he rolled his eyes. “We wouldn’t do it in my old bedroom or anything.”

“Son! That’s not –” Jack cleared his throat and took a deep breath. “Of course we’d love to have you visit. Both of you.”

So that’s what a baby step looked like from the other side. Halting, precarious and ultimately successful.

Ace must have had gallons of patience to deal with my stupid steps.

“Besides,” Jack said, “the guys in my golf foursome have been complaining about back pain.” He looked sideways at his son. “Maybe you could, you know,” he trailed off.

Zane smiled and rolled his eyes. No such thing as a free lunch.

“You know, speaking of pimping us out, if you ask nicely, Ace might rearrange the house.”

Jack grimaced. “I like things the way they are.”

“That’s what I thought, too,” Zane said. “Before I met him. You’ll be surprised how much better he can make things.”

The music switched to a slow song, and Helen arrived to take Ace’s arm. Adele darted over to demand a dance from Zane.

Zane happily wrapped his arms around his new sister-in-law, who was flushed and glowing.

She sighed. “This is nice. Wedding, check. Zane and Ace, check. Sold Brody’s house, check. I can relax.”

“When do you guys sign all the house papers?”

“After the honeymoon.”

“Speaking of that, has my mom asked about your ovulatory cycle yet?”

Adele blanched and missed her footing. “She’d do that?”

Zane laughed at how horrified she sounded. “Have you not met Helen McDonnell? She wants grandchildren, stat.”

Adele huffed. “Well, you and Ace better get going on that, then.”

“Oh, Mom’s already planted the seed of thought, trust me.”

“Good.” Adele snuggled against Zane’s chest. “I want our kids to grow up together, you know. Be in each other’s pockets. Best friends. True siblings.”

“What about the McDonnell history with siblings and chainsaws?”

“I’ll hide the power tools.”

“Thank God for you, Adele McDonnell.” He pulled back and tipped her head up. “I mean that. I thank God for you.”

Adele’s eyes swum with tears until she shook her head and pushed Zane back. “Now cut that out,” she said. “You had strict instructions.”

“Job’s done, toots. You’re all hitched now. I can make you laugh or cry all I want.”

“Well, that’s enough of that.” She carefully wiped her eyes. “My mascara will never stand up to this sort of treatment. Go find your man. Stat.”

Zane grinned and gave her a smacking kiss on the cheek.

He wound his way around the other dancers until he reached Ace and his mom.

“I’m stealing him away from you, I’m afraid,” he told Helen. “You should get Dad out here.”

“Oh, your father hates dancing,” Helen said. “I could barely get him on the floor at our own wedding.”

“Take Adele with you,” Ace said. “She can make people do anything she wants. Besides, he’s halfway drunk. Beer is a strong motivator at weddings.”

As Helen followed that advice, Ace took Zane’s hand. “I have it on good authority that the DJ is going to play some AC/DC soon. Wanna dance?”

“No.”

ACE BLINKED AT Zane. “Just no?”

Zane gently pulled Ace off the dance floor and toward the exit.

Ace frowned. “We’re not leaving, are we?”

“Not exactly. I’m trying to avoid giving my dad an aneurysm here.”

Walking as nonchalantly as possible, the two men slowly walked along the periphery of the tables until they reached the coat closet. Zane took one more look around, then tugged Ace into the dark little room.

He wasted no time and slanted his mouth over Ace’s. Ace came up for air after a long, drugging kiss and laughed breathlessly. “Seriously, we’ve got to stop meeting like this.”

“This room brings back very happy memories for me. Like the first time I met you.”

Their tongues danced happily, greedily against each other, a delicious pre-show for the coming event.

“Ohhh, man. The irony is thick in the air.”

Zane dropped his head to Ace’s neck and sucked on a pulse point. “Mmmm?”

Ace pulled back to look at him. “This is a closet. We are back in a closet.”

Zane looked around him. “I prefer to think of it as a trip down memory lane.”

Ace smiled. “You do like to fuck in dark, dangerous places.”

Zane kissed him deeply. “Correction. I like to fuck *you*. Anywhere I can.”

“I second that.”

He lost himself in the familiar sensation of Zane’s knowing touch. Zane kept up his exploration of Ace’s body, bringing Ace’s nerve endings to a rolling boil.

Zane growled softly and frog marched Ace deeper into the coat-filled closet until he bumped them up to the wall. “I just can’t wait to get you home. I need you now.”

Ace smirked. “Like you’ve ever been able to wait.” He turned around and braced himself against the back wall. “Just like old times?”

Zane spun Ace back around and shook his head. “I was thinking more like new times.”

He dropped to his knees in front of Ace and buried his nose against Ace’s groin.

“Mmm-hmm. You smell good. Smell like –” Zane paused, “like part of me.”

“Well, you do like to mark me with your scent, you big cat.”

Zane pulled back. “Does that make me a narcissist? That I’m attracted to the me in you?”

“No. It makes you mine.”

Zane’s eyes darkened with a deepening lust and he squeezed Ace’s cock through his dress slacks.

“Now, you just lean back,” Zane said, reaching into Ace’s briefs to pull out a perfectly hard cock. “Let Dr. Z take care of you.”

“Always.”

Zane grinned and bent to his work. And no matter how many times they had reached for each other, it always felt like coming home.

End.

Learn how Ace and Zane met in *Good Bones*, available at loose-id.com.