Your Love is a Melody
by jade_95

Summary

Jude swears he keeps meaning to tell Zero about his musical past. Problem is, the blond can be quite… distracting.

or

Zero is dumbfounded at what he is seeing. Somehow he’s managing to be totally turned on and irritated at the same time. His Jude playing guitar and singing, like a goddamn rock star.

Notes

I just can't quite give up on these two! This theme just wouldn't leave me alone, so here I am giving it another go. Hope you enjoy. Feedback is very appreciated!
“Atlantic Records…well I’ll be damned.” Jude states, surprise evident in his voice. A flood of nostalgia comes over him as he thumbs through his phone, glancing over faces he hasn’t seen in 6 maybe 7 years.

“Hmm?” Zero replies, awakened from his slumber. He musters up enough energy to lift his head in acknowledgement, but just ends up burrowing himself deeper into Jude’s warmth.

“Good for them” Jude huffs out, causing Zero to stir once again.

“Good for who babe?” Zero mumbles, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, wondering what has Jude’s attention so early in the morning.

“Just some people I used to know in the news. Surprised to see them in there is all.” Jude responds, as he leans down burying his nose in Zero’s blond hair, inhaling his unique scent of spicy and sweet.

“Why are you surprised, you know a lot of people in the news?” Zero responds around a yawn, as he rolls on his back stretching his arms high above his head.

“Fuck I got to piss.” Zero says bluntly scratching at his bare chest, as he sits up to head to the bathroom.

Jude tosses his phone aside, current news forgotten as he enjoys the view before him.

Zero is always great at distraction. Feeling Jude’s heated eyes, the blond gives a little shimmy before disappearing through the door.

“Get that sweet ass back in bed, I’m not done with you yet.” Jude calls out, as he rolls to his side leaning up on his elbow, not able to get the smile off his face as he thinks about last night’s rather adventurous activities.

Zero comes back out, leaning languidly against the bathroom door.

“Glad I could persuade you to get off your phone.” His voice is low and husky as he pushes off the door.

“I wonder what else I could persuade you to do this morning.” Zero smirks as he slowly starts stroking himself.

“Not sure you have to do much persuading.” Jude responds, eyes drinking in the man in front of him. He loves when Zero is in this mood. Makes him want to swoon like a teenager with her first crush. Not that he’d ever admit to that.

“Thought I might have worn you out. Looks like I was wrong.” Zero says smiling down at Jude as he kneels on the bed edging closer to the brunette.

Jude swats Zero’s hand away replacing it with his own. Zero groans as Jude’s hand slowly and firmly strokes up and down Zero’s hardening shaft.

With a wicked glint in his eye Jude smacks Zero’s ass, nudging him to straddle his face. Zero quickly obliges letting out a long low moan as he grips the headboard, slipping into the heat of
Jude’s mouth.

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Jude rubs at his dry eyes. The words on his screen starting to blur together. Shit, he just typed 33 million on this rookie’s contract summary. ‘He’s good, but he ain’t that good,’ he thinks, as he quickly deletes and corrects his mistake.

Zero and their late night escapades are going to be the death of him. He wonders how the blond is holding up. Surely not handing away millions of the company’s dollars like Jude is apparently doing.

“Ugh, time for a break”, he mumbles to himself. He minimizes his screen, looking around for his now, he’s sure, ice cold coffee.

The shrill of his office phone startles him.

“Jude Kinkaid.” He answers as he slips his eyes closed, mentally preparing for whoever is on the other end.

“Oh, listen to you being all professional like.”

The familiar voice makes Jude eyes shoot open.

“Who is…?” he starts, convinced his sleep deprived mind is playing tricks on him.

“Ah come on Jude, it hasn’t been that long that you forgot all about me, has it?!” the amused voice answers.

“Austin?!” Jude says grin splitting his face.

“The one and only. How the hell are you, big shot?!” Jude’s tired mind stutters, hardly believing he’s once again talking to one of his oldest friends.

“Holy Shit man, it’s been what…6 years?!” Jude exclaims.

“6 years 8 months.” Austin answers without missing a beat.

“Aren’t you supposed to be in northern California?”

“You keeping tabs on me Suit? I’m flattered.” Austin smiles into the phone.

“Suit huh? Haven’t heard that one in a while.” Jude responds as he grins at the old forgotten nickname.

“Shit, and when I gave it to you that was just because you went off to college, and left us losers behind. Little did I know how fitting it would become.” Austin’s deep baritone rumbles across the line.

“Oh really? And how would you know that, now who’s keeping tabs on who?” Jude replies, slipping easily into their old familiar banter.
“You’re kidding right? You and player man have been all over the news, it just started to slow down. I’ve seen your face splashed on the internet and magazines more then I saw you when we were kids!”

Jude briefly wonders what Austin means by ‘player man,’ as his slight change of tone doesn’t go unnoticed.

“Yeah, don’t remind me. It’s been pretty nuts. Not that I don’t want to be out there with our relationship, it’s just I’m not too fond of all the attention. Luckily Zero’s a pro at handling press.” Jude says warmly.

“Yeah, I bet he is.” Austin responds with a dismissive tone.

“So, yeah.” Austin says, quickly changing the subject. “We were supposed to be in northern Cali, but the tour got postponed, some contractual bullshit. They need us down here to go over some red tape.”

“Like in Atlantic Records contractual bullshit?” Jude questions.

“Crazy right? I guess we’re considered respectable musicians now. Bet you wish you were still with us? There’s always room for you if you want to come back you know.” Austin states teasingly.

“And ruin my suit reputation?! Never!” Jude laughs.

“But seriously man, were gonna be here for at least a week. The gang and I want to see you. We’re meeting up tonight at Beelman’s pub off Spring Street. Can you come?”

“Tonight? Ah… yeah yeah.” Jude responds as he quickly goes over his and Zero’s schedule in his head. “That would be awesome, man.”

“Sweet!” Wait till I tell everybody! See you around 7:00 then?”

“Yeah, 7 is good. Looking forward to it!”

They exchange their cell phone numbers and say their goodbyes.

After Jude hangs up, he shakes his head huffing out a laugh, still in disbelief at that whole conversation.

Of all the people in his past, Austin Black was one of the last he thought he would ever see again.

Jude remembers well when he was 12 years old, and the new family moved in next door. Austin was a year older, and as far as Jude was concerned, infinitely cooler.

The two became fast friends. In the beginning Jude felt lucky to even be able to tag along with the older boy.

They started their band a year later. Jude playing lead guitar, and Austin the lead singer. Their other friends Mike, Justin, and TJ quickly joining on.

They were awful in the beginning, screeching cats sounded better, but slowly they improved, and kept improving. Putting in countless hours of practice. They couldn’t wait to get home from school to start playing.
Jude remembers like it was yesterday, the night it all changed between him and Austin.

One night after practice when he was 16, all their band mates went home a little early, but Jude and Austin lingered behind so they could go over a new song they put together.

After playing a couple hours Austin pulled out a joint, and lit it up.

Jude was surprised, Austin never brought drugs around before, but he decided one or two hits wouldn’t hurt.

Jude wasn’t sure about that logic when he practically coughed up a lung after his first hit.

“Light weight,” Austin said, grinning over at Jude.

Austin set down his guitar and leaned in towards Jude.

“Just inhale slowly,” he said, his voice raspy from the smoke, as he took a long drag of the joint.

Jude felt his pulse quicken as Austin pursed his lips, slowly exhaling the smoke into Jude’s mouth, lips practically touching.

Watching Austin’s lashes fall to his cheeks, and full lips so enticingly close it was hard for Jude to deny his simmering attraction any longer. Jude remembers well how that small act alone made him instantly hard. When Austin lifted his gaze from Jude’s lips, their eyes locked. Jude’s breathe quickening along with his pulse rate.

The brief graze of lips shocked them out of their daze.

“Fuck, I’m fucking stoned.” Austin huffs, as he suddenly jolts back running a hand through his hair.

Although Jude was pretty much mortified that night, and couldn’t get out of there fast enough, he knew that was the moment when their friendship would never be the same.

But instead of getting kicked off the band like he feared, from that moment on they were pretty much inseparable. The fire between the two igniting the stage and creating electrifying performances.

But they were never meant to be. Austin never fully embraced his sexuality, and Jude got tired of being his dirty secret. On top of that, Jude’s dad and mom weren’t too keen on him being a musician. Said he would go nowhere. Eventual these things wore on him, and Jude left the band and Austin, and went away to college at the age of 20. Sparking his infamous ‘Suit’ nickname. He played with some friends at the University for a couple years, but it never was the same as his gang from home. That spark and chemistry onstage impossible to recapture.

Jude pours himself a fresh cup of coffee, wondering how different his life would be if he would have stayed back, and not headed out to college.

Would he still be with them now, signed with Atlantic records, and about to embark on a national tour? And what about him and Austin? Where would they be?

He shakes his head, dismissing those thoughts. Even through all the complications with his asshole father, Jude loves his job. He knows how lucky he is to have made it as far as he has. If his life would have taken him down another path there’s even a chance he wouldn’t have met Zero, and that right there is all he needs to know that he is right where he should be.
But still Jude can’t deny how every now and then he long’s to pick up his guitar and play with a group of friends, creating music that they brought to life. Once again to feel the rush of performing on stage.

There have been a couple times through the years when Jude has looked back on those days, and wondered what if, but they were young, and naïve, and none of them knew what life or love was really about. Pie in sky dreams, his dad use to say. Pretty ironic, Jude smirks, thinking about the bands new found success.

The thought makes Jude’s heart swell with sense of pride. Not bad for a bunch of aimless dreamers, remembering yet another one of his father’s numerous snide comments.

Jude can’t wait for Zero to meet his old friends. He’s sure they’ll all get along. Austin and Zero share similar qualities. They’re both stubborn as hell, and too damn cocky for their own good. Jude admits he’s a little nervous though, wondering how Zero will react to this long buried, yet still important part of himself.

Anticipation rises at the thought of sharing this with Zero. When he thinks about it he’s not quite sure how the topic has never even come up. For years Austin, and music were the center of his universe. He marvels at how much that has changed, with his universe now centering around a 6’1 blond baller.

It’s undeniable that Austin may hold some first’s in Jude’s life, but not the first to capture his heart.

Jude slowly grins when he thinks about who holds that spot, and what it took to get them here. It may have been a rough beginning, but Jude wouldn’t change it for the world if it meant he has Zero in his life.

Once again Jude’s mind goes right back to their morning activities. Zero never does things half way, and love making is definitely one of them. A blush starts creeping up Jude’s neck when he thinks about the blondes exuberant rim job this morning, eating him out like his life depended on it. Jude can’t wait to reciprocate.

His musings are interrupted by the beep of an incoming text message. He smiles when he sees it’s from Zero.

‘Hey gorgeous, sorry I couldn’t call earlier, today’s been brutal. How’s your day going?’ Jude revels at the fact of how a simple text from the ball player can make his pulse suddenly increase.

‘Oh you know, dreaming about a certain blond haired blue eyed boy, and thinking about all the interesting things I want to do to him.’ Jude replies, biting his lower lip around a grin.

‘Oh yeah?? Like what?’

‘Dreaming about getting my mouth back on you. I just tasted you this morning, but it’s never enough.’

‘Fuck babe, giving me a boner at practice probably isn’t the best idea.’ His phone beeps back.

Jude starts to feel that familiar arousal burn low in his belly, a Zero induced side effect.

‘You coming home now? I’m leaving the office soon. Need you.’ Jude replies squirming in his seat.

Zero audibly groans, getting looks from some close by team mates. There’s nothing that turns him on more than a needy Jude.
'Fuuuck you’re killing me babe. I want to. So bad. But after this I promised Pete to be at that basketball charity event with him tonight. As much as I’d like to I can’t back out now. I’ll make it up to you I swear.’ Zero replies.

‘Shit, I forgot about that.’ Jude responds, feeling a bit more despondent than he probably should. He was hoping Zero would be able to join him at the bar, but he knows Pete has been a pain in the ass, and nothing short of a life threatening virus would get Zero out of his obligations.

‘Can’t say I’m not bummed, but it’s ok, I know how it is. I’m going out for a drink with some old friends, but I won’t be too late.’ Jude responds, thinking anymore of an explanation is way too long to be done over text.

‘God, I’m sorry babe, next time?’ Jude sighs as he reads Zero’s reply, wondering if there will even be a next time.

‘Wake me up when you get home, I don’t care the time.’ Jude types back, deciding to move on from that topic, now just craving to see the blond again.

‘Oh, don’t you worry, I will. Have fun. Pete’s calling me, got to go. Love you xo’ Zero text back with a sigh.

‘Love you too.’ Jude replies.

Zero quickly adjust himself through his shorts, before he jogs back on the court.

He wants nothing more than to bail and go home to Jude, just talking to the man spikes a desire in him that he swears can’t be healthy.

Now that they got a little bit of a break a few days ago, Pete has been relentless with practice, pretty much running them ragged, and it’s only the beginning. Every night this week it’s either late conditioning, or early drills.

Zero feels bad that work is once again keeping him late, but he knows there is no way he can get out of this event. Pete committed him and Derek long ago, and in particular he wants them schmoozing up to the basketball Commissioner who will just so happen to be there.

Fat chance that’s gonna happen, Zero thinks, as he effortlessly catches the ball Derek passes to him.

‘I just have to be sure I make it up to him tonight,’ he thinks, as plans of what he has in store for Jude enter his mind. ‘Oh yeah, I’ll definitely be making it up to him all right,’ Zero grins, as he throws the ball, listening to the swish of his perfect three pointer.
Chapter 2

Jude slowly blows out a long calming breath, gathering his nerves before he enters the front doors of the rather unassuming pub. Internally berating himself for the fiftieth time for reacting this way. It’s not like he’s a fanboy for fucks sake, he’s an old friend who’s scrapped knees, elbows, and hearts with these guys.

It took him no less than 3 hours to find a decent thing to wear. Having a back and forth debate with himself on exactly how dressed up he was going to get for this. Eventually deciding fuck it, he hasn’t seen these guys in years. He wanted to look good. That decision added yet another hour to the whole process.

As he swings open the door, a wave of loud music and voices assault him. He glances over the crush of bodies, surprised at how packed the place is.

Shit, how is he going to find them? He pulls out his phone, but it beeps back at him before he has a chance to text. “Look to the right, table in the corner.” He reads with a smile. Austin always got the first word in, he thinks fondly, shaking his head.

He maneuvers himself around a tall women whose apparently telling a hilarious story if the rapturous cackles of her table mates is anything to go by.

Jude walks further into the bar, earlier nerves morphing into excitement at the anticipation of seeing some old familiar faces.

“Well aren’t you a sight for sore eyes.” Jude stops short, as TJ suddenly appears before him, huge grin on his face. “Holy shit man, it’s been too long,” TJ beams, as he pulls Jude into one of his infamous bear hugs. “It’s so good to see you.”

Jude pulls back, eyes full of fondness for the man in front of him. “God, did you get taller?! What happened to the shrimp I used to know?” Jude grins.

“I shot up my senior year. If you would have stuck around you would have known.” The younger man says, teasing grin on his face.

“Well you know what they say…big feet, big hands.” He says, wagging his eyebrows.

Jude shoves him away laughing. “Not something I need to know dude.” sounding like the big brother he always felt he was with the younger man.

“I couldn’t just sit there and wait for you like those losers. Come on, they’re right over here.” TJ was always the excitable one, wearing his heart on his sleeve. Jude’s glad to see that part of him hasn’t changed.

They approach the table to a welcoming chorus. All signs of Jude’s earlier nerves vanished.

After finally being released from the warm hugs of Mike and Justin, Jude’s looks down, eyes falling on Austin, who is casually leaning back in his chair, drink in hand, taking in the scene before him.

“Look at you…you sure did grow up nice Kinkaid.” The man drawls, lips curved into a sexy, half-
cocked smile, as his eyes slowly roam up and down the brunette.

Jude gulps. Fuck if he didn’t get even better looking. He’s more filled out then he was at 21, lean muscles pronounced through his black Henley. A cluster of tattoos Jude can’t quite make out covering both the man’s arms.

“Thought you said you saw me all over the news.” Jude finally gets out.

“I like you much better in live action, tecni-color,” Austin grins.

Jude glances down, hoping that his blush is hidden by the darkness of the pub.

Jude thought he would have grown out of that initial visceral reaction the man always stirred up in him. Guess that’s another thing that hasn’t changed.

Austin stands up and pulls Jude into a warm solid hug. He can’t believe how good it feels to see his old friends. He wonders why it took them so long to get together again, and he says so.

As the night goes on, conversation and alcohol flow, and before they know it 2 hours have passed.

Jude’s not sure where TJ, Mike, and Justin went, although he’s pretty sure it’s somewhere with those girls who have been fawning over them all night.

Jude’s feeling pleasantly buzzed, alcohol coursing warmth through his body. Besides the occasional fangirl approaching Austin for a picture or autograph, he pretty much hasn’t taken his eyes off Jude all night.

It’s been a long time that he’s been the older man’s center of attention. If he was being honest with himself, it feels pretty damn good.

They’re once again interrupted when a small blond with a barely there outfit on approaches their table.

“Excuse me. I’m sorry to bother you…but are you Austin Black from Bubonic?

Jude was fascinated at the instant change up of Austin’s demeanor, suddenly once again the very cocky, very hetero rock star.

“Why, yes I am darlin’” he drawls, sweet as syrup, as he eyes the blonds ample cleavage.

Shyness all but forgotten, the blond approaches Austin batting her long fake eyelashes.

“I knew it! My friends didn’t believe me, but I knew it was you! Oh my God, you’re the best, I just love your music! Can I get a picture?!” The blond doesn’t wait for a reply, practically launching herself on his lap to ensure their perfect selfie.

“Oh my God, awesome, thank you!” She says, inspecting the picture on her phone, most likely posting it right to Instagram.

Jude gives the façade playing out in front of him an incredulous stare, as he watches her suddenly become coy, slipping Austin a piece of paper, which Jude assumes is her phone number.

As his eyes follow the women sashay to her way back to her corner of the bar, Jude can’t help the comment that slips out. “Still in the closet huh?”

Austin slowly rolls the ice around in his drink. Focus directly back on Jude. “Why wouldn’t I be?
There’s no one worth coming out for.”

Jude cocks his head sideways, curious at that response. “It’s not about coming out for someone else Austin, it’s about coming out for yourself.”

“Oh yeah? Did you tell that to player man? Cause it sure as hell looked like he came out for someone else.” Austin replies, eyes sharply meeting Jude’s.

“That’s different Austin. He did it for us.” Jude responds, letting the ‘player man’ comment slip again…for now.

“My point exactly.” He responds, catching his bottom lip between his teeth. “Can’t say that I blame him though. If I still had you…” He pauses.

“Don’t go there Austin.” Jude replies, old emotions coming too close to the surface for his liking. “You and I,” Jude waves between the two, “we’re ancient history.”

Austin leans back in his chair, eyes locking with Jude’s. “Ancient history huh?” he finally replies after a few heartbeats.

It’s about that time TJ suddenly reappears, throwing his arm around Jude and loudly trying to persuade Jude to dance with him and his female companion that’s currently draped over him.

Jude takes a final swig of his drink, anxious to put some space between him and Austin. “There’s not even a dance floor man.” Jude laughs.

“Who cares, we made our own!” He beams, pulling at Jude’s arm.

“Alright, alright,” Jude relents, throwing one last glance at Austin who is staring intently at Jude, expression unreadable.

“You coming too?” TJ asks Austin.

That seems to break Austin out of his thoughts. “Nope. You guys have fun.” He replies, throwing them a wink as he drains the rest of his glass.

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Jude stumbles a little as he approaches his front door. He turns and waves to the Uber guy who is already half way down the street. He giggles to himself for being such a dork, as he attempts to pull out his keys from his pocket.

He decided it was best not to drive himself home, after Mike and Justin ordered several more rounds of shots as the night went on.

The night took on a distinctively lighter tone after he and TJ came back from the dance floor. He was happy that Austin moved on from whatever started to surface earlier, even somewhat relieved when the blond came back and remained perched on his lap for the rest of the evening.

They all parted with promises to meet up once again in a couple days before they headed out of town. Jude only slightly hesitated, knowing that next time Zero will be with him. He’s sure whatever fueled Austin’s earlier behavior is out of his system, and he would never pull that with
He and Austin were over long ago. In the light of day, he’s sure Austin will regret, maybe even be embarrassed by those comments.

Jude walks through the door, pulling off his jacket, listening for any signs of life in the house.

Zero’s keys are thrown in the dish by the door, so he must be home. With thoughts of a warm Zero in their bed, Jude speeds up his steps.

He decides to first head into the kitchen to grab a quick drink before he heads to bed.

As Jude drinks down the cool water, two strong arms slide around his waist.

He startles at first, but quickly relaxes, settling back into Zero’s firm chest.

“Drink a little too much, babe.” Zero whispers into his ear. His sexy laugh rumbling through Jude’s chest.

Jude tilts his head, as Zero’s lips press against his neck. “Just a little.” Jude replies teasingly, melting into Zero’s arms, head leaning back on his shoulder.

“Damn, you look sexy…I love your ass in these pants.” Zero says, desire pooling in his belly and groin.

Jude can’t formulate the words to answer, as Zero continues his ministrations on his neck, hands slowly lowering down Jude’s tight abs.

He couldn’t help but to thrust into Zero’s large hands as he palms Jude’s rapidly swelling cock.

Jude starts to clumsily undo his belt buckle. Zero quickly replaces Jude’s hand with his own, deftly undoing it the rest of the way.

“He could be in a haze of lust and heat, lost in the sight of his cock slipping in and out the blonde’s
pink spit slick lips.

Zero reaches up collecting the saliva by his mouth. Jude leans back on his elbows as Zero slides his fingers back to rub around Jude’s hole, sliding one finger in.

Jude’s an incoherent mess, mouth slack with pleasure as he grinds himself down on Zero’s finger, encouraging him to add another.

Zero thrust his finger in and out, hitting his prostrate over and over.

The blonde pulls off with a pop. “That’s it baby, let go.” Zero purrs, sending sparks skittering down Jude’s spine.

Zero adds one more finger, as he quickly unzips his pants with his other hand, pulling out his throbbing cock. Zero spits in his palm, needing to seek his own release as he watches his fingers slide in and out of the tight heated flesh.

Jude whines, shuddering as Zero’s lips once more wrap around him, suckling the tip.

His fingers mercilessly press against Jude’s prostate, as Jude comes with a loud cry, hole clenching around Zero’s fingers as he spills into the blonde’s mouth.

Zero groans, following right behind, spurting all over his hand.

They both pause, catching their breath. Jude’s thighs slightly trembling.

Zero kisses Jude’s stomach as the brunette falls back boneless on the counter. Jude feels wrecked. God what this man does to him.

“Shit, I don’t think I can move,” Jude says, a lazy grin covering his face.

Zero leans up giving Jude a long lingering kiss.“Come on, let me get you to bed.” Zero whispers, as he helps Jude down off the counter adjusting his now rumpled pants.

Zero gathers a pliant sleepy Jude in his arms and leads them to their bedroom.

“Did you have a good night?” Zero says softly, as he places soft kisses along the side of Jude’s jaw.

“Mmmhmm.” Jude answers, lips meeting Zero’s once again.

“Are you going to tell me about it?” Zero says breathlessly between kisses.

“Mmmhmm.” Jude mumbles once again, as he slowly backs Zero up until he flops down on the bed.

“Need to feel you inside me.” Jude says, arousal pooling low in his belly as the kisses quickly turn even more heated.

Planning on fully taking advantage of Jude’s apparent second wind, Zero pulls Jude’s warm body on top of him.

Zero effortlessly flips their position, blanketing his body over Jude’s.

“The night is still young sweetheart.” He responds, grinning wickedly down at Jude.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

So sorry this update has taken so long. Dang real life getting in the way of my fan-fiction writing! Hopefully there are a few of you still interested. Hope you enjoy!

“It’s your fault you know?” Zero pants, as he collapses onto his back.

“Oh yeah, and what fault would that be?” Jude responds, stretching out his pleasantly sore muscles.

After the two exhausted themselves well into the evening, Zero insatiable as he was, woke Jude up in the early hours for round three. Or was it four?

“I can’t be responsible for my actions when you wear those pants.” Zero replies, leaning up on his elbow smirking down at the brunette.

“Well considering I haven’t had them on for about…” he glances over at the clock, “6 hours, I’m not sure that argument holds much water.” Jude grins back up at Zero.

Zero’s eyes grow big as saucers. “Holy shit, is that the time!?” he says, legs getting tangled up in the sheets as he attempts to jolt out of bed.

“What the hell?” Jude states, confused at Zero’s sudden change from seductive to frantic.

“Goddamn Pete wants us at Mt. Baldy at 8am sharp for some mountain hiking bullshit.”

“Seriously?” Jude laughs in response.

“Some team building kick he’s on.”

“Hmmmm… good for Pete.” Jude says, suddenly thinking that’s not such a bad idea. Some bonding time might be just what the team needs.

He laughs when he hears Zero’s put upon groan echo from the bathroom. “Yeah, whatever. Did he have to pick a mountain to do it on?”

“A bunch of pampered millionaires being forced to hike and get along? Shit, I might just go and watch for the entertainment factor.” Jude grins.

“Hey now, who you calling a pampered millionaire?” Zero scowls as he pokes his head out, face slathered in shaving cream.

“Not you of course babe.” Jude responds, holding back a chuckle.

Zero gives him the stink eye once again for good measure before slipping back into the bathroom.

Jude hears the shower start up, so he closes his eyes and settles back into the cozy bed, chucking once again to himself at the thought of Zero’s impending hike. Picturing Derek, Terrence and Zero bickering the entire 11 mile trek.
Before he knows it he feels soft lips kiss his. “Goodbye, sleeping beauty.”

“Mmm…I must have dozed off.” Jude mumbles, eyes fluttering open.

“Go back to sleep. Wish I could join you.” Zero says, kissing Jude once again.

“Good luck babe.” Jude says rolling over to cuddle with his pillow, exaggerating his moves with a sigh to rub in the fact he has a clear leisurely schedule for the rest of the day.

“Brat.” Zero replies with a quirk of his eyebrow. “Pray for me. I’m gonna need it.” He adds.

“I’ll pray for your strength to get through this rough time.” Jude deadpans.

“You’re lucky I’m late, or I’d be crawling right back in that bed and show you a rough time.” Zero replies with a lick of his lips.

“Promises, promises…go on, if you’re late Pete’s gonna make you be the water carrier.

This got Zero’s attention. He glances at his watch.

“Shit, gotta go. Fucking LA traffic’s gonna screw me. Love you babe.” He quickly says, as he turns and disappears out the door.

Jude leans over unplugging his phone. He sends Zero a text. ‘Drive safe. The mountain’s not going anywhere. I’ll call you later xo’

He tosses his phone on the bed with a sigh. It really does suck how much Pete has been working them. In all fairness though, if anyone knows the pressure Pete is under to win the championship its Jude. The Devils are built to win titles. They have one of the league's best starting five. But they now have to improve upon last season's performance, justifying their decision to roll with who they have, and the millions they spend on each of these players. This alone puts immense pressure on Pete and the Devils administration.

Still doesn’t make it suck any less. With this new intense training schedule they barely seem to have time together and when they finally do, they can’t keep their hands off each other. Jude’s definitely not complaining about that factor, but it doesn’t bode well on the communication side of their relationship.

“Shit.” Jude suddenly spats, running a hand through his hair. He doesn’t even know how the fundraiser went for Zero. He knows Zero hates those things with a passion. He’d much rather play it low key, and shoot hoops with some local kids, then kiss ass to some stiff shirts to raise awareness and money.

Not to mention he forgot to fill Zero in about his old friends, and past. Again.

Who can blame him though? All that is the furthest thing from his mind when he has a lap full of Zero.

Jude pushes the covers off of him. No use on trying to sleep anymore, too many thoughts swirling in his mind.

He feels pretty disgusting, as he scratches at the flakes of come that have dried on his belly. He decides a shower is in order.

The hot water sliding down his body feels like heaven, and helps clear his head. Thoughts of last
night reenter his mind.

All things considered their reunion went really well. He forgot how good it felt to hang around those four guys. There were moments talking to them made him feel twelve again. Well, not counting the booze and all the women hanging around, he thinks, grinning to himself.

Tomorrow night will be their last hurrah before the band takes off on their country wide tour. Jude can’t deny the small pang he feels at this thought. Before his reunion he could just brush this off as lingering nostalgia, but now that he has once again felt that electric chemistry between them that is somehow still intact, it’s hard to deny these feelings. This persistent niggling thought that the band is not quite intact without him.

One thing for sure he’s not ready or willing to analyze these thoughts, he thinks, as he combs his fingers through his hair, ensuring the remains of the conditioner is rinsed out.

Shutting off the faucet he step’s out of the shower, grabbing a towel to dry himself.

Brushing off those earlier thoughts, and feeling a million times better, he walks back into the bedroom to the sound of an incoming text.

Anticipating a humorous update from Zero, he heads right over to his phone, quickly typing in his password.

‘Lunch?’ the text says, and for some reason the simple text from Austin throws him off. He stares at his phone not sure what to respond.

It beeps again.

‘Come on, it’s on me. How could you resist?’

Jude smiles at that, easily imagining the words coming out of the man’s mouth.

He pauses, but quickly decides.

‘As long as I get to pick the place’ he sends back.

‘Deal’ it beeps back instantly.

Jude sends the name of his new favorite lunch spot, with plans of meeting up in a couple hours.

He wonders if Zero will be done with the hike, so he could join them. Probably not, he concludes, considering it’s a pretty arduous hike, and well over an hour away.

It’s no big deal. It’s a simple lunch, it won’t hurt anybody. Zero can finally meet Austin tomorrow night, Jude justifies, as he throws on his dark green shirt, the one that brings out his eyes.

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“So we’re all sitting in your bedroom around the Ouija board, and I come up with this great idea to try to contact an ancient demon.” Austin’s face splits in amusement as he retells the old memory.

“Mike, and Justin who you thought were sick at home, were out by the circuit breakers. I told them
give us about 15 minutes and we should be well into it.”

“Just about the time I summoned the demon Abaddon, the lights started flickering.” Austin guffaws, happy they were in a secluded corner of the restaurant all to themselves.

“Yeah, and TJ starts twitching and convulsing like he’s fucking possessed!” Jude cuts in, slightly annoyed with his friend at this new revelation.

“Oh my God, that was legend! We nailed you so bad. You shot out of there like your ass was on fire!” Austin laughs, wiping the tears from his eyes.

“Yeah, yeah I remember… what did you expect, I was twelve!” Jude says, playfully pushing at Austin's shoulder. “I'm gonna kill those guys when I see them! Do you know how much that freaked me out?! I couldn’t even sleep in my room for weeks!” Jude grins, shaking his head.

“I can’t believe we pulled it off! I had to do some serious bribing to keep it a secret. I supplied their gummy worm addiction for months!”

“Bastards… you’re lucky you didn’t tell me this last night, I wouldn’t have come and had lunch with your ass!” Jude says teasingly. “It’s a wonder we ever got together. What the hell did I see in you?!”

Austin’s smile suddenly dims.

“Austin, sorry…I didn’t mean that. You are a bastard though.” Jude teases once again, hoping to keep the conversation light.

Austin looks down at his plate, and what remains of his food. He pushes it slightly forward, resting his elbows on the table.

“No… I… it’s just… I often wondered that myself.” He replies, resting his chin on his crossed fingers. “You were… are really special Jude, and I don’t think I told you that enough. Sometimes I think, maybe if I would have, you wouldn’t have left.”

The waitress clearing their plates gives Jude a moment to gather his thoughts and recover from the serious tone that suddenly took over the table.

If Jude was being honest with himself, meeting with Austin has stirred up some old feelings he’s not really comfortable with, nor is he sure where they’re coming from. Jude and Zero’s relationship couldn’t be better. He loves his job, and his life.

Still, this comment from Austin brings him right back to where they were over 6 years ago, and the decision that changed his life.

Jude clears his suddenly very dry throat. “You never told me that.” He finally responds, eyes directly meeting Austin’s.

“Well, you're right then… I was a bastard.” Austin replies, voice sounding raspy, unused. “Do you have any idea how hard it was for me when you left?”

Jude doesn’t know. He left and didn’t look back. Deciding a clean break was the way to go. Maybe it was selfish, maybe he should have handled things differently, but for survival all Jude could think about was the new life he was stepping into. Lingering on the past would have set him up for failure, and he was determined to prove to not only himself, but many people that he wasn’t going to fail. Until now he has never been confronted by the negative consequences of his decision.
Jude quietly shakes his head, gaze dropping to the glass he has cradled in his hand.

“The morning you left you didn’t even say goodbye. Not even to the guys.” Austin says, eyes focused on the swirls Jude’s making in the condensation on his glass.

“You all knew I was leaving.” Jude responds, gaze locking back on Austin.

“I didn’t know when, you just disappeared one day!” Austin huffs out, voice getting stronger along with his emotions. “It hollowed me out. The best thing that ever happened to me walked out of my life.”

“That’s not fair. You make it sound like it was all one-sided. I told you many times I was tired of being your dirty secret.” Jude say’s, unable to look away from the brown eyes so full of emotion. “I gave you many chances. Probably too many chances.”

“Given a little more time, I would have come out for you.” Austin says softly, leaning closer into Jude.

“No…no…no, we’re not doing this.” Jude responds holding his hands up between them. “You know I’m in a committed relationship, with someone I’m in love with.”

“With player man? Austin says, with a smug grin.

“Yeah, I noticed you like to call him that. Please stop. You know nothing about our relationship.”

“I know you deserve better.”

They both lean back in their chairs, arms crossed, challenging each other.

“Like with you?” Jude laughs at that. “Do you remember how many times I used to have to watch you get with the many girls that hung all over you, then when you were done with them, you conveniently came crawling back to me?”

“I was an idiot that would never happen now.”

“Oh, and was last night a preview of the new you? Because…it kind of looked like the old you.” Jude zings back.

“Jude…”

“Yeah, you know? I have to go. I have to call Zero. Jude says, as he stands, patting his pockets feeling for his cell phone. “Fuck,” he spats, realizing he left it in his car.

“I’m sorry…I’m just…never mind. Please still come out with us tomorrow night, the guys...and I would be really disappointed if you didn’t.” Austin says, scratching at his scruff. A motion Jude remembers he used to do when he was stressed.

Jude quickly looks away. “Yeah, don’t worry. Zero and I will be there.” Jude responds, throwing down a large tip, as he turns and walks away.

Jude settles into the plush seat of his Porsche, getting his bearings. Once again finding himself relieved to put distance between him and Austin.
He rubs at his temples, feeling an impending headache coming on. He’s pissed. Pissed off that these old memories and feelings are putting doubt in his mind. Pissed off that Austin can do this to him after so many years.

He needs to talk to Zero. Needs to see him. He picks up his phone. 3 text and two missed calls from Zero. Shit.

“Hey, where are you? Pete let us come home to clean up. Actually wasn’t too bad, although Derek was annoying as hell. Can’t wait to fill you in.”

Missed call

“Can’t believe I’m finally here and you’re not. The house is too quiet without you.”

Missed call

“I’m heading out. You’re getting me worried. Maybe you’re at work? Call me.”

Jude quickly pulls up Zero’s number, but it goes straight to voicemail.

Wanting nothing more than to see the blonde, Jude suddenly comes to a decision. He starts his car, heading in the direction of the stadium.
Jude hears the pounding of the ball, and screeching of sneakers before he even rounds the corner. He spots Zero right away. The blond and his team once again hard at practice.

Jude takes a seat off to the side out of direct sight. He pulls in a deep breath. Just being in Zero’s presence helps re-center him.

He watches Zero dribble down the court, leap through the air and drive the ball through the basket. A two handed dunk. One of his mastered moves.

The natural talent and ability Zero has on the basketball court never ceases to amaze Jude. A sense of pride stirs in his chest when he thinks about how far the man has come, and how hard he has worked to get there.

Somehow Zero innately knew that where he came from didn’t define his destiny. He knew that where he was, with the abusive, neglectful people he ended up with didn’t matter, because he was going to become something greater. And he did become something greater.

When he started out Zero may have done and said some things he’s not so proud of, but that doesn’t take away from the countless hours of dedication and hard work he put in to get him to the pros. It shows in every move and skill he displays on the court.

Jude knows and admires all of this in Zero. He knows better than anyone the odds of what it takes to be playing on the court in front of him.

Yet he still has to remind himself of this when Zero has to drag himself away to the never ending games and practices that his career demands. Or when Jude needs to talk to Zero, and the blond yet again is not available. Not available to talk when old friends show up and make Jude re-examine his choices.

Goddamn Austin, showing up out of the blue. Twisting up his feelings and putting seeds of doubt in his mind. The man in front of him is the best thing that has ever happened to him. Nothing or no one compares.

Then why in the world can’t he get Austin, and the tour out of his mind. The undeniable pang he feels when he pictures them leaving without him.

With a heavy sigh, Jude scrubs a hand down his face.

“Jesus Jude, what’s with the hang dog look?” Lionel says, seemingly appearing out of nowhere.

Jude startles, so lost in his thoughts he didn’t even hear her approach.

“You my friend, look like you need this more than me.” She says, handing him the drink she has in her hand.

“Fuck Lionel, warn a guy.” He responds, hand on his chest. He tentatively takes a sniff of the proffered drink.

“A Bloody Mary? It’s like 3:00 in the afternoon!”

“What? It’s 5:00 somewhere.” She smirks. “Actually I just had a lunch meeting at the Playground
with Adam Silver. He had to leave early, and I wasn’t about to waste a perfectly good Bloody Mary.” She replies, taking a seat by Jude.

“God forbid.” Jude chuckles. He swears he loves his friend, and her quirky ways.

“Thought I would come by and check out practice. Besides, it looks like I couldn’t have come at a better time. What’s the 911, my dear?” She says, twisting a bit in her seat to give all her attention to the brunette.

“Nothing…nothing’s wrong. I just…have stuff on my mind. Work. And stuff.”

“Uh huh, and how come I’m not buying that? That look on your face earlier would have made Olaf weep.” She says, with a quirk of her eyebrow.

Jude has no idea how his friend does it. She has this ability to read him without him even uttering a sound. Jude knows resistance is futile. Once she gets it in her head something is wrong, she’s pretty relentless. Sometimes it drives Jude nuts, but if he was being honest, he’s mostly appreciative of how much she cares. Mostly.

“Really, Lionel I’m good. I just wanted to watch the team practice a bit is all.”

“On your day off? When you haven’t had a day off in weeks? Nice try. Spill it Kinkade.”

Jude rolls his eyes. “Fine. Have it your way.” He relents, thinking she wants it, she’s gonna get it.

He takes a deep breath. “I have some old friends from childhood that have reappeared in my life. They were really great friends, but we have been out of touch for years. One I even had a relationship with at one point, but he was in the closet and could never accept the fact he was gay and kept me as his dirty little secret. I was actually in a band with these guys where I played lead guitar and sang backup, but I left and decided to go off to college to get a degree instead of sticking around, both to get away from Austin and I wanted to finish my education. Also, my parents never supported my music, said I would go nowhere. Now they are back and still in the band, and just signed with Atlantic records, and now are about to embark on a nationwide tour. Austin has been subtly, and not so subtly flirting with me and letting me know he wants me back and now I’m all turned around and doubting my choices in life with my career and…and even Zero. And I’m even fucking contemplating going with them on this tour. How fucked up is that? And no I’m not joking.”

Lionel looks a bit dumbfounded, as she takes a moment to let that sink in, “You have childhood friends?” she finally says, scrunching up her brow.

“That’s your take away from this?! He responds, exasperated.

Lionel stares at Jude for a few seconds, before she takes the watered down Bloody Mary out of his hands and places it beside her.

“Well.” She grins, “I will admit, I am a bit surprised about…all that.” She says, hands making a circling gesture in front of her, “but I’m not surprised you have a past Jude. A past I don’t know about. Hell, you hardly talk about it. I think this is the most you told me about it in all the years I’ve known you.”

“And yes, I am surprised that you play guitar and sing…really? You really do?” She clarifies, still having a hard time digesting this information.

“Yes, I really do smart ass.” He replies, giving her a teasing shove.
“Listen.” She says softly, scooting a little closer to Jude. “I get it. I get the allure. Old friends? A band? This guy’s sexy isn’t he?” This gets her another shove from Jude.

“You had fun with these guys, and have great memories, but Jude you’ve worked so hard in your life to be the man you are today. That much I know. This guy, and the band is in your past for a reason.”

“If you could do it all over again would you really get rid of all this,” she says with a swooping gesture of her arm, “and that” she motions toward Zero with her chin.

She wraps her arm around her friend, tone softening even more. “Once upon a time Austin was what you needed, but is he really who you need now?” She says pausing, eyes locking with Jude’s.

“Well…that’s enough Dr. Phil for me.” She says suddenly, as she stands up straightening out her skirt.

“That being said, by all means if you want to run off and be a rock star, knock yourself out, but don’t think you’re getting out of playing for me bud!”

“You got it.” Jude replies, with a fond look on his face. “Thanks Lionel.”

“Anytime.” She replies with a wink, “And Jude… I know you’ll be just fine.” She says giving him one last lingering look before she turns on her heals and walks down the corridor.

He watches her disappearing form, her words whirling around in his mind.

Lionel’s right. Austin has no place in his life right now. The past is the past for a reason. Would he trade the life he has and the people in it for an unknown future? Unlikely. But…maybe he could keep both, do both? Maybe he doesn’t need to trade? Maybe…

His convoluted thoughts send a chill down his spine causing him to wrap his arms protectively around himself.

“Jude!” Zero shouts from across the court. Confused expression instantly changing at the realization that Jude is there.

He looks up as Zero runs towards him still breathing heavily from practice. Face beaming like the sun to see the brunette. God how could Jude ever doubt anything that led him to this man.

“Jesus, babe where were you!?” Zero says, now standing before him with a worried look on his face.

“Hey. Are you ok?” Zero asked as he sits, straddling the bench facing Jude.

Before he even has a chance to answer Zero is cupping his chin with his hands, drawing Jude in for a deep kiss.

He knows some of the players are still a bit uneasy about their relationship, and public displays of affection aren’t looked highly upon, but Zero could give two shits about that at the moment. All he can think about is getting that look off Jude’s face. The one that pierced right through his heart.

Tongues tangle as Zero tilts his head to deepen the kiss.

They pull apart slightly panting, resting their foreheads against each other.

Jude grins, closing his eyes to soak in the moment. Heart feeling a million times lighter than just
“Moments before.”

“That’s better.” Zero says softly.

“Mmm, a lot better.” Jude agrees, grin widening.

“I probably really stink.” Zero says smiling broadly, pulling slightly away from Jude. “Sorry, you got me at practice and all.” He grins, head twitching toward his teammates.

“We’re not paying you to make out with your boyfriend Zero! Get back to work!” Pete shouts, startling them out of their haze.

“Hey Jude, sorry man…” Pete smiles waving to Jude, demeanor instantly changing.

“Hi Pete, it’s alright.” He waves back.

“What the…? What am I Swiss cheese?!” Zero spats, affronted.

“You’re not Jude.” Pete shrugs matter of fact.

Zero can’t argue with that. “Nope, sure ain’t. I guess Pete has also joined your fan club.” He jokes, pulling Jude up with him as he stands.

Zero pulls Jude back towards him. “Got to get back. See you later?”

“Yeah. What time will you be home?”

“Not sure.” Zero replies just as Pete’s loud whistle shrills, and everyone runs back on the court.

“Shit, when did Pete get that?” Jude cringes at the noise.

“Second day using it. Derek and I are already planning its disappearance. Like hell we’re listening to that all season. Can’t believe I’m saying this, but I’d rather hear his voice”

This gets a laugh out of Jude. “Hmmm…should I be worried?”

“Unless Pete suddenly becomes 6 foot, gets brown eyes, brown hair and goes by the name of Jude Kinkade, I don’t think you have anything to worry about.” Zero replies, eyes sparkling.

Jude doesn’t answer, just pulls Zero in for one last kiss.

“Knock ‘em dead stud.” Jude says pulling back.

“Always do.” Zero responds with a smug grin, before he runs off joining his teammates.

With one last lingering look Jude heads back out to his car.

Seeing Zero and talking to Lionel has definitely taken a weight off his shoulders.

Jude feels like he’s being ridiculous. What is he thinking, running off to play music like he’s 19 years old again? These guys have morphed him back to his teenage way of thinking.

Austin may care about him in an old friend nostalgic sort of way, but that’s it. They’re all just riding on the high from seeing each other again. Jude’s just been suckered back into falling for Austin’s default mode of flirting. Since it fell flat with Jude, he probably went and picked up somebody right after he left the restaurant. Some warm body to keep him company. And Jude’s
just fine with that.

He feels his phone buzzing in his pocket as he unlocks his car door. He smiles as he pulls out his phone wondering what Zero forgot to tell him.

Austin’s name flashes across the screen. Jude reluctantly swipes his phone.

‘Hey, sorry about how things went down at the restaurant. I don’t know what to say. You know I was never good with words, but I can’t lie anymore Jude. Not to you. I’ve done enough of that. I know you don’t want to hear this but there’s never been anyone else that compares to you. I have no right to say this, but you’ve always been the one for me. I was just too fucking dense to realize it. Please don’t hate me.’

Jude stares at the words in disbelief. Not sure what to make of the sudden burning feeling in his chest. He throws his phone on his front seat, wanting it out of his sight.

He takes a couple deep breaths. So much for the weight off his shoulders. Shit just got real.

Running both hands through his hair, he suddenly comes to a conclusion. With a determined set to his shoulders he picks up his phone typing out a text to Austin.

‘Meet me at your hotel in 20 minutes. I need to see you.’
Chapter 5

Zero slams his locker door closed a little harder than he intended. The look on Jude’s face earlier continued to linger persistently in his mind.

He didn’t even get a chance to talk to the brunette. Maybe work is getting to him. Zero may from time to time give him shit about his corporate position, but he truly has nothing but respect for Jude.

He can’t imagine the crap Jude has to go through with the talking heads of the league. With controversies and criticisms being flung around on a daily basis. It’s hard to imagine navigating through all the bullshit and coming out intact. Dealing with constant labor disputes with, in Jude’s words, pampered millionaires. Not to mention having to deal with that crazy corrupt father of his.

Yet Jude has done it several times, and with nothing but class and ease. Maybe Zero has taken for granted that fact and never really realized how hard it all is on him, and the toll it takes.

Fuck all if he’d know though, it’s not like he’s been around much, he thinks, tossing the towel he has wrapped around his waist on a nearby bench as he slips into the shower.

He moans, tilting his head back under the spray as the water slides down his body, the hot water feeling amazing on his sore muscles. He inhales the steam feeling some of the stress of practice roll off of him.

Zero scrubs the shampoo through his hair, thoughts belying his relaxed body.

Maybe Jude’s getting tired of having an absent boyfriend. It can’t be easy having a pro-basketball player as a partner. Fuck, what a shitty boyfriend he’s been. Sticking my tongue down his throat instead of actually listening to what was wrong with him. Brilliant Zero, way to be sensitive, he thinks, vigorously rubbing the soap over his chest and stomach.

Maybe he’s had enough of being alone at night, and Zero cancelling on his planned nights out. Didn’t Jude just go out with some old friends? Now that Zero thinks about it, he wonders what old friends Jude went out with. He never has mentioned any. What if it wasn’t old friends he went out with, what if…no, no way.

If there is anything in this life Zero can depend on, it’s Jude. He trust him with his heart and soul.

But God, maybe he’s having second thoughts about them.

The mere thought sends Zero’s stomach plummeting to the ground, as he aggressively shuts off the water tap stepping out of the stall.

“Get a fucking grip,” he says out loud, wrapping the towel back around his waist. He runs both hands through his wet hair grip tightening around the longer strands. All these fucking ‘maybes’ starting to drive him mad.

“What the hell you mumbling about man?” Derek smirks, strutting towards the showers like he has on a fine tux, and is not buck naked.

Zero glances up surprised. So lost in his thoughts he almost forgot there were other people in the locker room.
“Uh…” he huffs, scrubbing a hand down his face. “Guess myself man.”

“Hmm, might want to get that checked out…they say that’s the first sign of senility.” Derek snides, smug grin on his face.

“Pffft…even talking to myself is better conversation then with you assholes.” Zero responds with a smirk, as he walks back over to his locker already tuning out Derek’s reply.

Zero pulls out his phone sending a text to Jude. ‘As much as I loved kissing you, it looked like there was something heavy on your mind. Sorry I didn’t give you a chance to tell me. You ok?’

After drying off, he quickly throws on his clothes. Anxious for Jude’s response he sets his phone on the edge of the locker, hyper focused on the device.

“See you at the meeting.” Terrence says, heading toward the exit.


“Seriously Zero?” Terrence replies, turning toward the blond. “The fucking commissioner himself has been in town. Been having meetings all week with everybody. Now it’s our turn. Pete’s mentioned it at the last two practices.”

“Fuuuk!” Zero spats, banging his head against the locker.

“It’s in an hour.” Terrance says, glancing at his watch. “You miss it dude, you better be bleedin’ or dyin’, Pete will have your ass.”

“Yeah, and he’s got a bone to pick about the recent shitty press. It’s gonna be long and brutal.” He adds.


“They don’t pay me enough for this shit.” Zero says, shoving the gym clothes in his bag.

“Yeah, they actually do dude…see you there sunshine.” Terrence smirks, as he turns to leave.

An hour? Not enough time to go meet up with Jude like he was hoping and make it back in time.

Shit, can this day get any worse? He sighs, acquiescent to his fate. He grabs his gym bag hiking it up on his shoulder, as he heads toward the exit.

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Jude pulls his Porsche up to the Omni Hotel. The luxury resort that’s currently serving as the temporary residence to the musicians.

He decides he doesn’t want to take the time to park, so he drives up to the front practically leaping out of the car as it rolls to a stop.
He gives the attendant a tight smile as he’s handed the valet ticket. Heading through the mahogany doors he pulls out his phone, finally reading Austin’s response to his sudden demand that they meet. ‘I’ll instruct the front desk to give you a key card to our Penthouse. I’ll be there in 15.’

Jude looks at his watch. That was 25 minutes ago. He eyes the bar as he passes, deciding Austin can wait a few more minutes, he wants a drink.

He walks up to the counter, not bothering to sit down. This won’t take very long.

“Shot of Johnnie Walker Blue please.”

“Not on the rocks?” The bartender says raising his brow. “Seems a shame not to savor that whiskey.”

“A shot, thank you. Actually make it a double.”

“You got it.” The bartender answers, turning to fetch the customer what he wants.

This is not something he indulges in often. Only when the moment calls for it. And this is one of those banner moments.

Once the drink is placed in front of him he doesn’t waste any time throwing it back, enjoying the burn claw down his chest. He slowly blows out the fumes, hoping the alcohol takes affect sooner than later.

After throwing down some cash, he nods to the bartender as he turns to leave.

He approaches the front desk. “I have a key on hold…to the Penthouse” He says, stomach starting to churn, wondering if the whiskey’s going to make a reappearance.

“Of course sir, and your name?” The pretty blond behind the counter smiles.

“Jude…Jude Kinkade.”

“One moment sir.” She replies, turning towards a small stack of envelopes to her right.

“The Penthouse elevator will be right over there.” She says, motioning with her hand towards a long corridor. “Will there be anything else I can help you with sir?” she continues, handing him a white envelope with his name scrawled across the front.

“No, thank you.” He responds, walking towards the hall leading to the elevator.

“Not sparing any expenses are we boys?” Jude says, pressing to button to the top floor.

Jude steps up to the door debating on whether to knock, but instead he slides the card and opens the door. He was left the key after all.

Eyebrows shoot to his hairline as he takes in the lavish surroundings. Austin is sitting on a plush chair off in the corner, strumming on his guitar. The sight all too familiar to Jude.

“You made it. I was beginning to doubt you were gonna show up.” Austin says with a small grin, setting his guitar aside. “I had to distract myself before I went crazy.” He adds, head motioning towards the instrument.

He stands walking towards Jude. He clears his throat, nerves showing for the first time. “So…I guess you weren’t expecting that text, huh…?”
Jude takes three long strides across the room. “Weren’t expecting it?! Jude huffs, “You can’t fucking do this Austin, you can’t just show up years later and cause all this turmoil!”

“Turmoil…you’re in turmoil over me?” He replies, eyes lighting up.

“That’s not the point…”

“Yes it is!” Austin says getting in Jude’s space. “That’s exactly the point. You feel it too, that’s proof you do.”

Austin takes another step closer, practically nose to nose. “And you’re the one that came to my hotel room Jude.” He says, light turning to heat in his eyes, as he glances from Jude’s eyes to his lips.

He stares back at Austin, taking in his handsome face. His light brown eyes, and full lips. Lips that in another life he couldn’t get enough of. But there’s one thing that stands out the most to Jude. They’re not Zero’s. Not what he craves. What he longs for with every fiber in his body. They’re not the lips he wants to kiss for the rest of his life.

A calm assuredness comes over him. A strength and clarity he hasn’t felt since this whole thing began. The kind of feeling that comes over you when deep in your heart you know, without a doubt, you are making the right decision.

“I came here to talk to you Austin, and I needed to do this face to face.” Jude says softly, placing his hand on Austin’s chest, making sure the man doesn’t come any closer.

Austin slowly nods, reluctantly stepping away from Jude. “Ok…let’s talk. Have a seat.” He says gesturing for him to sit on the ornately designed maroon couch.

Jude sits across from him, after Austin sits back in the corner armchair.

“You still have your old guitar.” Jude says, glancing over at the instrument that’s leaning in the corner.

“Yeah…it’s the only one I’ll practice on.” He responds quickly. “Please talk to me Jude.” He blurts out, looking strained, just wanting to know what’s on the brunette’s mind.

With a deep breath, Jude closes his eyes. Pulling together his thoughts before he speaks.

“I think…I think you showing up has fucked us both up a little. It has both of us questioning what might have been. Probably because of all the unfinished business between the two of us. And maybe me being with Zero has stirred up these old unresolved feelings in you too. I think me leaving without saying goodbye fucked us both up. Kind of an open wound, you know? No closure.”

But let’s be real Austin… we were always better friends then lovers.” Jude says, scooting to the edge of his seat, hoping to get his point across.

Jude clears his dry throat, continuing. “Do you remember the countless times we would go out in the backyard staring at the stars talking about our dreams?”

“Of course.” Austin quietly responds, nodding his head.

“Do you remember what I would always say that you would tease me about?”
“That you wanted to be Spider-man?” He smirks.

Jude chuckles, appreciating Austin’s attempt to lighten the mood. “Well duh, who wouldn’t want to be? But no, the other thing you teased me about.”

Austin pauses, recalling their past conversations. “That you would find someone like in those romantic movies. Someone you wanted to spend your life with.”

“Like Noah and Allie.” Jude adds, with a lopsided grin.

“How could I forget? You were always a sucker for those sappy movies. Drove me nuts how many times you wanted to watch The Notebook.”

“Do you remember what you told me that one night at TJ’s birthday party?”

“That I hope all your dreams come true.” Austin replies, realization dawning on his face.

“Yeah, and that’s just the thing….” Jude replies softly. “They have come true.”

Austin looks down at his hands. Unable to keep eye contact.

“Zero’s your Noah isn’t he?” He says after a long pause, eyes meeting Jude’s once again.

“Yeah, he is…” he smiles, “I love him so much Austin.”

A million emotions cross Austin’s face. Jude’s heart hurts for the man, as he watches them all play out before him.

“Can’t say I’m surprised. I just was kinda hoping that would have been me.” He finally croaks out.

“I think you’re looking at our past with rose tinted glasses.” Jude says. “We had a pretty messy relationship. Hell, we never even really fought until we got together.”

“True…we did have some pretty epic fights.” Austin huffs. “Making up was fun though.” He says grinning.

Jude swallows, anxiety rising at what he’s about to say next. “I care about you Austin. You will always be a part of me, and an important part of my past. But, if you can’t just be my friend then you can’t be in my life.” There he said it, the part he most feared above all else. Now that they all were back in his life, the last thing he wanted was for them to be out of it again. But he can’t back down now, there has to be a line drawn.

Austin stares at Jude, letting it all sink in. He starts nodding his head.

“Of course I still want that for you Jude.” Austin replies, “Even if it’s not me who gives it to you. I don’t want to lose your friendship, not again.”

“And I don’t want to lose yours either.” Jude says sincerely. "But now we have a chance for closure on our past relationship, something we didn't get before."

“You were always the wise one Jude.” Austin says fondly. "You know before all this you were my best friend, and honestly keeping that is the most important thing to me. If that’s what I can get, then I count it as a win.” Austin says, as he stands up walking toward Jude.

“Doesn’t mean I have to like the guy though” He adds, holding out his hand to help Jude up off the couch.
“You haven’t even given him a chance Austin. Who knows you might actually like him.” He replies with a grin, taking his hand and standing next to him.

“Let’s not get too crazy. Envy him is more like it.” Austin responds, smiling back.

They stand for a few moments quietly facing each other.

“Thanks.” Austin says softly.

“For what?”

“For clearing my head like you always do, and for putting up with me, and not just leaving me in the dust. I know this is the last thing you needed in your life right now.”

“Don’t worry, you’ve always been dramatic. I’m used to it.” Jude teases shoving at the man’s shoulder.

“Yeah, I guess I have” Austin cringes, scratching at the back of his head.

“I hope Zero knows how lucky he is.” Austin says, seriousness back in his voice.

“I think he does.” Jude replies.

“Well if he ever doubt’s it, tell him to feel free to call me. I’ll remind him.”

Jude doesn’t answer, just smiles and nods, relief palpable that Austin is handling this so well.

“I’m feeling the need for some musical therapy. You down?” Austin says suddenly, picking up his guitar and motioning to the extra one leaning against the wall.

“Hell yeah.” Jude responds.

Austin’s showing Jude the chords to a new song he wrote, when TJ suddenly burst through the door.

“Jesus Christ…I think that bitch from the bar gave me something.” He says, scratching at his balls, rushing straight to the bathroom.

Jude and Austin look at each other and burst out laughing.

Yeah, Jude thinks, everything’s gonna be alright.
Zero taps out a staccato rhythm with his pen in an attempt to keep himself from drifting off. He’s feeling a weird combination of nervous energy, and being on the verge of becoming comatose.

Oblivious, the commissioner drones on something about changing the dynamics of the NBA draft, and how it could impact the Devils.

This almost makes him miss the ass chewing they got earlier for their recent bad press. At least that conversation was somewhat lively, and didn’t make him wish he was unconscious.

“Dude, you don’t even want to know where I’m gonna shove that, if you don’t stop doing that shit.” Derek whispers, hand suddenly covering Zero’s.

“This is agony, why are we here again?” Zero whispers back, as Pete asks yet another question. Brown nosing at it’s best, Zero thinks, rolling his eyes.

“To keep us in the loop man, as painful as it is. Speaking of, thought your boy would be here.”

“Um…he’s got other commitments.” He responds, even though he knows that’s bullshit. It’s true, Jude should be here, but Zero will be damned if he’s going to give away any uncertainty to Derek of all people.

Zero glances once again at his phone. Still no response to his text. Where the hell is he? Zero feels his stomach churn. A regular occurrence lately.

“So I’m calling for the NBA and NBAPA to end the restrictive one-and-done rule and allow pro-ready athletes to enter the league straight out of high school. I’m also lobbying for earlier contact with NCAA-certified agents to help high school athletes make this decision, and ask that the NCAA allow athletes that enter the NBA draft but don’t get drafted to retain their eligibility.”

Adam continues on, with no shortage of energy on his end. Clearly passionate about what he was saying.

“That’s all we need. A fucking high school aged kid on our team.” Terrence snides, garnering some laughter and head nods from the table’s occupants.

“Yeah, but it sure didn’t hurt the teams that got LeBron and Kobe now did it?” The commissioner quickly shoots back.

“Shit, they taking tips from me!” Terrence huffs, assuring his ego is intact.

“Yeah, yeah… alright guys, you’re free. Thanks for hangin’ in there. You don’t need to see me again until October.” Adam smirks, gathering his paper work finally wrapping up the meeting.
“I think that’s when I’m on vacation.” Zero jokes with a grin.

“Oh hell no. You’ll be fresh and ready for a new season.” Adam chuckles pointing right at Zero. “Hey Zero, you and Pete hang back for a second.”

Zero stands stretching out his back. Internally cursing himself for not making it out of there fast enough.

The room empties as the two approach the commissioner.

“Tomorrow’s my last night in town. I’d like the two of you with Lionel to meet me for dinner. I think as the team captain Zero, you should be there.”

“Yeah, of course. Just let me know where and what time.” Pete quickly replies.

“What about Jude?” Zero blurts out, without even thinking.

“He already cleared it with me, he’s had prior obligations the past couple nights, and tomorrow night. We met up a few days ago already, so we’re good. But I’m sure you know that already.”

Prior obligations the past couple nights? What? Fuck, did Jude mention something about tomorrow night? Zero pauses, trying to rack his brain. The now familiar stomach churn in full motion.

“Of course he’ll be there.” Pete says slapping him on the back, after the silence stretched out a bit too long.

“Great, I’ll text you the place and time.” Adam responds with a smile, as he grabs his briefcase and heads out the door.

Zero feels like an idiot. Standing there gaping at the two of them to the point Pete had to respond for him.

It’s not like Zero had any chance to get out of this anyway, but he would have liked to have tried on behalf of Jude. But fuck all if anything is coming to him.

“You alright? You seem a little…off.” The older man says, brow furrowed.

That’s an understatement, Zero almost responds, but holds his tongue.

“I know you hate these things, but just one more night then he leaves. Plus, he’s not too bad of a guy.” Pete says as they exit the room.

“Yeah… he’s alright.” Zero replies still clearly distracted with his thoughts.

“Listen, man.” Pete turns toward Zero, resting a hand on his shoulder. “I know I’ve been working you guys pretty hard. After the commissioner leaves why don’t you and Jude take a couple days off? Get laid, it might clear your head.” he chuckles, now teasingly shoving at Zero.

This perks Zero right up. Anything with get laid and Jude in the same sentence will do that.

Zero grins. “Thanks Pete. We might just take you up on that.”

“Good… but until then, see you bright and early at practice in the morning.” Pete grins, as he turns to walk down the corridor.

“Slave driver!” Zero calls out.
Pete laughs, not bothering to turn around as he throws up a goodbye wave to Zero.

Zero shakes his head. Fuckin’ Pete…the man’s an odd mix of a Jewish grandmother and the Devil. No pun intended.

Zero pulls out his phone, once again looking for any sign of life from Jude.

Nothing. Fuck it, he’s sending another text, seriously beginning to get concerned in more ways than one.

‘Hey, I’m about to head home. I hope I didn’t fuck up so bad you can’t talk to me now. I’m not too proud to beg. I know you like it when I do ;) Call me…please.’

He turns, walking in the opposite direction as Pete. Not much longer then he can have two blissful days off with Jude. God does he need that. Both his pace and his heart speed up at the thought, as he gets closer to the exit. He can’t get out of that stadium fast enough.

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Jude slips on his shades, as he walks out the front doors of the hotel. Feeling as if a literal weight is off his chest.

It went so much better then he anticipated. Although, Jude has to admit, in the back of his mind he thinks Austin took the news almost too well. Like he somewhat expected Jude’s response. He’s known that man and his reaction’s for more years than not, and Austin never has handled losing at anything very well. Much less something he’s passionate about.

Still, he’s not gonna dwell on it. Maybe the man has matured. Maybe he has really changed his ways. The time they just spent playing music together was relaxed and fun, just like the old days before the tension of them dating impeded their relationship. He figures for now that’s proof enough that things are OK, and that they can move forward.

Jude hands the man the valet ticket giving him a wide smile. Demeanor much different than when he arrived not even three hours ago.

“Glad you enjoyed your time here sir.” The valet says, obviously picking up on this much happier Jude.

“Thank you.” Jude grins once again, handing the man some cash as he steps into his Porsche.

Jude can’t help but laugh when he gets in his car, wondering what the man thought he’s been doing those few hours that put such a smile on his face. Nothing PG he’s sure.

“Shit.” Jude says, as that train of thought leads right to Zero, and his text Jude never replied to.

He fumbles in his pocket to pull out his cell phone.

Jude rubs a hand over his smooth jaw, reading over now two text from Zero. So he picked up that something was wrong. God, he wonders how he came across. Zero probably thinks something is wrong between them. Shit.

Well Jude just needs to fix that doesn’t he?
He looks at his watch. Zero’s last text was 10 minutes ago. Plenty of time he thinks, as a wicked grin spreads across his face. He may even have time to make a quick stop to pick something up if he takes the right streets.

He backs his car out of the parking spot, and throws it in gear. The engine revs along with his anticipation, as plans for what he has in store for the blonde start to formulate in his mind.

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The house is so quiet and dark when Zero enters that he feels a pang of disappointment. Certain that Jude hasn’t made it home yet.

He turns on lights along the way as he heads to the kitchen. He grabs a water bottle out of the fridge, drinking the whole thing down in one go. He throws it in the recycle bin, deciding he’ll call Jude after he unloads his stuff in the bedroom.

He pauses when he notices soft glowing light pooling out their bedroom door. He slowly pushes the door open wondering if maybe Jude accidentally left the TV on before he left earlier.

His duffel bag slips off his shoulder hitting the floor with a soft thud.

“Ho…ly…shit.” Zero mutters. His breathing picks up at the beautiful sight even before he takes a single step forward.

Jude is on the bed naked except for his black socks pulled up to his mid-calf, and work shirt laying open showing the gorgeous hard planes of his chest and stomach. He is leaning on pillows against the headboard legs spread wide. Long graceful fingers slowly sinking in and out of himself. The small sheen of sweat covering his chest and abs only extenuating the dips and curves. A look of ecstasy on his face as he bites down on his lip grinding deeper onto his fingers.

Jude knows what a turn on it is for Zero when he keeps a little bit of his corporate self on in the bedroom. Makes him feel crazy to know he gets to have this powerful usually buttoned up man begging and at his mercy. Although, it looks like Jude is turning those tables tonight.

“Welcome home.” Jude practically moans.

Mesmerized, Zero takes a step forward without even realizing.

“Don’t move.” Jude pants, eyes heavy lidded, and face flushed as he continues to push his fingers in and out. “I want you to watch.”

Zero has to close his eyes briefly, feeling a little dizzy from the fast rush of blood suddenly to his groin. He palms himself needed to relieve some of the pressure.

“No touching yourself.” Jude demands, and fuck if this isn’t doing it for Zero. Usually it’s him who takes command in the bedroom. How did Jude know this is exactly what he needed?

Zero licks his lips. Desperate to taste and suck the long corded muscles of Jude’s neck. To replace
his fingers with his tongue. Taste the strong musk that is uniquely Jude.

Zero nearly chokes on his tongue when Jude reaches under the pillow and pulls out what has to be at least a 10 inch dildo.

Jude sets it down beside himself pulling out his fingers. He picks up a small bottle of lube from his nightstand and flicks it open. Pouring it on the large dildo and slicking it up and down the shaft.

Zero stands dumbstruck as Jude spreads his legs wider slowly sinking the dildo in his ass. With a slight hiss he pushes it all the way in until it practically disappears then slowly pulls it back out with a groan. Heated eyes lock on Zero’s as he thrust the dildo in and out as Jude’s hard cock bobs at the motion.

“Fuuuck Jude…I can’t…please baby…” Zero’s fit to burst. Vision literally beginning to blur from the heated lust rising up in him.

“Pull your pants down.” Jude says breathlessly.

Zero quickly obliges. Practically ripping the material from how fast he removes them.

After a few more deep thrusts, Jude pulls the dildo out and sets it aside. He tosses Zero the lube. “Get ready.” He says with a smirk as he gestures to Zero’s engorged cock.

Zero quickly gets with the program slicking himself up with a low moan relieved that he can finally touch himself.

Jude turns around on all fours sticking his round pert ass up in the air for the taking. Shirt end covering the top of his ass, but Zero still has a perfect view of Jude’s loosened hole. His mouth waters.

Jude rest his forehead on the bed adjusting his legs wider.

“Show me who owns this ass.”

Zero’s moving before his brain even tells him to. His tongue is going to have to wait. His cock needs to be inside this man rightthefucknow. He kneels up on the bed gripping Jude’s hips and pulls him in.

Jude moans as Zero slides inside him balls deep in one swift move, making them both cry out.

Zero gasp with how good it feels, pausing for a moment allowing them both to adjust. Not able to wait any longer, Zero starts thrusting his hips pounding into Jude. Jude groans, resting his head on his arm taking all Zero will give him.

“Fuck babe you feel so good. You’re so fucking tight.” Zero nearly sobs as his hips relentlessly jack hammer into Jude.

“Yes…God…yes Gideon fuck me!” Jude babbles, gripping the sheets with his hands to keep from sliding forward from the force of Zero’s thrust.

Zero groans as he wraps his arm around Jude’s waist pulling him back on his lap. Jude rest back as Zero slows his hip into a deep grind. Jude lays back against the blonde turning his head seeking Zero’s mouth.

Their mouths meet in a messy kiss, biting and licking at each other’s lips.
Zero pulls slightly away. “This fucking beautiful ass is mine. No one else's. Mine. Understand?” Zero says possessively as he reaches around sliding his palm down Jude’s abs taking his warm wet cock in his hand and starts stroking.

Jude shivers at Zeros words. “God Zero…yours…yes…fuck” Jude moans rocking his hips finding the perfect rhythm, up into his fist and down onto his cock.

“Touch yourself.” Zero whispers in Jude’s ear. He wraps his hand around Zero’s both stroking his cock, quickening the pace.

“Yeah…that’s it. Come for me.” Zero pants.

Jude groans deep and animalistic, head falling back on Zero’s shoulder, as hot spurts of come shoot out covering both their hands.

A few more quick thrust has Zero filling Jude up with his own release.

Zero wraps his slightly trembling arms around Jude as they come down from their incredible high.

Zero nuzzles Jude’s temple. “Damn.” he chuckles, breathing finally getting back to normal.

“Yeah.” Jude breaths out.

“What was that?” Zero says still dazed.

“The best sex I ever had in my life.” Jude replies with a huff.

“That was pretty fucking mind blowing.” Zero grins. “You know it drives me crazy when you call me Gideon when we’re in bed.”

“I know.” Jude smirks. “And you know it drives me crazy when you get all possessive when we’re in bed.”

They both grin, happy to have pleased one another. Zero rest his forehead against Jude’s relishing their intimate connection a little longer.

“Come on.” Zero whispers after a few heartbeats. “I’ll get something to clean us up.”

They slowly pull apart. Jude wincing a little as Zero pulls out of him.

Jude flops on his back watching Zero disappear into the bathroom.

He stretches out his muscles loving the fact he can still feel Zero inside him. He scrubs a hand down his face. God did he need that. And apparently Zero needed it too, if his reaction was any indication.

Jude knows he spurred on Zero’s possessive behavior by his actions in bed, but he feels there was something more there. He felt it in every touch, every claim from Zero. He knows by Zero’s text that he picked up that something was wrong with Jude, but he’s now positive that something was doubt about them. Somehow he knew Jude was questioning their relationship.

He curses himself for being more transparent about his emotions then he thought he was. For even putting that doubt in his lover’s mind.

His thoughts are interrupted when Zero walks back into the room carrying a warm towel.
Jude bites his lip as he watches the blond wipe away the remains of their lovemaking. Emotions swelling inside him with every caress.

Jude stills Zero’s hand, brown eyes locking on blue. Zero furrows his brow in confusion.

“I fucking love you, you know.” Jude whispers, trying to keep his emotions in check.

The beaming smile he receives from the blonde lights up Jude’s entire being. Giving Jude hope that the seed of doubt that Zero had has been crushed to oblivion.

“I know you do.” Zero grins, turning to throw the towel in the hamper. He pulls the covers up gathering Jude in his arms, quietly settling them.

“What brought all this on?” Zero whispers into Jude’s hair, needing to inhale Jude’s calming scent, as earlier worries start to resurface.

Jude looks up at Zero, wondering how much he should tell him, not wanting to shatter this moment between them.

“We’ve both been so busy lately, and I just feel like maybe you needed to be…and I needed to be…reminded about who we belong to.” Jude replies, gazing lovingly at Zero.

“You needed to be reminded of that?” Zero says, determined to keep his voice steady. “Did something happen babe?”

Jude decides there’s no point in telling Zero all the sordid details when they were already worked out between him and Austin. No need to rock that boat when it’s already sailed.

“No…I mean yeah…I mean…” Jude scrambles trying to organize his thoughts. “Remember I told you a couple days back I had some old friends in town?”

Zero twist sideways, leaning up on his left elbow, wanting to face the brunette while he speaks to him. Jude mirrors him, leaning on his right elbow.

“Yeah, you went out with them the other night. The night I couldn’t go?”

“Right. They’ve been here a few days now, and it’s been really great seeing them. Better than I thought it would be.” And for the most part that’s true, Jude justifies. Again, why bring up the stuff with Austin when now it’s a non-issue.

“Yeah? That’s great.” Zero’s not really sure how this is connected to the animalistic claiming session they just had, but Zero decides to just go with it. He’s also not sure why he suddenly feels nauseous. “I’d like to meet them sometime.”

“I really want you to. And I want them to meet you. I’ve been hanging out with them, and it’s been fun. Like old times. But I want you to be part of that. I need you to be part of that.” Jude says, sincerity shining from his eyes.

“Tomorrow night’s the last night they’re going to be in town before they leave. We’re meeting at a bar downtown, and I really want you to be there.” Jude says, sitting up, taking hold of Zero’s hand.

“Tomorrow night?” Zero says, heart sinking. “Fuck!” He spats, falling back on the bed, running both hands through his hair.

“The commissioner wants me, Pete, and Lionel to meet him for dinner. It’s his last night in town
too. He asked me himself Jude. I don’t think I can get out it. Not without Pete popping a blood vessel.” Zero continues, clearly exasperated.

“Seriously?” Jude responds with a sigh, feeling despondent.

Even though Jude feels like throwing a tantrum like a two year old, to be fair it’s not Zero’s fault. Jude fundamentally knows this. But again, it still doesn’t make it any easier. There’s nothing Jude can do. He decides he’s not going to make more of it then he should. Maybe Zero meeting the guys just wasn’t meant to be. He scrubs a hand down his face, eyes meeting Zero’s.

“That asshole hasn’t left yet? Feels like he’s been here 8 years!”

“12 years…you didn’t sit through that last meeting.” Zero smirks, still feeling racked with guilt.

“God babe, I’m sorry. Should I suddenly come down with the flu or something?”

“And risk getting your team captain title stripped away. I wouldn’t put it past Silver to pull something like that.”

Zero sighs, silently nodding his head. Jude’s right, that’s exactly what would happen.

“Next time they’re in town, I won’t miss them for anything I promise.” Zero says gathering Jude back in his arms, and laying them down.

“Don’t keep promises you can’t keep baller.” Jude teases, nudging his elbow into Zero.

“Oh, I’m keeping that one Kinkade, you can bank on it.” Zero says around a large yawn, jaw cracking.

“Fuck it’s been a long day.” Zero says, eyelids starting to droop.

“And Jude…I fucking love you too.” Zero mumbles just before he hears soft snoring coming from the blond.

Jude smiles softly at the now sleeping man, gently kissing his stubbled jaw. Its then that he makes up his mind.

He’s not going tomorrow night without Zero.

He reaches over and grabs his cell phone, pulling up a previous group text that was sent to him days ago.

‘Sorry guys, I hate to do this but something came up. I can’t make it out tomorrow night. Hit me up when you’re back in town. Kick some ass. I know you will.’

He swallows thickly, choosing to ignore the pang of disappointment he’s feeling as he sends his text. He plugs in his phone and turns down the volume.

He settles back on Zero’s chest. It’s for the best, he tells himself. Emotional exhaustion from the day weighs down on him like a heavy blanket as the first tendrils of sleep start to take him under.

He quickly starts to doze off, oblivious to the fact that his phone is currently blowing up with text on his nightstand.
Chapter 7

TJ takes a deep drag from the joint, reclining back in his seat, watching Austin casually strum on his guitar.

He kicks his feet up tilting his head back as he slowly blows out the perfect smoke rings.

“Been pretty cool having Jude around again.” He states between puffs. “Forgot how much I love having him around.”

Austin stops, pausing to glance up at the younger man. He looks back down, finishing the chords he was playing. “Yeah, it’s been alright.”

“All right?” TJ huffs, “Is that what you call it when your great love is back in your life?”

Austin freezes, eyes remaining downcast. He slowly lifts his gaze to TJ. “What did you just say?”

TJ sets the joint down in a small bowl beside him. He grins over at Austin, unfazed. “You really think we didn’t know?”

The brunette calmly sets his guitar down. Only sign of distress is the sudden clenching of his jaw. Of course his old friend notices.

“Come on man, it’s really not a big deal. I don’t even know why you never told any of us.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Austin responds stubbornly, the old habit of denying his sexually easily sliding off his tongue.

TJ places his feet on the floor, leaning forward with his elbows resting on his knees.

“Summer of 2009. We were playing that party out in Irvine. For my brother’s friend’s 18th birthday. Ring any bells?”

Austin remains silent and motionless, slightly glaring at TJ wondering where he’s going with this.

“We sounded like shit. Not sure why they hired us.” He huffs, “man…you remember the girl I hooked up with at that party? Shiit, I still dream about her…” he stops holding both hands far out in front of his chest “…mammary glands.” He finishes, cracking himself up.

“Will you get to the fucking point!?” Austin barks.

“Yeah, right…sorry.” He says clearing his throat. “Remember how hot it was out that day? All of us couldn’t wait to jump in the pool, and we ended up swimming into the night.”

Austin felt the heat from the blush rising up his neck. Hell yeah, he remembers everything about that night. He and Jude could hardly keep their hands off each other. They could barely wait until everyone went inside. Austin claiming he forgot something, as Jude waited out by the pool house. Austin swears he broke the record for fastest clothing removal, both his and Jude’s. It was dangerous, and they knew it. But he remembers well the burning desire practically eating them alive, and they didn’t care. They thought they got away with it too. He suddenly feels slightly nauseous.

“After everyone went inside, I went back out to grab my keys I threw on the back table. Then I
heard some noise coming from inside the pool house. I thought everyone already went inside, so I thought maybe it was a squirrel or something. I almost left until I heard some moaning. So I thought shit, someone was getting lucky. I decided what does it hurt I’m gonna see who’s having some fun. Someone was getting lucky alright.” He smirks.

“Thought I smoked some bad weed or something, and was seeing shit!” he states, rubbing his eyes like he’s reliving the whole experience. “I might as well have seen a ghost or something for as fast as I shot out of there.”

Austin feels the color drain out of his face. TJ saw that?! Jesus.

“Man that was some crazy shit! I didn’t know whether to tell the guys or not. I knew if I did they would think I was bullshiting them. At one point I thought I dreamed the whole thing. That was until I actually started to pay attention to the two of you, and figured out I wasn’t dreaming.” He says, falling back in his chair leaning over to pick the joint back up. “You guys were fucking obvious if you just payed attention.”

“Not like I care though man. To tell you the truth you guys looked pretty hot together, still do. Shiiit…” he laughs, running a hand through his hair. “Damn weed…gives me zero filter.”

During the whole explanation Austin felt somewhat detached. Unable to believe TJ was saying what he was saying. They were all around 17 years old at that party. He has known all these years. He’s at a loss at what to say.

TJ lights the joint back up taking another deep drag. He leans his head back slowly blowing out the smoke. He hands the joint over to Austin. “By the look on your face man, you need this.” He says, with a slight grin.

He eyes the blunt and then wordlessly agrees, taking it from TJ’s fingers then inhaling it slowly, giving himself time to calm down from this new revelation.

“Who else knows?” he says softly, deciding it’s pointless to deny. He suddenly wonders why he has so vehemently denied his true sexuality all these years, realizing the world actually didn’t just end.

“Pretty much all of us.” TJ shrugs. “It’s not like you guys were that good at hiding it. I mean seriously, do you think we’re idiots?! We knew you guys had your falling out here and there, but we knew you were together mostly by how much you would fight. It was the weirdest thing, you guys ran hot or cold, no grey area. At least when you were fucking. We figured that out pretty early on. You guys got along way better when you were broken up.”

“That’s what he said.” He huffs, looking down at his hands.

“Who…Jude? Well he was always the one with the brains.” TJ jokes, nudging him with his foot. Austin doesn’t respond. Doesn’t even crack a smile, still looking down at his hands.

“What’s wrong, man?” TJ says, suddenly concerned by Austin’s behavior.

“I’m afraid I can’t keep a promise I made.” Austin says, slightly shaking his head.

“Promise…to who?”

Austin’s eyes meet his. “To Jude…I told him that I was ok with just being his friend now.”
“Whoa…what? Have you guys been seeing each other this whole time?!”

“No man, it was over between us years ago.” Austin replies, running a hand down his face.

“Ok…why do I feel like I’m missing something here?” TJ questions.

“Well, it was technically over, but the truth is, I never really got over him, and I recently told him that.”

“Ohhhh…” TJ responds. “Shit…and I’m guessing him and blondie didn’t take that too well.”

“Player man doesn’t know, or at least I don’t think, and no he didn’t really take it too well. Said if I wanted to be in his life we could only be friends.”

“So you lied and said you were cool with it but in reality you still want to jump Suits bones?” TJ finishes for him.

“It’s more than just wanting to fuck him TJ. To tell you the truth I don’t know how I’m gonna handle seeing them together. Jude deserves better then him.”

“Come on man, I love you, but a few minutes ago you just admitted for the first time to me that you were even with him. I mean is that better than the person who could have lost his entire NBA career because he admitted his love for Jude?”

“Fuck you too TJ!” He spats, as he springs to his feet needing to put distance between him and the younger man before he does something he’ll regret.

“What man?! I’m just telling it like it is!” He says, throwing up his arms.

“Oh yeah, a guy who has a horrible reputation for sleeping around. Who doesn’t care about anyone but himself, and his cock!? He’s not fooling me!”

TJ pauses, thinking over what Austin said. “Shit…I think Jude has a type.” He huffs.

He actually flinches from the death glare Austin sends him.

They both hear their phones go off simultaneously and wonder who is texting them at this hour. Probably Chuck their manager, Austin thinks, deciding to ignore it.

But TJ pulls up the text. It’s from Jude.

“Fuck… well, it looks like you might not even have to worry about seeing him and blondie together after all.” He frowns at the phone, holding it up to Austin.

Austin looks at his own message. His heart sinks at Jude’s words. Why would he cancel? Is it because of him? He can’t imagine not seeing Jude before they leave on tour.

Without even exchanging another word, the two of them start furiously texting away at their phones.
The bright morning light shined through the shades causing Jude’s eyes to slowly flutter open. He rolled over turning his face into his pillow to avoid the glare, instinctively reaching out beside him only to find the space empty.

He lifts his head squinting as he looks around the room hoping he finds Zero just temporarily exited the bed. He finds no sign of the blond. He scrubs a hand down his face jaw popping around a large yawn.

He doesn’t hear the shower running and the house seems pretty quiet. It looks like Zero had to head out to practice.

He turns to look at the time, and notices a piece of paper stuck to his alarm clock. He picks it up smiling.

‘You were sleeping so peacefully, I didn’t want to disturb you. I must have worn you out. ;) I made coffee for you. Hope it’s still hot. I’ll call you later after practice. Love you.’

Bless Zero, Jude thinks, as he sits up throwing the covers aside, deciding coffee is sounding pretty damn good.

Grabbing his phone without looking at it, he shuffles into the kitchen. Happy to see the coffee pot hasn’t shut off yet, he pours himself a cup inhaling the delicious smell.

Sitting down at his kitchen table he picks up his phone, pressing in his code bringing it to life.

Jude’s not all that surprised to find a shit ton of text from the guys. He starts reading a few from the thread.

**TJ**: ‘What!? Are my eyes deceiving me? Come on man, you got to hang out with us one last time before we go!’

**Austin**: ‘Disappointed to say the least. Had plans to pull out some of our classic songs and play them with our old lead guitarist.’

**Mike**: ‘Shit, what did Austin do? I’m apologizing on his behalf. Come play with us.’

**Justin**: ‘Do I need to drive up there and beat some corporate ass? I’ll do it for you Suit.’

**Austin**: ‘Fuck you Mike.’

**TJ**: ‘Come on Jude, you’re a big shot at work, just cancel whatever it is. Tell them your friends want you to come out and play. ;)’

**Mike**: ‘My comment comes from years of extensive research on the matter. I’m right aren’t I?? :D’

**Austin**: *Flip off emoji*

**Mike**: *Crying laughing emoji*
Justin: ‘Is it because Mike reeks like patchouli and it makes you gag? I’ll make him shower I promise.’

Austin: *Crying laughing emoji*

Mike: ‘Hey, I thought we were harassing Austin?!’

Austin: ‘Pay backs a bitch, bitch.’

TJ: ‘All right children, settle down. Give Jude time to realize how his life will not be complete unless he comes out with us tonight and blow’s everyone away with his mad skills.’

Jude sets his phone down with a slight grin on his face, figuring he’s read enough.

“Assholes.” He mumbles with fondness. In the back of his mind he knew they weren’t going to give up easily. That’s just not them. Hell, he wouldn’t be surprised if they come driving over here dragging him to the bar.

Jude has to admit, he really doesn’t want to miss their last night here, but does he really want to go again without Zero? Considering the issues with Austin, it just didn’t feel right.

He looks out his window at what looks to be shaping up as a beautiful day. Happy that the early morning fog is finally lifting from his brain, he starts to think about the night before, and all that transpired.

He gets up and pours himself another cup, slowly stirring in the creamer and sweetener, thoughts everywhere but at the task at hand.

“God, what was that about last night?” he says to no one, as he sits back down adjusting a bit in his seat, still feeling the remnants of their passion as he tries to find a comfortable position. “But fuck it was hot” he adds, feeling a tingle of arousal as he recalls the evening.

Jude supposes he could analyze it to death why he acted as needy as he did, but the simple fact is he needed Zero more in that moment than he needed his next breath. It felt so primal, this need to be claimed and connected to the blond. Zero didn’t disappoint, just as desperate. Whispering intoxicating words of love and desire fueling the fire between them.

He palms himself threw his boxer briefs, memories of last night causing his cock to fill out.

Still feeling wanton from the night before, he bite’s his lower lip as he pulls down the front of his boxer’s, cock springing up. He snaps a picture with his phone, quickly typing in a text and sending it off to Zero. ‘Can’t get last night out of my mind.’

Jude wonders what Zero would be doing at practice about now when he pulls up this text. A wicked grin covers his face. God he wishes he could see his reaction. Imagining the heated flush that will more than likely cover the man’s gorgeous face.

Jude stands up and puts his cup in the sink, deciding he needs to take care of his little problem. He knows what will do the trick.

He heads towards the bedroom throwing back the covers in search of the item. Finally finding it shoved in the corner kicked to the bottom of the bed.
With a sly grin Jude picks it up turning toward the bathroom. He takes off his boxers and turns the water on, stepping in he takes a moment to enjoy the hot water running down his body. Soaping up his hands and ass, he gives himself a couple of slow strokes. He leans forward against the shower tiles, imagining Zero behind him. Biting his forearm, he moans as he reaches back and starts to thrust the dildo deeply in and out of his still slightly loose hole.

Freshly showered and dressed and feeling invigorated with the glow of a newly had orgasm, Jude walks out of his bedroom.

He ambles over to the fridge and pulls out a bottle of water, downing half of its contents.

Picking up his phone once again, he leans against the counter scrolling through the rest of his unread messages.

**Justin:** ‘Free alcohol all night, how could you pass that up?’

**TJ:** ‘Hot dudes to look at too. I mean, just look at me and Mike.’

**Justin:** ‘Hey!’

**TJ:** ‘Oh yeah, and Justin too. :D’

**Austin:** *Flip off emoji*

**TJ:** “Whatever Austin. Everyone knows ur a pretty pretty princess.”

**Justin:** *Laughing emoji*

**Mike:** ‘Come on man, one last hurrah, before we all go out and play rock star.'

**TJ:** ‘It just won’t feel right not seeing you before we go.’

**Justin:** ‘As much as TJ sounds like a girl, I have to admit I agree.’

**Mike:** ‘Ditto Suit.’

**Austin:** ‘Playing with you again would start our tour off right.’

Jude sighs. And there they go, right for the heartstrings.

He reads one last text that’s not on the thread. It’s from Zero.

‘Seriously babe about tonight, you should go. Don’t let me hold you back. They’re your friends. You should spend the last night with them. Whatever you want I’m good with. xo’

This sends a warm flush through Jude’s body. He feels the love and affection coming from all these men in his life. Looking down at his phone a smile covers his face.

Well, that’s it then. How could he possibly say no?
Decision made, he quickly types and sends off two text. Earlier reluctance instantly turning into anticipation and excitement.

He walks back into his bedroom closet, pushing his hung clothes aside to pull out a long box. He places it on his bed pulling off the tape to break the seal. He carefully takes the case out, flipping open the latches. He smiles as he gazes down at the beloved guitar that he hasn’t laid eyes on in years.

Gently caressing the neck, he notices the wear and tear that’s showing from the hours upon hours he has played the instrument.

“You need some TLC, don’t you?” He says softly, as if speaking to an old friend.

Jude sits on his bed, and strums a few chords. He twists the tuners realizing it’s in desperate need of a tune-up. He does his best to get the sound right, but decides a better course of action would be to get it re-strung and tuned by a professional.

He knows exactly who can help.

Getting back up, he places the guitar back in its case. He carries it along with his keys and wallet, and heads out the door.

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Zero rummages through his duffel bag. He thinks it probably would have been a good idea to hang up his outfit for the evening instead of shoving it in the bag. The shirt and pants now a wrinkled mess. It pretty much highlights to him the importance he put on this dinner.

“Fuck.” He spats, as he tries to salvage what he can of the clothes to no avail.

“You don’t plan on wearing those out in public do you?” Terrence smirks, as he walks by Zero heading for his locker.

“Looks like I have to.” Zero responds, throwing the shirt and pants down on the bench in front of him in frustration.

“As much as I would find it endlessly amusing if you went out in public looking like a homeless person, I do happen to be fond of your boy and wouldn’t want him being seen with you looking like that.”

“And your point is?” Zero responds, barely acknowledging him, as he continues to dig through his duffel now in search of his deodorant.

“There’s an iron, and ironing board over there in that closet.” Terrence answers, pointing toward the direction with his chin.

Zero looks in that direction. To be honest he was beginning to not give two shits about how he looked tonight. Maybe they would make him go home for embarrassing them. One could only
hope.

“I’m not going out with Jude. Dinners with Silver, Pete, and Lionel.” He replies with a sour look on his face.

“Hmm. Jude hasn’t been around very much. Trouble in paradise?” Terrance says, as he slips on his pants.

“Like it’s any of your fucking business.” He replies, instantly annoyed at himself for letting Terrence get under his skin so easily.

“Easy dude, I mean no harm.” He responds, hands raised in a placating manner.

“Right.” Zero says dismissively, already done with this conversation. He decides he has too much pride to leave the clothes as is, so he heads in the direction of the closet, finding the items right where he was told they were.

Seriously…now he’s ironing for this thing? Could this get any worse?

He finishes the job quicker then he thought he would. He definitely is chalking that up as something that he’s never going to do again if he can help it.

Zero puts on his shirt and buttons it up. Then he slips on his tie, already feeling much more like a noose then a fashion accessory. He then slips on his vest and pulls up his pants and tucks his shirt in, finishing off his look.

He decides he needs some motivation for the rest of the evening, so he pulls out his phone, and opens up the earlier picture Jude sent. A fucking dick pic. The glorious picture that surprised the shit out of him, and practically gave him a coronary arrest right there on side court. He’s getting Jude back for this one.

He notices he has an unread text he didn’t hear. It’s from Jude.

‘Guess I’m having a change of heart. You’re right, they are my friends and I should see them the last night. I’m meeting them at The Redwood downtown at around 7. I’ll probably be home pretty late. I’ll miss you. Good luck tonight. Hang in there. Love you’

Zero sits down on the bench running both hands through his hair. He wants more than anything to be there with Jude tonight. Why does it seem like an invisible force is always trying to keep them apart. The last thing he wants is to miss another night out with Jude.

He sighs, as he once again looks over Jude’s last two text. With a determined clench to his jaw, Zero decides fuck it, and the consequences. Some things are just worth it. And Jude is on the top of that list.

Almost without thought, he stands up and starts unbuttoning his vest, and loosening up his tie. Undoing everything he just put together. This rebellious act giving him a new found surge of energy. He suddenly feels like his old self again, and it feels good.

He looks at his watch. He’s sure Jude has headed out to the club by now. He decides he has time to run home to change into more appropriate club attire. Tonight he wants to look damn good. He’s got a date with a hot brunette.
“Holy shit. Jude Kinkade…in the flesh!” The blonde middle aged man exclaims, as he quickly steps around the counter wrapping Jude in a warm embrace.

“Jack…it’s so good to see you.” Jude replies with a warm grin, as he leans back to get a good look at his old friend and guitar instructor.

“What the hell man?!” The older man states, now gently pushing Jude away. “You disappear out of the blue, then decide to just show up in my shop years later?! I ain’t as young as I use to be boy, my heart can’t take this kind of shit!” He grins, teasing the younger man.

“Looking pretty good to me.” Jude responds, looking the man up and down. “As a matter of fact, I’m impressed Jack. Kate’s still on you isn’t she?” He smirks.

“Damn right. Women’s a menace. After that health scare years back she won’t let up. I practically have to sneak anything decent to eat! That women’s no fun!” He groans, but with a sparkle in his eye. He’s not fooling Jude. He remembers fondly how he used to envy the great relationship Jack and his wife Kate had. They were always such a fun loving couple. Two peas in a pod.

“How are the guys? Have you seen ‘em recently?” Jack questions, old southern twang prominent. Jude grins at the familiar sound of it.

“Yeah….um, as a matter of fact that’s one of the reason’s I’m here. I’m gonna be playing with them tonight, and my guitar needs some love. Figured you’d be the perfect person to help me out.” Jude responds, reaching down to pick up his case and setting it on the counter, flipping open the latches.

Jack eyes the instrument. “This your original?” He questions. Jude answers with a nod.

“Ya ol’ sap...sure…I can fix it up.” The older man say’s, smile curving his lips. “So tonight, huh? When’s the last time you all played together?” he asks, with a quirk of an eyebrow.

“Long time…going on 7 years.”

“Well hell, I can’t miss that! I’ll tell you what. I’ll even hand deliver it to the club for you. I’d love to hear the old gang play again.”

“You’d do that!? Shit, thanks Jack. I knew I could count on you.” Jude exclaims in relief.

“I’d be happy to.” He replies with a clap on Jude’s back.

“You got time for a quick lunch?” Jude say’s looking at his watch. If they just go for a little bit, there should be plenty of time for Jack to fix up his guitar, and get out there in time.

“Hell yeah. For you, I’ll even close up shop.” Jack responds, already walking towards the front of the store to flip the ‘We’re Closed’ sign on the door.

“I know this great place about a block away. It’s a dive, but the food is awesome.” The older man says with a beaming smile, happy to be spending this unexpected time with his old friend.

“Lead the way.” Jude beamed back, throwing his arm around his shoulder, as they headed out the door.
Jude blinks as he enters the dark bar, squinting to let his eyes adjust to the sudden dimness. He glances around looking for a familiar face. The place looks pretty empty. They obviously didn’t announce the band would be playing tonight. Jude hopes it stays this way, but he knows that’s wishful thinking. Once the cat is out of the bag, he’s sure this place will fill up. At least to the capacity the Fire Marshall will allow.

Jude grins at the thought. Despite his earlier wish, excitement stirs in his belly at the prospect of playing in front of such a crowd.

As he walks further in, he finally notices Mike up on stage adjusting the height of his snare, as a man Jude doesn’t know helps him arrange the toms to their proper angle. Jude’s a little surprised, but it seems the few scattered patrons are apparently not recognizing the band setting up on stage. That may all change when Austin walks out. Being the front man, and most recognized in the band he’ll probably be the one who causes the stir.

Jude looks back toward Mike and grins. He hasn’t seen the man behind a drum set in so many years. He gets that familiar flood of nostalgia at the sight.

He doesn’t waste any time and heads right over to them, not even bothering to take the side stairs he swings his legs, hopping up on the stage with ease.

“Damn that’s one fine looking instrument.” Jude says, after he blows a long low whistle in acknowledgment.

“Jude! You made it!” Mike smiles, face lighting up.

“Yeah…sorry about that text. I…” Jude says, hand rubbing the back of his neck.

“No worries man.” Mike responds, cutting him off. “All that’s important is that you’re here!” He continues, pulling him into a quick solid hug.

Mike glances around him. “Where’s your guitar? You’re playing some songs with us tonight, right?”

“Hell yeah! Jack’s dropping it off in about…” he says, glancing down at his watch. “A half hour.”

“THE Jack?! As in…‘do as I say, not as I do’ Jack?!”

The old phrase makes Jude laugh out loud. “The one and only! Still owns that music shop off of Bay Street.”

“No shit? Jack fucking Murphy! How cool is that!”

“Tell me about it. It was great to see him! He’s coming to see us play together again.”

“Wait till the boy’s hear about this.” Mike replies.

“Speaking of, where are they?”
“I don’t know,” he says waving his hand, turning back toward his set. “TJ’s off somewhere crying like a girl…broke his fingernail or something.”

Jude laughs out loud once again at the teasing reply. God, he loves being around this again.

“I think they’re somewhere back stage. Probably practicing.” Mike continues, now busying himself once again adjusting his cymbals.

“You good here?” Jude says, gesturing towards the drum set with his chin.

“Yes, good ol’ Phil’s helping me out. I’m good.”

“Alright awesome, thanks man. See you soon!” Jude smiles, as he turns to leave.

“I’m not going anywhere!” Mike grins back.

Jude heads down some stairs toward the back of the stage. He sees a door at the end of a small hallway where some people are gathered.

He jumps off the last few stairs, excitement in his steps as he hears the far of sound of music and singing coming from the room.

Jude stops just short of entering, as an older man comes up to him. “Jude Kinkade I presume?” the man grins, holding out his hand. “Chuck Davis…the boy’s manager.” He continues, as Jude gives him a blank look.

“Ahh…right! Nice to meet you.” He responds shaking the man’s hand.

“Boy, I’ve sure heard a lot about you. Feel like I’ve know you forever. Rumor has it you got some mad talent.”

Jude looks down as a blush creeps up his face. “Thanks sir, that’s nice of you to say.” He replies.

“Don’t thank me…just what I heard. I’m gonna be watching you tonight.” The older man says pointing at Jude. “Come on in, the boys are just practicing.”

Jude’s swallows hard around the lump in his throat, nerves suddenly flaring, as he follows the man further into the room.

Why is the thought of playing for him making him nervous? It’s not like he’s auditioning for the man for fuck’s sake. But shit, Chuck Davis with Atlantic records? Shit just got real.

His nerves die down as he spots Austin, TJ, and Justin sitting off to the side of the room playing one of their newer hits.

They all spot the brunette and simultaneously stop playing.

“Glad to see you changed your mind.” Austin grins up at Jude eyes sparkling.

Jude grins back warmly. “Yeah, me too.”

“My man, you had me worried there for a second.” TJ says, standing up and giving Jude a bear hug.

“Good to see you Suit. Grab a guitar, we got some practicing to do.” Justin chimes in, attention clearly focused on the upcoming show.
Jude grabs an extra guitar and settles in next to Austin.

“Ok. Jude’s here now. Let’s pull out the old school.” Austin says, as he picks at his guitar strings. “Think you can remember No Limits?” He says, looking over at Jude.

“In my sleep.” Jude smirks, remembering the endless rehearsals when they were younger.

The band hoots and hollers before they settle down, smoothly transitioning into their sweet melodic harmony.

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Zero coolly steps out of his black Lamborghini, door closing behind him with a solid thud. He turns heading toward the club, slightly grinning to himself when he notices the attention his car has warranted.

He knows it’s an obnoxiously indulgent car, and not something he would normally bring to a place this unassuming, but tonight is different. Tonight Zero feels like pulling out all the stops. He finally gets a night out with Jude. He’s even being allowed a rare glimpse into Jude’s past, with the opportunity to meet some of his old friends.

A special occasion such as this calls for celebration, and a little indulgence.

He pulls out his phone to check the time, but realizes it’s still turned off from earlier after he sent Pete, and Adam the text explaining that he’s sorry, but some things are just more important.

He debates whether to turn it back on or not, but decides against it. He knows they’ll just be a deluge of text from the men more than likely bitching him out. He’ll deal with them later.

He also contemplates texting Jude, but instead pockets the phone. He wants this to be a surprise to the brunette.

He notices a larger crowd than usual outside of the club. He’s never seen an actual line to get into this place before. He enters the club, bypassing the crowd with a nod from the bouncer to allow his access. Being an NBA star definitely has its perks.

There’s an even larger amount of people inside as he walks into the crowded club, but most seem to be gathered in front of the live band that’s currently playing.

As typical when he walks into a room, eyes gravitate and linger on him. He even notices some phones snapping his photo in recognition.

Grinning at the attention, he runs a hand down his tailored gray blazer. Smoothing down the material that accentuates his athletic build perfectly. He glances around the dimly lit bar with no sign of Jude. He spots the bar and decides to first grab a drink before he continues his search for the brunette.

Zero steps up to the counter flagging down the bartender, and orders his drinks. There’s a palpable energy in the room Zero’s never felt here before. This band must have something to do with it, he thinks, as he taps along to the beat of the music. He remembers hearing this song last year. It’s one of his favorites. This cover band’s doing a great job of it.
Zero gets his shot, and downs it, then takes his beer and turns toward the stage once again scanning the crowd for Jude. He still doesn’t see him. He knows he’s got to be here somewhere. Maybe he should just turn his phone back on and text him.

While he decides what to do he stops to listen to the music, sitting at the bar to check out the band. He recognizes the lead singer right away. His eyebrows shoot up to his hairline, as he leans over to the bartender. “Is that the actual band up there?! In this dive?!” The bartender laughs. “Yeah, they were added last minute. Some sort of reunion going on. We tried to keep it low key, but social media…spreads like wildfire. Damn good for business though” Zero just shakes his head in acknowledgment, eyes turning back toward the stage.

He notices the broad back of the dark haired lead guitarist as he jams out facing the drummer.

He recognizes the lead singer right away. His eyebrows shoot up to his hairline, as he leans over to the bartender. “Is that the actual band up there?! In this dive?!” The bartender laughs. “Yeah, they were added last minute. Some sort of reunion going on. We tried to keep it low key, but social media…spreads like wildfire. Damn good for business though” Zero just shakes his head in acknowledgment, eyes turning back toward the stage.

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Zero stands without even realizing, jaw dropping open at the sight before him.

“What… the…fuck?” He mumbles, dazed.

“Duuude!” a man on the bar stool beside him screams suddenly, as Zero’s tilted beer starts pouring down his arm.

“Shit, sorry man!” He says, temporarily snapping out of it, grabbing a stack of napkins and handing them to the man.

“Jesus…watch it!” the man grumbles, as he attempts to dry himself off.

Zero quickly dismisses him, walking closer to the apparent hallucination in front of him.

He shakes his head. No his eyes weren’t deceiving him.

Zero is dumbfounded at what he is seeing. Somehow he’s managing to be turned on and irritated at the same time. His Jude playing guitar and singing, like a goddamn rock star.

There are very few things in this life that render Zero speechless. And dammit if this isn’t one.

When the hell did Jude learn to play guitar!? Not only learn it, but master it, Zero thinks, as he watches Jude’s long graceful fingers slide over the neck with well-practiced ease.

And Jesus…his voice. He didn’t think his boyfriend could get any hotter. He just proved him wrong.

Zero closely watches Jude. Fascinated by the comfort and ability he’s showing on stage.

He blindly sits at an empty chair close to the stage, not caring if it was being occupied by someone else. He can’t quite wrap his head around what he is seeing. Jude’s good. Really good. But when did he become a fucking member of Bubonic?!

Zero snap’s out of his daze, as the singer throws his arm around Jude as they harmonize into the shared microphone. The lead singers face lighting up at Jude like he’s the second coming.

Zero bristles as he continues to watch the interaction between the two, although clearly more attention is given to Jude from the lead singer, Austin…something if Zero recalls correctly. The man can’t seem to keep his eyes, or hands off of Jude.

Zero’s not sure why this man thinks he has the fucking right to be pawing at his boyfriend, but one
Jude suddenly sees Zero in the crowd, a look of surprise causes the brunette to stumble over the lyrics. Quickly composing himself, he gives Zero a sly grin. That gorgeous grin suddenly calming Zero’s anger, as a surge of warmth and need course through his veins.

Austin notices Jude’s mess up and follows his line of site out into the audience. Eyes narrowing slightly when he sees the baller in the crowd. Ever the professional he doesn’t miss a beat, turning his distaste at seeing the man, and the effect he had on Jude into fuel towards his performance, working the crowd like the pro he is, strutting back-and-forth across the stage making the crowd go wild.

After they play a few more songs, Jude thanks the audience, jumping off stage to rapturous applause, and heads right over to Zero.

Zero is blown away at the beautiful sight before him. Jude looks positively radiant. Glowing, as he waves in appreciation to the shouts and thunderous applause. Zero’s not sure the last time he has seen Jude this happy. The thought creating a strange mix of pride and uncertainty deep in Zero’s gut.

Jude takes a seat by Zero, large grin still spread across his face. Zero’s brow lifts to his hairline in a clear ‘what the hell was that’ fashion. The loud noise of the bar not really the best environment to start that sort of deep conversation.

Jude kisses the quizzical look off Zero’s face.

“That was fucking amazing.” Zero leans in whispering into Jude’s ear.

“Thank you.” He huffs, blush covering his checks. “Listen, I’m so sorry I never mentioned this.”

“Not here.” Zero says, giving Jude another lingering kiss. “We’ll talk later when we’re home. Here…feel what that did to me.” Zero says taking Jude’s hand and placing it on his hard cock. “I just really want to take you out back and fuck you.” Zero whispers, practically breathless as Jude’s hand squeezes him, not caring who sees them.

Back up on stage, TJ takes his position as lead guitarist, as Austin turns toward the band synchronizing their next song.

Austin walks up to the microphone. “Thank you so much. You guys have been an amazing audience tonight!” He pauses, as he waits for the shouts and cheers to die down. “We’re gonna change up the tempo a little bit, and slow it down. This is a remake we did a little while back. It’s for a certain someone. I think you know who you are.” He says, glancing over at Jude.

Zero’s brows furrow as he gives a side long glance to Jude. Arousal starting to turn to dread at this whole situation.

Austin strums the opening notes, as the band starts up with their soulful rendition of ‘Bang Bang’ by Kaleo.

Jude gulps. Why would Austin do this? It was going so well. Jude remembers this song, although he had no idea they re-did it. The lyrics will leave no doubt to anyone about their past relationship. So much for his fucking word. Telling the whole world about their past is not keeping it just friends.

Jude’s so caught up in inner turmoil he doesn’t even have the energy to care that Austin is
practically coming out in front of him and this live audience, not to mention the millions that will soon see it plastered all over social media.

What is he trying to gain with this?

For a few seconds Jude actually contemplates fleeing with Zero. But no, he can’t. He won’t. It’s time to face the music, in more ways than one. Jude has put off telling Zero about this whole situation for too long, and now it’s about to blow up in his face. This isn’t really the way he wanted it to be, but he guess’s he somewhat deserves it.

He steels his nerves, taking Zero’s hand in hopes to calm him once the song plays out and Zero inevitably realizes its meaning.

Austin made no illusions to whom he was singing the song. Looking in Jude’s direction, singing it right to Jude. As if no one else is even in the audience.

Zero’s hand slips from his as he sits straight up in his chair. The determined set to his jaw, and glare he’s sending Austin making Jude’s pulse rise in dread.

Austin belts out the last chorus and the audience erupts in thunderous applause. Word obviously spread who was playing tonight. The place now filled to capacity.

The band exits out the back of the stage giving Zero and Jude some much needed time to themselves.

Zero turns towards Jude pausing as he visibly tries to control his emotions. “So I’m gonna take a stab, and guess that’s the old friends. And I’m gonna take another stab and guess that some of them weren’t just friends.”

Jude looks down at his hands taking a deep breath nodding his affirmation.

“Just one was more than a friend…Austin.” He responds, finally finding his voice.

“Austin? The guy who couldn’t keep his hands off you earlier? The fucker who basically didn’t notice anyone else existed in the room but you during that last song?”

Jude just huffs, shaking his head. “He and I were a long time ago Zero, and we’ve both moved on.” Jude figures that’s at least half the truth.

“I don’t think that guys moved on Jude.” He says unavering.

Jude doesn’t even try to argue. The evening definitely playing out to the contrary.

“Doesn’t matter. I have.” He say’s earnestly. He takes hold of Zero’s hand once again.

“Is this what last night was all about?” Zero says reluctantly, not really sure if he wants to hear the answer.

“No.” Jude replies, shaking his head. “It’s just…it’s all been a bit overwhelming.” He says glancing down at their entangled fingers.

“What has…us?” Zero says, swallowing thickly.

“No…just, seeing them again. Old memories and feelings resurfacing.” Jude answers.

“Old feelings…?” Zero says, once again releasing Jude’s hand. Trying but failing to keep his
emotions in check.

A waitress approaches interrupting their conversation, she set’s a bottle of Jude’s favorite whiskey down before them along with two glasses. “Compliments of the band. They also wanted me to tell you to meet them upstairs in the VIP section.” She grins, leaning in a little too close to Zero for Jude’s liking. “Stairs are over that way.” She motions with her head, eyes lingering on the blond, as she throws him a wink before turning to leave.

Jude grits his teeth. Jesus, what the fuck is in the water tonight!?!

Zero pay’s her no mind, as he picks up the bottle. “Peace offering?” He questions, eyebrows raised. “He’s gonna have to do better than this. But I will enjoy drinking this whiskey though.” He says, twisting off the cap and pouring two fingers worth into both of their glasses.

He raises his glass in the air for a toast. “May we have the hindsight to know where we’ve been, the foresight to know where we are going, and the insight to know when we have gone too far.”

“Zero, I did not go too far with...”

“Come on...” he interrupts, chair scrapping across the floor as he abruptly stands up. “Let’s go meet your friends.” He grabs the bottle turning in the direction of the stairs.
“Goddamn stubborn son of a bitch,” Jude mumbles under his breath, as he watches Zero walk away.

The bouncer waves them through as they approach a dimly lit stairwell leading up to what seems to be a quieter VIP section of the bar.

There’s voices and laughter as they reach the top of the stairs. They glance around taking in the new setting, surprised at what they see. The area is large, and much nicer than expected. The room has a pool table in the center, with a bar surrounded by brick lining the entire back wall. The low light and candles that are scattered about give off a relaxed almost romantic ambience.

There’s a splattering of people throughout the area. The band is surrounded by a group of women, probably cherry picked from the crowd. Jude notices Austin sitting alone on a leather couch paying no attention to the small group standing close by. Rolling the ice around in his almost empty drink, staring into it like it carries the secrets of the universe.

Zero gets the attention of a red headed waitress as she walks by. “Do me a favor, hold onto this for me.” He hands her the bottle. “Sure thing,” she replies, grinning sweetly at him, carrying the whisky back toward the bar.

Zero pauses before they go any further, turning to look at Jude. Big blue eyes full of emotion making Jude’s heart melt, and earlier frustration vanish.

“Let’s try this again…” Zero says, taking a deep calming breath. “I really don’t want to ruin this moment for you. I know how important it is. It’s damn sure more important than me throwing a selfish fit.”

Jude swallows around the sudden lump in his throat, feeling warm all over at Zero’s sudden change of heart.

“Come on…introduce me to your old friends,” Zero says lovingly, as he holds out his hand for Jude to take.

“Yes… ok.” Jude smiles warmly, taking Zero’s hand and squeezing it, as they turn to walk toward the group.

“Well lookie here…look who’s finally joined us,” Mike says, as the two approach.

“Holy shit, if it isn’t the Zero man himself!” TJ suddenly exclaims. Obviously delighted to finally meet the baller. “My dude, you’re legendary!” He says gripping his hand and giving Zero a half hug like he’s known the man for years.

The gesture has Zero grinning from ear to ear. And just like that any lingering tension was lifted. God, Jude loves TJ.

“Suit’s told me all about you! Man, it’s good to finally meet you!”

“Suit?” Zero asks with a smirk, eyebrow quirked.

“Well you know Jude’s always’ been the brains of this tribe,” TJ grins. “It’s a nickname that just stuck,” he shrugs.
“Sounds about right,” Zero smiles proudly at Jude.

“Who knew it’d be like a prophecy or something. Bet you have fun taking those suits off him huh?” Justin adds wagging his eyebrows.

“What the fuck Justin!?” Jude states, mortified by his friend’s comment.

“I sure do,” Zero replies with a smug grin, unfazed at the question.

“Alright assholes… I’d like you to officially meet my boyfriend. Zero this is TJ, Mike, and Justin. Guys this is Zero,” Jude says, beaming.

“Awww… look at you all smitten!” Mike teases Jude with a little shove.

“Shut up!” Jude replies, cheeks turning red, as he shoves him right back.

Zero bites his lip. Enamored with his boyfriend’s playful behavior. It’s plain to see how special these guys are to Jude. He’s suddenly very relieved that he decided to get his shit together before meeting them.

They all shake hands, but of course that’s not enough for TJ. He tells Zero as much, pulling him into another hug, but this time it’s one of his infamous bear hugs.

Zero laughs at the man’s over exuberance, as he tries to gather the air back in his lungs.

“Jesus Austin, you too good for us or something? Get over here man,” TJ says, turning towards the singer who’s now casually leaning back on the sofa, arm draped over the back, eyes glaring at the scene before him.

“Didn’t want to interrupt the love fest,” Austin replies sarcastically. He drains the rest of his drink, then sets it down on the table before he slowly stands.

His eyes soften, as they focus on Jude. “Listen… about the song, I…” Austin says, but Jude holds up his hand to stop him from continuing.

“Let’s not talk about it now Austin. What’s done is done.” For the sake of everyone in this small vicinity, Jude feels it’s best not to even go there right now.

Austin nods quietly in agreement. “You were great out there tonight Jude. Reminded me of the old days. Still a natural on stage,” he says, blatantly ignoring the fact that Zero is standing just a couple feet away from him.

Jude looks down cursing silently at his propensity to blush. “It was pretty amazing,” he replies.

Zero gets that uncertainty once again churning in his gut. He slips his arm around Jude’s waist, pulling him closer.

Jude clears his throat, pulse quickening at what he’s about to say. “Austin I’d like you to meet my boyfriend Zero. Zero… this is Austin.”

Austin’s eyes slowly glide over to Zero. Earlier softness instantly hardening as they narrow in on the blond.

The two silently size each other up, neither of them offering their hand, or saying a word.

Jude gulps, so much for the tension being lifted, he thinks, anxiety increasing with every second
“Well, ok then…” TJ nervously laughs. “Drinks on me everyone!” He shouts out, pointing in the direction of the bar.

That had its intended effect, and cleared everyone out pretty fast. Free drinks tend to do that.

Everyone but the three.

Before he leaves, TJ rest his hand on Jude’s shoulder leaning in. “I’ll be right over there if you need me,” he whispers. Jude nods, still focused on the two stubborn men in front of him.

The tension is so thick between them. Jude feels sweat building at the base of his back.

It once again strikes Jude how similar the two are. Both beautiful, talented, and stubborn as hell men. Highly skilled Alpha male’s at the top of their game. Each achieving high respect for their accomplishments in their industry.

If the situation were any different Jude could see them becoming fast if not competitive friends. Unfortunately the situation is not different, and they are currently looking at each other like one of them is not getting out of here alive.

It’s Zero who finally relents. As much as he wants to pound the guy, he can’t let Jude down now.

“It’s good to meet Jude’s friends” he says with a little nod of his head. Keeping the comment obscure, not mentioning which friends he actually enjoyed meeting.

“Oh we were a lot more then friends, but I’m sure you already know that.” Austin replies, with a cocky smile.

Jude’s jaw drops open slightly, in total disbelief at what Austin just said. He feels the way Zero’s body tenses up beside him.

Zero’s jaw clenches. So the bastard wants to play that game. He doesn’t know who he’s messing with. He grins, but there was nothing kind in the expression. “Yeah, well that was the last thing on our minds when we were fucking last night.”

Austin doesn’t miss a beat. “You sure about that player man? I think it’s safe to say I’ve been around him a lot more lately then you have…and he’s barely mentioned you,” he says with a smirk, eyes glaring at the blond.

Jude hears a low growl come from Zero, as he takes a small step forward. He’s flabbergasted at what is transpiring before him. Words seem to be caught in his throat.

“You’re delusional if you think you’re gonna get Jude back with your little declarations and whiny songs,” Zero spats, inches from Austin’s face.

“Watch me,” Austin replies barring his teeth.

“Austin Black!” a voice booms beside them making all three men flinch. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing!?!” Jack shouts, putting his hand between the two of them, slightly pushing at Austin’s shoulder.

“How about you man up and stop treatin’ Jude like he’s a Goddamn possession. Shit…the both of you!” he growls, stepping back a little glaring at the two men. “I’m just waitin’ to see which one of
you pee’s on him first to mark your territory!”

Mike guffaws, reappearing behind the small group, “God, have I missed you Jack!”

“Jack?” Austin says dazed, expression turning from anger to surprise in an instant. “What the hell…?”

Jude’s relief is palpable at seeing the older man. If there’s one man on this earth Jude knows Austin respects, it’s Jack Murphy. Back when they were young, their old guitar instructor bailed Austin out of trouble more times than he can count. When no one else supported him and his dreams, the older man always had his back, never giving up on him. Not to mention the countless gigs he would help the band out with, lending his truck and a helping hand, always being the voice of reason when things got a little too out of control.

Looks like another thing that hasn’t changed.

“Yeah it’s me all right. Can’t say I’m too happy to see you right now. Doesn’t look like you matured much since the last time I saw you!”

Zero gets a triumphant grin on his face.

“Same goes for you boy! Talking about Jude like he’s not even here! Show some respect! Zero’s face falls at the words of this man apparently everyone knows but him. Seems to be a common theme lately, Zero thinks, grinding his teeth.

“Young lady,” Jack calls out to the red haired waitress walking by. “Why don’t you go ahead and grab that bottle of whiskey blondie here handed you earlier and bring it on over…actually bring another one too while you’re at it. I’m gonna need a whole lot of assistance talking sense into these boys.”

“Absolutely,” she says with a raise of her eyebrows and a knowing grin, “Reinforcements on their way.”

“Why don’t we all have a seat boys?” Jack says gesturing to a table off in the corner away from the noise and prying eyes.

“Before I open a can a whoop ass on you!” He adds more aggressively, when Austin and Zero don’t budge.

Jude wonders what the blonde’s reaction will be to this unknown man bossing him around. Zero allows very few people to tell him what to do. He’s paid millions to let Pete get away with it. And Jude, well he’s been given the privilege of Zero’s love, and he trust him enough that it usually doesn’t get to the bossing stage. Jude swallows hard, sending a prayer upstairs that this all goes well.

Zero eyes the older man, pausing as he watches Jude and Austin wordlessly follow the man’s orders. He’ll be damned if he’s gonna allow this asshole to boss him around! Does he know who he is!? There’s only two men Zero will take orders from. One because he has to, and one because he wants to.

He watches as Jude suddenly stops, turning towards him as if he was hearing his thoughts. Jude reaches out his hand, eyes pleading for Zero to join them.

And just like that, Zero swallows his pride, unable to deny Jude anything.
He takes his hand and follows him toward the table and chairs where the other two men have already settled.

Sitting directly across from the singer, Zero glances up at him. The man looks properly chastised, yet there’s still a current of defiance running through him. Zero knows that stance well having been in a similar position with Pete and the press on several occasions. Zero also knows that stance means you’re not going down easy. Zero lifts his chin slightly, ready for whatever comes next, grip tightening around Jude’s hand.

Austin tenses as the two walk hand in hand and sit down across from him and Jack. And fuck if it didn’t twist up his guts. He knew he would have a hard time seeing them together but what he didn’t expect was for his reaction to be quite so swift and intense. The first words out of his mouth taunting the blond.

Austin knew he had to do something after seeing them in the front row looking like they were about to devour each other. The hot burning jealousy that suddenly tore through him forced out any rational thought. Playing that song was the first thing that came to mind. God, will Jude ever forgive him?

He scrubs a hand down his face bracing himself for whatever is thrown his way, but still feeling pretty unsure he will be able to control his emotions.

“I may be over stepping my bounds here, but frankly I don’t give a shit. Austin, I’ve known you and Jude since you were kids, and I can’t believe you would cause such a scene. What the hell is going on with you boys?” Jack asks, suddenly breaking the tense silence.

“I think I’m the one who should answer that,” Jude responds, done with being silent.

All eyes fall on the brunette. Jude sits up straight, hand slipping from Zero’s as he nervously runs it through his hair.

“I…” Jude croaks out, voice raspy. He tries again, clearing his throat. “You really want to know what’s going on Jack?” he continues, not looking at the older man, but directing his attention right at Austin.

“Basically, I just learned Austin’s word is pretty much shit. He promised me that being friends was enough for him. And that he wanted nothing more than for me to be happy.”

“Jude…” Austin says, swallowing hard. “Please listen to me…”

“Let him finish.” Zero responds sharply, eyes narrowing on Austin leaving no room for debate.

Jude rest his elbows on the table, leaning forward towards the brunette. “I told you Austin that if you can’t just be my friend, then you can’t be in my life. You told me that keeping my friendship was the most important thing to you. Obviously that was all bullshit! It’s the same shit I had to deal with when we were younger. Never knowing what to believe or not to believe.”

“No Jude. You got it all wrong. It’s nothing like it used to be when we were younger.” Austin replies, eyes wide and sincere.

Jude laughs, but it’s cold and cynical. “Right…”

“I would never treat you that way again. If I had you, I would never let you go…” Austin pauses, closing his eyes to brace himself for what he’s about to say. He opens them, eyes locking with Jude’s.
“Because I’m in love with you Jude Kinkade.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Sorry for the long wait! Hopefully it will be worth it. There should be just one more chapter after this. This has been a lot of fun writing! I know Jude has a new love interest on the show, but for me it will always be Jude and Zero. Please note additional tags have been added. Hope you enjoy! Feedback is very appreciated!

“The Fuck!?” Zero shouts, chair flipping backwards from him abruptly standing. Austin mirrors the blonde’s actions, seemingly anticipating his reaction.

“Whoooah now…” Jack says holding up his hands in a placating manner towards the two men. “Think about your next move here. If you touch him Zero, the press will have a field day. None of you need that.”

Zero’s blood is rushing in his ears. He barely hears what the older man is saying to him. He’s coiled like a snake ready to pounce. All his anger, fear, and insecurities came crashing to the surface just from those eight words. All he wants to do is reach over and pound this guy to a bloody pulp, but God…what if? What if Jude is in love with him too? He feels an ice cold rush run through him at the thought.

Jude feels his heart pounding. He looks between the blond and the brunette. Austin now standing in defiance against Zero. Both looking ready to attack. How did such a fun night turn out so fucked? As much as he feels Austin may deserve it, he doesn’t want to see either of them get hurt. He stands reaching out toward the blonde.

Zero feels a hand touch his arm gently. “Gideon.” Jude says looking over at the man, eyes pleading. “Don’t…please…”

He looks into his lover’s worried eyes. Causing a scene is the last thing Zero wants to do, especially with the distress it’s causing Jude, but the blood is surging through his veins and his heart is practically beating through his chest. He needs to get himself under control…now.

Zero recalls a calming technique he learned back during one of his many required therapy sessions when he was in and out of juvie. It always helped re-center him when he started to feel out of control.

He takes a deep breath, glancing down at the mahogany table, he looks at the glasses set on it, the flickering candle in the center. He then imagines touching the softness of the napkin, the cold glass of the ice water, and the hardness of the wood. He listens to the sounds around him, the laughter in the background, and Linkin Park blaring from the speakers. He smells the faint smoke of the candle, and the musky fragrance of his cologne. Finally, he recalls the lingering taste of the whiskey on his tongue.

Successful in its effect, he feels a calmness come over him, as his fist unclench. Using all his senses he feels grounded again, back on earth and in this room, Jude by his side. The pounding in his chest has subsided, and the swish in his ears now a dull sound.
“Zero…?” Jude asks, worry in his voice, when the silence stretches out.

Now feeling more in control, Zero turns toward Jude. Sincere blue eyes meeting brown. He knows he probably should drop this for now for everyone’s sake, but he just can’t. He needs to know. “Jude…? Do you…” He stops, licking his suddenly dry lips. “Do you feel the same?”

Jude looks wide eyed at the blonde, taken off guard. Why would Zero ask that!?

“I…” he starts, unsure how to convey all the jumbled thoughts trying to come out of his mouth at once. “I…” he tries once again. Of course he’s not in love with Austin, but he holds an important part in Jude’s past, and now present, and for that he loves him and probably will always love him. But nothing or no one will ever compare to Zero. Zero is the love of his life. Jude has so much to say on the matter that he doesn’t even know where to start, and the words once again get caught in his throat.

Zero slightly recoils, unable to believe Jude is stumbling over the answer. Shouldn’t it be simple? He glances over at Austin as the brunettes lips slowly spread into a victorious smile.

Zero feels the walls closing in around him. He needs air.

He stumbles back, heart sinking. “I’m out of here.” He says turning on his heels, and heading for the stairs.

“Zero!” Jude calls out. He feels as if he’s having an out of body experience as he watches Zero rush toward the exit. When his brain finally kicks into gear Zero is nowhere to be seen. Without so much of a glance back at the two other men he quickly follows behind.

The waitress approaches the table tentatively, cautiously anticipating another eruption. Almost dropping the platter with the bottle and glasses that she was carrying in her hand, when Jude whisked by her.

“Why don’t you go ahead and pour that for us darling,” Jack states blowing out a long breath as he flops back in his chair, practically speechless at what just transpired.

“Make that a double please. And Austin, why you don’t have a seat son…we need to talk.”

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So much for calming down, Zero thinks, as he practically runs out of the bar, hands slightly shaking from the adrenaline pumping through him.

He swears if he was there one more second he was gonna wipe that smirk permanently off that fuckers face. He can’t believe he controlled himself. His old therapist would be fucking proud.

He knows deep down though that’s not the full reason he didn’t tear Austin’s head off. He could give two shits about Austin and the press that it would have garnered. He controlled himself solely because of Jude. He knows Jude would care. Both about the press, and about…shit…Zero thinks
scrubbing a hand down his face as thoughts instantly go back to the reason he fled the bar in the first place.

He walks down the sidewalk, needed to get away from the small crowd gathered around the front of the bar.

He slips into a dark alley leaning against the rough brick. Needing the quiet solitude to pull his thoughts together.

He tilts his head slightly gazing up at the clear night sky, letting out a long breath. The beauty and allure of those far away celestial objects always centering him and putting him in his place. The real stars of the universe, he thinks, not the contrived self-inflated egomaniacs here on earth, inhibiting the planet for a millisecond of time.

God, is that what he’s done? Drove Jude away because of his drive to stardom and fame? His relentless pursuit to push himself to always be better, do better. Not giving enough time and energy to the things in his life that truly matter?

Zero thinks back to the past few weeks and months. Sure he and Jude have had some time together, even some great times, but if he was being honest it’s been work and its demands that have taken precedence in his life. How could he be such a fool? Letting the most incredible man slip through his fingers right before his eyes?

“Gideon! Jude’s voice suddenly echoes through the darkness. “Gideon!” his voice calls out again, this time tinged with concern.

Jude frantically looks around, trying but failing to control his rising worry. He saw Zero’s car in the parking lot, he knows he’s around here somewhere.

Zero hears the scruff of Jude’s shoes coming closer. He watches as Jude stops at the opening of the alley, looking around frantically, but still not seeing Zero.

“Where are you Gid?” Zero’s heart melts, when he hears Jude’s soft anxious plea.

“Right here.” He replies, voice raspy with emotion.

Jude whips around towards the alley. Relief floods his face, but soon concern replaces it when he realizes Zero’s tucked away in a dark alley.

“Why are you back here?” Jude asks, walking up to the blond, trying but failing to make eye contact. Zero looking anywhere but at Jude.

“I needed to be alone, and calm down before I got behind the wheel.”

“Ok.” Jude nods, placing his hand gently on his arm. “Can we go home now?”

Zero swallows hard, not budging. “You never answered my question.” Zero responds, eyes finally meeting Jude’s.

“Are you really serious with that?” Jude says exasperated. Zero doesn’t reply, just looks down at his feet, jaw clenching.

“How could you doubt the way I feel for you?” Jude replies, inching closer to the blonde.

Zero feels the sincerity pouring from Jude, but it still doesn’t explain the man’s earlier hesitation.
“I’m not even sure how to say this... listen, I do love Austin.” Zero’s heart skips a beat, as he stands up straight silently braces himself. “But I’m not in love with him…I don’t think I ever really was. Infatuation sure, especially when we were younger, but in love? I don’t think I even knew the definition of that until I met you.”

Zero can’t help himself, the relief at hearing those words fill him with such emotion he falls back against the rough brick. He huffs in relief, swiping at his eyes, as the following silence wraps those loving words around him.

Jude steps closer to the blond cradling his face in both hands. He wipes a tear with his thumb, heart swelling for the man before him.

“God, my beautiful boy, when will you realize no one will ever compare to you.” Jude whispers, breath picking up, as his thumb gently caresses Zero’s pink swollen lips.

A fissure of hot desire skitters down Zero’s spine. A sudden hot aching need almost overwhelms him. His eyes darken with desire as they lock with Jude’s.

It’s almost as if someone presses the fast forward button, belts clank open, zippers come down, and pants are quickly shoved down and out of the way.

All rational thought has left Jude’s mind. Right now he doesn’t care that someone could walk right around the corner and see them, hear them. Let Austin see for all he cares. Then maybe he’ll finally understand what Zero does to him, the mad passion Zero entices in him. Right now all he cares about is feeling the blond inside him. This burning desire surges beyond his boundaries of any restraint or caution.

Zero pushes Jude roughly against the brick wall. Jude lets out a slight gasp that Zero quickly crushes with a searing kiss. The baller’s large capable hands hold and press Jude against the wall, as he bites and kisses his way down his neck.

The contrast of Zero’s soft plush lips and needy bites make Jude burn up with need. His cock pressing hard and heavy between them.

“God you feel so fucking good…” Zero huffs, as he rubs his equally hard cock against Jude’s, pulling a long low moan from the brunette.

“I want to fuck you.” Zero whispers into Jude’s ear.

“Yes, please.” Jude replies without hesitation.

Zero’s brain melts at those words, as he turns Jude around rubbing his hand over the firm roundness of Jude’s ass. Zero bites his lip at the gorgeous sight before him. He gives it a hard slap causing Jude to beautifully arch his back in a clear invitation.

“Need you,” Jude moans, as Zero goes to his knees, kneading Jude’s ass as he separates the firm globes.

Zero doesn’t hesitate as he plunges his tongue inside. Kissing and prodding Jude with his tongue.

Jude gasped open mouthed, rolling his forehead against his arms pleasure surging through his body. He pushes back wanting Zero’s hot prodding tongue to go deeper...deeper.

“Oh my God…” Jude moans half out of his mind. The fact Zero is doing this to him outside in public, adding to his mad desire.
Zero pulls back, lost in a daze of lust as he adds a finger, feeling Jude’s hot warmth envelope it. Jude nearly sobs, fucking back into Zero’s finger rolling his hips and moaning with each thrust.

Zero adds another as Jude cries out at the intrusion. Zero pauses as he peppers soft kisses along Jude’s lower back mumbling into his skin. “Are you OK baby, did I hurt you?”

“No…more…please” Jude barely croaks out.

Zero removes his fingers, spiting into his palm as he slicks himself up, nestling between Jude’s legs. He leans in slowly pushing into Jude’s tight heat. Jude’s fucked out cry echoes down the alley.

“That’s it baby, take it all,” Zero gasps when he finally bottoms out, lips once again licking and biting along the back of Jude’s neck.

With every inch Jude felt himself stretch open, sending tingles down his spine. He feels so open, so exposed out in public. The thought practically making his knees buckle beneath him with desire.

Zero starts thrusting and rolling his hips, setting a brutal pace that sets Jude’s nerves on fire. Jude matches him thrust to thrust, fucking back on Zero’s cock, pushing, needing. The loud slap of their skin enhanced by the enclosed walls of the alley.

Zero grasps Jude’s hips, angling Jude perfectly to hit the small bundle of nerves deep inside him.

Through his haze, Jude hears a distant strangled cry. It's clearly not the man above him, who is lost in Jude’s heat mumbling something intangible against his back. He turns his head slightly, quietly gasping as his eyes lock with another.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

This story has taken on a life of its own. This will not be the last chapter. Probably 1-2 more to go. Sorry it's taken so long! For those of you still interested, thanks for hanging in there. Feedback is appreciated! :)

Austin crossed his arms across his chest, as he leans back in his chair. Defiantly glaring at Jack from across the table.

Jack pauses as he set’s his glass down in front of him. He closes his eyes, taking a moment to savor the taste of the fine whiskey he just poured down his throat, and to pull his thoughts together.

“You can glare at me all you want, won’t change the fact that you were actin’ like a jack ass a few minutes ago.”

Austin scoffs, sitting up on the edge of his seat. “Like I give a shit what player man thinks?”

“Maybe not…” Jack replies, eyes meeting his. “But apparently you care a whole lot what Jude thinks.”

His eyes turn soft at the mention of the brunette. Thoughts of the man running off in chase of Zero making his heart sink.

“Yeah…yeah I do.” Austin responds, voice raspy.

“You’ve got to accept reality son, he ain’t yours.” Jack says, slamming his hand down on the table a little harder then he intended.

“No…I won’t Jack,” Austin replies, shaking his head. “Mark my word,” he continues with eyes that could cut glass. “I know deep in my gut that man will break his heart. I know his type, because I am that type! Zero really doesn’t know what he has…not like I do. I think I fell for him the day I saw him moving in across the street, but I was young, and too stupid and self-absorbed to know what any of that meant, even when I actually had him. That won’t ever happen again.”

“You’ve always been a stubborn son of a bitch, but this takes the cake.” Jack says exasperated.

“This isn’t being stubborn Jack, or me having some spoiled fit.” Austin says as he pulls his shirt up revealing a tattoo.

Jack leans in to look closer at the intricately designed art over Austin’s heart. It’s a red heart, with parts torn and shattered from it, a thin weave of thread haphazardly trying to sew it back together, but the break is too big. The black initials of J and K brokenly lay on the remaining pieces.

Jack swallows hard. There is no way to misinterpret the meaning of that tattoo.

“I’m sorry Austin. I had no idea.” Jack replies, sincerely shocked at the depth of Austin’s love and heartbreak. He truly didn’t have any idea. He thought they were just a teenage fling.
“I’ve tried and thought that maybe…maybe I was over him. I knew I wasn’t, but with the band getting signed, and so busy it just became easier and easier to act like I was. I knew he moved on, I read all about it online. But when I saw who he was with…” Austin stops, shaking his head.

“When it happens Jack. When he breaks his heart…I’m gonna be there for him.”

Once again Jack flops back in his chair, speechless.

“You could be an old man still waiting on that Austin. Doesn’t seem all that fair. Closing yourself off like that to findin’ someone else.” Jack says, when he finally finds his voice.

“There is no one else Jack.”

Jack blows out a big breath. He hates the inevitable heartache Austin is setting himself up for…again. He’s always thought of him like a son. But he knows firsthand once this boy has his mind set on something, there’s no turning back.

He scrubs his hand down his face a couple times. He’s too old for this shit, he thinks to himself, but he knows he has to say this even though it will probably hurt Austin.

Jack leans forward gently resting his hand on the younger man’s forearm, hoping to soften the blow. “If you truly love him Austin, you will leave him alone and let him be happy, and be with who he loves.”

There’s a long pause, as Austin’s stares at his hands, eyes lowered. He slowly starts to nod his head.

“I know,” he says so softly if Jack didn’t see his lips move he would have thought he imagined the response.

Jack leans back with a sigh. He picks up the bottle that’s sitting between them, and pours the amber liquid into two glasses.

“My friend…what whiskey will not cure there is no cure for.” He quips, placing the drink in front of Austin, as he raises his own up between them.

This gets a slight smirk out of the singer, as he slowly picks up the glass inspecting the contents. He gives a halfhearted salute before he takes a drink. He feels a sense of much needed calm come over him, as the alcohol slowly course through his veins.

“Thanks Jack.” He says, setting the glass back down in front of him. “You have this uncanny knack of always being there for me.”

“What are friends for? Besides, I had to catch up on some lost time,” He responds with a grin. “But don’t think I forgot about you leaving me in the dust all these years!” He points at Austin, mock serious.

“Never will happen again.” Austin replies with a fond spark in his eyes.

TJ decided to stay on the outskirts of the action, and watch the whole scene play out from the distance of the bar. Of course he would have been there if he was needed, but for the most part the situation looked under control. If more of them would have got involved it would have only
exasperated the situation.

He couldn’t hear exactly what was being said earlier, but if body language was anything to go by, he’s shocked it didn’t end with the two men bloody on the floor. But he knows how much that would have upset Jude, and that’s probably the reason they held back. He thinks about the hold the brunette has on both Austin and Zero. Millions of music, and basketball fans obsessed with the two of them, and Jude has them wrapped around his finger. Fucking stud, he thinks smirking to himself as he approaches the table.

“Mind if I join you?” he says to the two men, who for the first time this evening look somewhat relaxed.

Austin looks up towards TJ as if he’s surprised there’s anyone else in the bar.

“So, you finally decided to join us? Thanks for all your help there TJ.” Jack says snidely.

“Hell…nothing you couldn’t handle Jack,” he replies to the older man taking a seat right by him.

“You alright?” He says, looking over at the brunette.

Austin’s eyes narrow on TJ, as if he’s really thinking about his response. “Been better.”

“Listen…I don’t pretend to know what you’re going through, considering the deepest I’ve gotten with a girl is what to order for dinner, but it will get better man, I swear.”

Austin just blinks at him. He has to give TJ credit, he does try, but unfortunately he’s done talking about it for the evening.

“You know what…I think I’m gonna get out of here.” Austin says, abruptly standing.

“Good going TJ.” Jack remarks, quickly glancing over at him.

“Dude, I didn’t mean…” TJ sputters.

“Let me have the keys.” Austin says cutting him off, as he holds out his hand.

TJ digs in his pocket, but hesitates. “Can you drive? I can take you back to the hotel.” TJ asks, looking down at the drink in front of him.

Austin huffs, “I’ve only had two drinks…and they were hours apart…and mom” He replies aggravated, just wanting to get the hell out of the bar.

TJ tosses him the keys, but with hesitation.

Jack grins at their exchange. It’s just like old times, always looking out for each other. It’s like they’re transferred back in time, not famous musicians who could summon a driver and a limo at their beck and call.

“Let me know if you want us to come back earlier.” TJ calls out to his retreating back.

“I’ll be fine,” Austin replies, throwing them a wave without looking back.

Austin doesn’t hesitate and abruptly heads out the door, ignoring the gasps and stares that accompany him along the way. He’s had enough of this clusterfuck of a night. He could care less if fans think he’s being rude because he won’t give them the perfect selfie. The only person on his mind is Jude. God, but the man was beautiful when he was on stage with him. The only good part
of the evening.

He heads down the sidewalk toward the parking lot, happy he’s not getting the same attention outside of the club as he did inside. He’s just about to approach the front of a dark alley way when he hears moaning. He stops short, thinking it’s probably some animals in heat. He curiously peaks around the corner before he’s in full view.

What he sees almost make his knees buckle. It’s Jude moaning in ecstasy as Zero pounds him from behind. He’s crushed with sudden desire, dizzy with how fast his blood rushes south. His heart rate suddenly picks up along with his breath as his eyes laser focus on where Zero has entered Jude. He can’t deny they’re beautiful together, but fuck he wants it to be him…feel the brunette’s insides gripping his cock…

Without much more thought he undoes his belt buckle, and pulls down his zipper. Cock almost painful with how hard it is.

He ignores the lingering voice in the back of his mind reminding him what the headlines would say if he was caught. Public exposure…some sort of pervert. He doesn’t care. With Jude making those noises writhing on a cock right in front of him, how is he supposed to think straight? Fuck the tabloids, and its consequences.

Austin slides more into the shadows at the lip of the alley to get a better view. He leans back against the wall, in case his legs give out from the sight before him.

He has to hold himself back from his burning need to slip around the front of Jude and fall to his knees, taking Jude’s cock deep in his throat, to choke and gag on it as he’s pounded from behind.

He feels feverish as the moaning, and relentless slapping of skin echoes down the alley and through the walls of his brain. He strokes himself faster, orgasm suddenly slamming into him, he can’t help but cry out.

Jude’s eyes turn toward the sound. He lets out a gasp at what he sees. Austin leaning against the wall, pants open hand around himself staring straight at Jude. Jude bites his lip as a wave of heat rips through his body as he watches Austin bring his hand up to his mouth licking off his come, tongue laving over his thick fingers, half lidded eyes never leaving Jude’s.

Jude feels on fire, almost high from being the focus of desire of these two men. Jude pushes back against Zero making his intention known, he wants it deeper, faster.

Austin’s gaze feels like a physical caress. How long has he been watching them? Fuck if this isn’t hitting more kinks then Jude even knew he had. He leans back slightly, stroking his fist up the length of his cock. Let Austin watch, let him see who Jude belongs to. The thought sending another shiver of desire skittering down his spine.

“God…yes. Harder baby. Harder,” he groans eyes never leaving Austin’s.

“Fuck yeah,” Zero mumbles as if in a daze, as his hips pull back and slam against Jude over and over again.

He watches as Austin’s hand slips down to once again work over his cock. He moans as he strips it fast and dirty.

“Who owns my ass?” Jude says breathless, as a shudder rips through his body.

“I do. I own it.” Zero growls back, jack hammering into Jude.
As a singer in a popular band, Austin knows he’s been exposed to more sexual adventures then the average person, but fuck if this isn’t the hottest thing he’s ever seen. He’s so close to coming, as he rotates his hips thrusting harder into his hand, imagining it’s him slamming into Jude causing those beautiful sounds. Sounds he hasn’t heard in so many years.

“I’m gonna come.” Jude says, the intensity of it all sending him over the edge. His muscles tighten and body constricts as his orgasm rips through him. He watches through a haze as Austin jerks and comes at his words. Zero stills gripping his hips, cock pumping its load into his ass.

Heavy breathing replaces the sounds of pleasure as they all come down from their euphoria.

Austin finds it in himself to stand, pulses still running through his body from the most intense orgasm in years. He looks down briefly as he wipes his hand on his jeans as he attempts to pull himself together.

Zero falls back against the rough stone, taking the brunt of Jude’s weight with him.

“Jesus,” he says, as he kisses Jude’s shoulder. “That was...”

“Amazing...” Jude pants, leaning his head back against the blond. Jude suddenly feels an overwhelming feeling of guilt come over him. He enjoyed it. Every bit of it. And he’s not really sure how to process that.

Zero gingerly pulls out of Jude. He feels energized, as if he won a championship game. There was an explosive current of electricity running through their lovemaking that he doesn’t always feel. And God it was hot as fuck. They may have to risk public sex more often.

Austin remains in the shadows for a few heartbeats. The now tender gestures between them piercing his heart, and making him want to flee. He’s relieved the blond apparently didn’t see or hear him. He knows the outcome would have been much different if he had. His eyes quickly devour Jude from head to toe, as if to sink this sight into his memory before he slips away, leaving as quietly as he came.

“Hey...you ok?” Zero says, suddenly worried he took things too far when Jude doesn’t meet his eyes.

“Yeah... I’m good.” He responds glancing off to the side.

Zero follows Jude’s gaze to an empty space in the alley.

“I think we’re in the clear babe. I don’t think anyone heard us. If they did, I guess there’s no question about who belongs to who, huh?” the blond says with a smirk, as he fastens his belt buckle.

Jude startles at that. Surely he’s kidding? There’s no way Zero would have tolerated that...right?

“Come on. Let’s get out of here.” Zero says wrapping his arm around his shoulder.

Jude feels bone tired. Nerves frayed from the emotional roller-coaster of the day. He wants nothing more than to go back to their home, just the two of them, and not think about anything else this evening.

Jude leans into his embrace. “Yeah...let’s go home,” he replies, burrowing into the warmth of Zero’s embrace.
Chapter 12

This is long overdue. Life has been pretty crazy, but I could not give up on this story. Hopefully there are a few of you out there still interested! Looks like this is not the last chapter after all. Hope you enjoy. Comments and kudos are appreciated!

They got home late last night, emotionally exhausted from the high adrenaline of the evening. Jude had no trouble falling asleep, ready to put the day behind him. Zero on the other hand couldn’t settle the thoughts bouncing around in his head.

Much of Jude’s past was finally revealed to him that night. It was all so much to take in. But what he can’t get out of his head is why did Jude keep it from him? Does he not feel secure in their relationship to share his past with him? TJ, Mike, Justin, Jack, and of course fucking Austin. So many people in his life that mean so much to Jude, yet Zero knew of none. There were many questions that were answered last night, yet so many still remain.

The one thing that was clear to Zero is that these guys love and respect Jude. They were tight even after all these years, and had a history that Zero doesn’t share. Jude was positively radiant when he stepped off that stage. He never saw Jude so in his element. Is that what Jude really wants to do? Who is Zero to keep him away from something he loves so much?

Zero sighs as he glances over at the clock. 6:16 am. Looks like he’s not getting any sleep after all. He settles back on his pillow staring at the ceiling.

Even with all these jumbled thoughts there’s another thing that was clear to him about that night. There was no faking Jude’s expression of love and lust that he showed Zero in that alley way. There’s no doubt in his mind that Jude loves him…but is he enough for him?

Zero looks over at Jude, spread out on his stomach. Gorgeous tan back and strong shoulders laid out before him.

Zero decides he wants to put these thoughts to rest for now. The brunette is here with him. In his bed. Not anyone else’s. The risk he took last night in the alley giving himself over to Zero like that was amazing. And that means something.

And Goddamn if it wasn’t the hottest thing Zero has felt in a long time.

The blonde leans up on his elbow, taking his finger and gently tracing down his lovers back, watching in fascination as goosebumps appear on Jude’s skin. The act causing Jude to stir in his sleep, body unwittingly moving toward the enticing touch.

Zero slowly pulls the sheet down revealing the round curve of Jude’s ass. Zero smiles at the sight, softly tracing over the warm mound of flesh. Jude squirms, legs slightly parting almost anticipating Zero’s next move. He drags his finger down Jude’s crack, lips replacing his finger as he softly nips and licks his way up Jude’s back.

He just had the man a few hours ago, but his mouth is practically watering with anticipation at
having the opportunity once again.

Jude’s eyes flutter open, as he feels a warm sensation in his groin. He spreads his legs in invitation as warm full lips kiss lower and lower down his back.

“Mmm…yeah…” He moans out, voice low and raspy.

“Morning baby…” Zero mumbles into Jude’s skin, spreading his legs a little further as he positions himself behind Jude.

Zero pulls apart Jude’s ample cheeks and flicks his tongue at his lovers opening, still red and a little swollen from their earlier lovemaking.

“Hope I wasn’t too hard on you last night. Are you sore?” Zero says softly, honestly concerned he was too rough on Jude in the throes of passion, and without the proper lubrication.

“Not really.” Jude’s deep voice rumbles back.

Taking it slow, he laps and licks at the area, cock hardening from the sounds coming from the brunette. Jude starts a slow and steady grind down into the mattress then back into Zero’s tongue.

“God…yes…” Jude groans.

“Lift up a little…” Zero says, softly smacking Jude’s ass.

Jude complies, raising slightly up on his knees so Zero can take hold of his cock from behind.

“Perfect,” Zero says as his large hand starts to milk Jude’s cock.

Zero laps over Jude’s hole, wet tongue dragging over the rim without pushing in as Jude groans into the sheets.

The blonde runs his tongue down to his balls to the top of his spine before returning to once again circle Jude’s rim.

He points his tongue as it enters Jude, wiggling it along the way causing guttural noises to pour out of Jude.

“Fuuuck…” Jude moans in ecstasy.

He lets go of Jude’s cock, slowly pushing in two fingers dragging over his prostate, tongue slipping in between.

“Oh God…yes! Fuck…Gideon!” Jude cries out taking hold of his cock jerking furiously.

“You gonna come for me baby?” Zero growls, pulling his tongue out as he watches his fingers sink in and out of Jude relentless on his prostate.

Jude seizes up unable to find the words before he’s crying out his release.

Zero continues his punishing pace with his tongue and fingers watching his lover ride out his orgasm.

“Fuck.” Jude pants collapsing boneless on the bed.

Zero pulls back with a playful swat to Jude’s ass.
“What about you?” Jude asked, as he rolls onto his back reaching out toward the blonde.

“No, that was for you. We’ll get to me later.” Zero responds with a grin as he stands to get a towel for Jude.

He comes back gently wiping up the spurts of come on Jude’s chest and stomach and discarding the towel on the floor.

He slides up next to Jude pulling the covers up to their waist.

Jude rest his head on Zero’s chest lazily drawing patterns on his flat stomach.

“They say morning sex boost your immune system.” Jude chuckles.

“Oh do they? Like we need any reason.” Zero replies with a smile.

“What I want to know is how sex is always so amazing with you? I didn’t even get off and I feel so relaxed.”

“Because we were meant to be.” Jude responds with a kiss on Zero’s chest.

“You always know the right words to say.” Zero says lovingly leaning in to inhale Jude’s scent.

“I don’t know about that,” Jude scoffs. “I sure didn’t last night.”

And just like that all of Zero’s worries, and anxieties come rushing back.

Jude notices Zero’s sudden silence.

“Are we gonna talk about last night?” he says softly, leaning back on his pillow to meet the blondes eyes.

“Can’t I have coffee first?” Zero snarks.

“It’s fine if you don’t want to talk about it now.” Jude responds casting his gaze down, trying to hide his sudden rush of disappointment at once again putting off a much needed discussion.

“Hey…I was just kidding.” Zero says sincerely, resting his hand on the brunette’s arm as he starts to turn to get out of bed.

“Of course we can talk about it now. Shit…it’s been all I can think about.”

Jude sits against the headboard, turning back towards the blonde.

“I didn’t get much sleep last night.” Zero states, when Jude gives him a questioning look.

“Yeah, I know that was a lot to take in.” Jude replies taking Zero’s hand in his when he scoots up to sit beside him.

“But hey…little did you know you were sleeping with a musician.” Jude says, wagging his eyebrows.

“That definitely is an upside.” Zero replies with a crooked grin.

Their gazes fall to their clasped hands. Zero squeezes Jude’s hand, mustering up the courage for his next words.
“You really were amazing on stage. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you happier.”

“Yeah, it felt really good to be up there again.” Jude responds, remembering clearly the rush of playing once again with his old band.

Zero runs a hand down his face a couple times, once again steeling himself for an answer he may not want to hear.

“Is that what you want to do? Do you want to re-join the band and tour with them?” Zero questions, internally proud of himself for saying that without any guilt or accusation in his voice.

“That’s the million dollar question isn’t it?” Jude answers with a sigh. “I’m not gonna lie Zero. I thought about it. A lot.”

“Seeing the boy’s again drudged up some serious feelings that confused me.” Jude whispers. This is one of those moments Zero concludes, that he needs to be stronger then he actually is. For Jude. Going into a jealous rage right now would do no one any good.

“What’s confusing you?” Zero replies, wondering if Jude can actually hear his pounding heart.

“I agree with you. Being on stage I’m in my element. Besides having sex with you I haven’t felt that rush of adrenaline in fucking years. Picking up my guitar again, shooting the shit with them, hell even seeing Jack was like finding something precious I lost that I didn’t even realize I was missing.”

For Jude, Zero repeats in his head. “Does that include Austin?” Zero says around the lump in his throat.

“Austin?” Jude huffs. “He’s a whole other story. There was a lot of unresolved issues going on with Austin. Yeah, he did confuse me too. I wasn’t ready for any of it, Zero. I didn’t want any of it.”

Jude replies passionately.

The blonde grips the sheets with his other hand, anchoring himself in the moment so he doesn’t flee the scene like all his instincts are telling him to do.

Zero nods in response silently urging Jude to continue, afraid if he opens his mouth he’s not sure what will come out.

“You have to understand,” he continues, still holding onto Zero’s hand. “Yes he’s good looking and talented, and yes, I love him. But Gideon, it’s because of our past and the role he played in my life. The key word in there is past.”

Jude pauses looking deep into his lovers eyes. “I’m not in love with him. He’s not nor will he ever be…you.” Jude states the last word with emphasis, hoping he’s conveying the depth of his feelings. “The fact he’s not over me is something he has to deal with, not us.”

Zero visibly relaxes, squeezing his eyes closed as relief washes over him.

“And what about the band?” Zero whispers.

“The boys will always hold a place in my heart, but…the life I’ve built, my job I love, being here with you, that’s where I belong.” Jude smiles, feeling at peace with the decision he finally made.

Zero sighs, mirroring Jude as a grin spreads across his face.
“Trust me, that’s exactly what I wanted to hear, but it seems a shame to hide away that talent of yours. Especially now that I just got a little taste of it.” Zero states with a flirtatious nudge to Jude’s thigh.

“Oh it doesn’t mean I’m not ever gonna play again.” Jude replies with a mischievous grin, loving how the flow of this conversation has changed course.

“Jack mentioned that he knows some guys looking for a lead guitarist for part time gigs. And…I’m really thinking of taking them up on it. No tours or big obligations. Just some local stuff here and there.”

“Oh yeah? I get to fanboy and watch my sexy man on stage? Sounds good to me.” Zero replies, as he leans in for a slow kiss.

“Come out on a date with me.” Zero says softly as he pulls back slightly from Jude’s lips.

“An actually date? We haven’t had one of those in…”


“Yes an actual date, where I get to treat my beautiful boyfriend.”

The smile that spreads across Jude’s face makes his answer clear.

“That sounds wonderful.”

“Yeah and we can take Pete up on his offer and make it a three day date.”

Jude gives him a quizzical look.

“Pete told me to take a few days off with you…get laid, it would do me good.”

“He did not!” Jude replies with a burst of laughter.

“He did! I guess I wasn’t hiding my worry as well as I thought I was.” He chuckles. “That is if he isn’t still pissed off at me for blowing off the commissioner at dinner.”

Jude tilts his head as he listens, realizing a date where they can just talk and catch up is exactly what they need.

“I think we have a lot of catching up to do.” Jude says sincerely.

“I think you’re right.” Zero replies with a kiss to Jude’s hand.

“But for now, I think a hot shower is in order.” Zero says, after he exaggeratedly sniffs at himself.

“Yeah, definitely… by all means, lead the way…” Jude responds with a flick of his wrist. “I like the view from back here.” Jude winks.

“You like the view huh?” Zero repeats teasingly as he stands, leisurely stretching with his backside toward Jude.

“I might need a little bit of help soaping this up.” The blonde says with a grab to his firm ass.

“Fuckin’ hell.” Jude states, practically drooling over Zero’s athletic body.
Zero yelps as Jude leaps after him, laughter echoing off the tiles as they stumble into the bathroom.

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Zero blows out a big breath as he heads down the long hall, almost in disbelief with what he just got away with. He somehow Jedi Knighted his way through the front desk up to the penthouse, laying the charm on thick and heavy to get what he wanted. The women at the check in desk didn’t stand a chance. He even somehow convinced her not to call them up first because being the NBA star and great friend and all that he is, he wanted to surprise them. Worked like a charm. Sometimes he even amazes himself with his dazzling abilities. He chuckles as he imagines Jude rolling his eyes at his audacity.

Feeling a renewed energy and confidence from seamlessly overcoming that obstacle, he confidently strides up to the mahogany door.

He told Jude there were a few things he needed to take care of before their date tonight. Jude, needing to run by the office himself to pick up some things, didn’t question it. He doesn’t feel that he is keeping this from Jude necessarily, it’s just that sometimes there are things you just need to do for yourself. And this is definitely one of those times. He needs this for both the closure, and clarity he hopes it will bring.

He hears the faraway buzz of an electric guitar as he lifts up his hand pressing the doorbell.

“Is that the door!?” Mike asks, screaming over the shrill of TJ’s guitar. “Who the hell are we expecting?”

“Yup, sounds like it.” TJ replies after he stops playing for a few seconds to listen to the chime ring a second time. “I’m not expecting anyone.”

“Oh I’ll get it your highness…don’t you worry.” Mike snarks, lifting his hands up in surrender as he gets up off the couch when TJ shows no signs of budging.

Mike saunters up to the door, hoping there’s some good alcohol included in the room service Justin, or Austin apparently ordered.

What he absolutely did not expect was the tall cocky baller staring back at him from the other side of the threshold.

“Zero.” Mike finally croaks out. It’s not that he isn’t happy to see the blonde. It’s just the last time Austin and him occupied the same space, let’s just say…things didn’t go so well.

“Is Jude with you?” Mike questions, sending up a silent prayer that the brunette was with him. If anything to keep the two men in heat over him in check.
“Nope…just me.” Zero replies with a slight grin. “May I?” The blonde continues gesturing inside the penthouse.

“Oh yeah…sorry.” Mike states after he realized he was pretty much standing there gawking at the man.

Zero let’s out a long low whistle as he looks around. “Nice digs…so this is where rock stars stay.”

“Oh…probably a lot like where NBA stars stay.” Mike responds with a crooked grin, the blonde’s easy going nature settling his nerves.

This gets a laugh out of Zero. “True…true.” He replies nodding his head.

“Nope! My dude!” TJ shouts as he appears from the other room, seemingly not sharing the same concern as Mike with Zero’s sudden appearance. “Welcome to our humble abode.”

“Welcome to our humble abode.” TJ states, taking a seat across from Zero, as he picks up his acoustic guitar plucking at the strings.

Mike side eyes TJ, wondering what the hell he’s been smoking. The man seems to be oblivious to the fact that Austin is a room away, and could walk out here any minute. Zero may not want a drink, but he sure as shit could use one. He heads right over to the liquor cabinet pouring himself two fingers worth of whiskey.

“I really appreciate that man, thanks.” Zero says sincerely. “I just never got a chance to properly express my appreciation for your show last night. You guys were amazing. First time I was able to see Jude up there, and all I can say is that it was pretty electrifying to witness.”

“Glad you enjoyed it dude.” TJ replies with a smile. “We were all pretty charged having Jude back. He rocked it. It’s like he hasn’t even been away all these years. And I haven’t seen that level of performance from Austin in a long time…Jude always knows how to ignite that fire in him.”

Mike coughs as the whiskey goes down the wrong pipe. Goddamn can TJ be dense, he thinks, as he tries to gulp air back in his lungs.

“You all right, man?” TJ says, concerned. Mike doesn’t even justify that with an answer, as he sends a glare his way.

Zero clenches his jaw, TJ reminding him of the other reason he is there. He decides to ignore the younger man’s remark, he’ll save his reply solely for Austin who currently is MIA.
“Yeah, Jude always has been the level headed one who held us together in the old days. It still surprises me that we’ve managed to do it this long without him.” TJ says, continuing to softly strum his guitar providing background music to their conversation.

“Ain’t that the truth?” Mike says, taking a seat next to TJ. The alcohol doing a nice job of relaxing him. “He always had an uncanny ability to connect with all types of people…and he was able to put up with the three of you.” He smirks shoving at TJ’s shoulder.

“Pfft, and you were such an angel. I distinctly remember around…oh I don’t know…2011,’12, at that crappy local festival we played, you decided to drink a gallon of Jägermeister and graffiti ‘Clown College…apply within’ on that other band’s car. Jude had to pull out all his mad skills to get us out of that shit!”

“They were a bunch of clowns.” Mike says, chuckling as he recalls the memory.

“Luckily they didn’t take us to court like they wanted to, and all we had to do is re-paint the damn thing!” TJ states, trying to but failing at holding back his amused expression.

A grin spreads over Zero’s face, as they banter back and forth. Loving the fact he gets to hear these old stories. He can definitely see why Jude is such good friends with these guys. Their fun, casual presence belies their meteoric rise to fame. There is no air or pretense, unlike the majority of NBA players he associates with. He has no doubts why Jude would want to be part of it. He’s just reminded once again how lucky he is Jude chose him.

“Speaking of boy wonder, where is he?” Mike asked.

“He had some things to do…and so did I” Zero responds, looking down at his hands. “Listen guys, I’m sorry about the shit that went down last night. I want you to know that any issues that I may have with Austin doesn’t have anything to do with you. It’s between the two of us.”

TJ puts down his guitar, resting his elbows on his knees. “In most circumstances I would say, you fuck with one of us, you fuck with all of us.”

Mike glances sharply over at TJ, wondering where he’s going with this.

“But with you.” TJ says, shaking his head. “You’re different man. I see how much Jude loves you, and how much you love him. Austin…he can be a stubborn son of a bitch. I love him and all, and I know he’s always had it bad for Jude…” he stops once again shaking his head. “I agree it’s between you two, but…I think he may have overstepped his bounds here.”

“Besides, I consider you a friend.” TJ says sincerely.

“As do I.” Mike agrees, raising his glass between them.

Zero feels a warm sensation through his body at their declaration of friendship. He agrees, and he says so.

But that feeling quickly evaporates when he hears the bedroom door swing open.

Austin walks out, hair damp and towel slung low on his hips. “Chuck, why are you bitching at me? Why haven’t you called one of the guys, I’ve been in the shower! Can you just make it work? You know we need those extra two day in the studio. Do whatever you need to do.” Austin hangs up on their manager and tosses the phone on the bar.

“Does anybody answer their phone around here? Apparently Chuck’s been trying to get a hold of
us and no one is answering.” He barks, looking at his two band-mates.

Their wide-eyed looks make Austin pause.

His eyes slowly glide and narrow in on the man sitting across from the two.

“How the hell did you get in here?” Austin spats, looking down at the blonde.

“And hello to you too.” Zero replies with a smirk, as he rises from the couch.
Thanks to all of you who have hung on with this story. I just realized I started this over a year ago! The longest I have ever taken to finish one. I guess you can say it's been a crazy year, but I just love writing about these two and just can't seem to give them up! For those of you still out there, I'm a little sad to end this, but I hope you enjoy the last chapter! :)

Zero coolly eyes the brunette, as he stands to his full height. He sizes up the singer's half naked body in front of him. There’s no doubt he’s good looking. He can see why Jude was attracted to him. The thought makes his stomach turn.

He takes slow even breathes, casually taking two steps toward the man. He has every intention to do this as civilly as possible.

Unfazed, Austin glances around. “Kind of surprise you’d show up without Jude to hide behind. Did he finally get sick of your shit?”

Zero grins, but it’s anything but kind. Man, does this dude get under his skin. He pulls his resolve from deep within to not hulk smash the guy.

“Nah, he just needed to rest up from fucking all night.”

Austin’s face falls at those words, visible color rising up his neck.

Zero smirks, knowing full well what caused that reaction.

Austin runs a hand through his damp hair as he clears his throat in an obvious attempt to pull himself together.

“Why are you here?” the brunette finally says, voice raspy.

Zero shrugs. “I guess you could say we have unfinished business.”

“I don’t have any business with you.” Austin huffs.

“Stay away from Jude.” Zero states matter of fact.

“You don’t own him Zero. Jude’s a big boy, he can make his own decisions.”

“Exactly…and he chose me. I just wanted to make sure that was crystal clear.”

“Uh huh…” Austin chuckles, as he steps closer into Zero’s space. “You know we’re not much different…you and I.” He states gesturing between the two.

“It’s all fun, sex, and rock n roll, or rather fun, sex, and hoops. But when shit goes down…when it gets real, we’re out of there faster than you can say long term commitment.”

Zero bristles. Hands unconsciously clench at hearing his deepest insecurities laid out before him.
“Mark my word baller, it’s just a matter of time that you leave Jude in the dust, and trust me…I’ll be there to pick up the pieces.” He says with a smirk.

Fuck it…at least he can say he tried. Without missing a beat Zero’s long arm swings around, fist smashing into Austin’s face.

The singer tumbles back in surprise, but somehow manages to stay on his feet. Hand quickly grabbing the knot of the towel at his waist to keep it in place.

Zero’s chest is heaving, he vaguely hears someone call his name behind him.

He glances over at the two other men in the room that he forgot were there. TJ’s arm is blocking Mike from intervening, worried looks on both of their faces.

This somehow brings Zero back to his senses, his breathing becoming more even.

Austin slowly wipes the blood off his mouth, intensity in his eyes giving away the conflicting emotions going on inside. “I guess I deserved that…but let me make this crystal clear,” he says taking a step closer to the blond. “I’ll allow that only once.”

Zero responds with a nod of his head, feeling anything he says will only add fuel to the fire.

A trickle of blood drops and falls on Austin’s broad chest. Zero’s gaze can’t help but follow it, suddenly feeling contrite at being the cause.

Zero’s eyes widen as the blood traces over an intricate tattoo of a shattered heart that he earlier barely acknowledged.

Austin notices where the blonde’s eyes have focused. He unconsciously rubs at his chest suddenly feeling very exposed. Blood smears across his chest, adding a macabre sense of realness to the ravaged heart.

“Is that…?” Zero stops, pointing to the tattoo. “JK…Jude Kinkade?”

It’s not like the man doesn’t know how he feels for Jude, he’s made that perfectly clear. But for the baller to finally see the true depth of his feeling’s and heartache, throws him off.

“Yeah…” he finally whispers, and just like that all the tension between them evaporates.

Zero realizes right then and there that they truly are not so different after all. Acknowledges that there can be more than one person with deep feelings for someone. He can’t imagine the pain of losing someone like Jude. Never seeing him again, or feeling him in your arms. Having that permanently taken from you…the thought alone makes him feel hollow inside. He feels an odd pang of sadness for the brunette that he’s not sure where to place.

Zero vows from that moment on he is going to spend every day of his life making sure Jude knows and feels the depth of his love.

“Listen…I know Jude had a life before me…and that you two will always share a history, but this is his life now. I love him more than I have ever loved anyone in my life Austin.” he’s not sure why it’s suddenly important that the man understands this. “I would never ever hurt him.”

Austin doesn’t know if it was the punch in the face, or Jack’s earlier harsh words. Jude’s not his… and he has to face that reality. Still doesn’t mean he has to like it though, and he’s not going down that easy.
“Don’t think this changes the way I feel. I’ll always love Jude, and will be there for him if the time comes…but…I want him to be happy. And right now, you make him happy.” He says, voice raspy.

Zero appreciates how hard that probably was for Austin, and decides to take that as the olive branch that it was meant to be.

Zero nodes his acknowledgement, as he slowly reaches out his hand to the singer.

Austin eyes the stretched out hand, reluctantly taking it in his own. He knows that they will probably never be friends, but they can at least be civil.

The handshake was quick, but poignant. Declaring a silent truce between the two hard headed men.

“Woa! Damn, I need a smoke…and I don’t mean a cigarette!” TJ quips behind them, making the two men slightly jump. “That was fucking intense!”

This makes Zero chuckle, and he notices an amused glint in Austin’s eye. Got to love TJ.

At this point, over staying his welcome is definitely an understatement. “Well, I think I probably should be going…boys…” Zero nods over at TJ, and Mike, “It was great to see you again.”

“Man, it was so awesome to see you too!” TJ quickly answers, his response a little too enthusiastic if Austin’s stink eye was anything to go by.

“And Austin, sorry about the…” he says, gesturing to his own jaw.

“Barely felt it.” the singer smirks.

Zero grins back, relieved he can already joke about it.

“Oh and one more thing Austin.” Zero says, turning back toward the group before he reaches the door.

“Hope you got your fill back there in the alley. Cause that will be the last time I will let you watch us have sex.”

The color drains out of the brunettes face, as the shocked looks of his bandmates fall on him.

If the circumstances were different Zero would have burst out laughing as TJ’s eyes practically bulge out of his head.

“See you later, boys!” Zero turns, and heads out the door.

“Duuuuude….whaaat?!” Mike responds simultaneously with the closing of the door.

“Spill the motherfucking tea man!” TJ laughs out, right behind Mike, “You got to watch them have sex?! Ok, shit… you got to tell me all about Zero!”

Austin’s glare could melt steel.

“What?! Come on, you have to admit the guys fucking hot! And talented…Jesus! I bet he’s hung too!” TJ excitedly states.

“Jesus Christ! I’m out of here!” Austin huffs, turning on his heals towards his bedroom.

“No way are you getting out of telling us about this!” TJ calls out to the slamming of the door.
“Dude, wait until Justin hears about this! He’s missing all the fun. Jude is a kinky motherfucker!” Mike exclaims, as him and TJ bump fist. “Who knew he had it in him??”

“It’s those quiet, intellectual types. They’re freaks in the sack, I’m telling you.” TJ says, plopping down on the plush couch. “I remember this blonde in Phoenix on our last tour…all buttoned up and proper…but maaaan, I barely came out of that alive.”

TJ brightens up as a thought dawns on him. “Wait a minute…do you think Zero would let me watch?!” he says ducking as a barrage of couch pillows come raining down on him.

“Not a fucking chance.” Mike snorts.

“A boy can dream.”

“Keep dreamin’, man.”

Jude hears a loud plop as two magazines are unceremoniously dropped on his desk. Already knowing who the culprit is by the scent of her perfume, he doesn’t bother looking up.

He glances down inspecting one of the headlines, ‘Sorry ladies, but it looks like Austin Black of Bubonic just came out of the closet!’ He pushes the first magazine aside checking out the other, “Is the charming Jude Kinkade rocker Austin Black’s long lost lover?!”

Expression emotionless, he goes back to his typing. “That’s nothing, have you seen social media?”

“Austin Black!! This is the Austin you were talking about!? How could you keep this from me!? The man is a God!”

“I didn’t keep it from you! You practically forced it out of me! I’m not sure I could have been any clearer…Austin, rock band, signed, about to go on Nationwide tour….” he huffs.

“Yeah, but who would have thought it was them! THE Austin Black is your childhood friend, the very one who you used to play music with, and had a relationship with!? Shit, now I’ve heard it all.” She exclaims, as she flops down on the chair in front of his desk.

“Show’s how much you listen to me.” He smirks.

“Oh, I listen to you, and if I recall I gave you good advice. Although if I would have known it was him, I would have altered it a bit. You could have given him my number, ease his pain.”

“Slow down cougar, did you not read the headlines?” He says with a chuckle.

“Ugh, why is it always the good ones? This should become a national day of mourning!” She states dramatically.
Jude can’t contain his eye roll. “Trust me, I know he looks good, but he’s not the best to have a relationship with.”

“Holy shit...” she says, suddenly sitting up straight. “How did Zero deal with this! There’s no way he handled it well!”

Jude leans back in his chair, arms crossed in front of him.

“No...he didn’t.”

“You ok?” she questions, taking in Jude’s suddenly closed off demeanor.

He shrugs. “Yeah, it’s been an interesting week to say the least. Zero, he’s coming around. Not sure how he’s going to handle being dragged in the middle of it though.”

“Nothing for him to handle...he’s got the prize.”

“Oh, I’m a prize huh?”

“Two of the hottest, and most talented men on the planet seem to think so.” She beams. “Lucky dog. And you know what...? I agree.”

Jude can’t help but blush at the compliment.

“There is one thing that’s clear from all of this.”

Jude raises his brows, waiting for her to continue.

“My Jude likes the bad boys.” She teases.

He contemplates her comment. “They are pretty hot. Much better than those tie and stuffy suit guys.”

They both burst out laughing at the irony.

There’s a soft rap on Jude’s door.

“Come in!” Jude calls out not really giving much thought about who’s on the other side.

It slowly swings open revealing the last person Jude expected standing at his office door.

“Hey.” Austin says with a shy grin. “I hope I’m not bothering you.”

Jude hears a strangled squeak from Lionel.

“Austin.” He says standing from his seat. “No...no not at all, come in. I’m just surprised to see you here. How did you know where I work?”

Austin gives him an amused look. “Jude, everyone knows where you work. But...I texted Zero and he gave me the heads up that you’re probably here catching up on a few things.”

Jude tries to contain his shock at hearing that. Zero gave him the heads up? The trust that Zero is showing from that small gesture gives him a warm feeling all over. He’s not sure what happened, but he’s not complaining.

Lionel loudly clears her throat.
“Oh…yeah, Austin this is Lionel. She’s my…”

“Friend.” She says quickly before he can say mother in law. She coyly extends her hand out to the singer.

“Austin Black…here…” she giggles. “You’re so great…I mean, it’s so great to…ah…to meet you…I love that thing that you do…your music…I love your music! You have a very talented body…voice! You have a very talented voice!”

Jude bites his lip, trying to contain his laughter. He has never seen the calm, cool, collected Lionel stumble all over herself. He is so giving her shit for this.

“It’s nice to meet you Lionel.” Austin replies taking her hand in his, charming as ever.

“The pleasures all mine.” She purrs batting her long thick lashes, finally pulling herself together.

“Have a seat.” Jude says to Austin, gesturing to the chair.

“I think I’d rather stand, if that’s ok.”

“Of course.” Jude replies, a little surprised, but going with it.

“I think I should probably…” Lionel say’s pointing to the door.

“Ok, I’ll call you later.” Jude states.

“Take care, Lionel.” Austin says, flashing her a megawatt smile.

She nods stumbling a little on her way out, eyes never leaving Austin. Oh God…he is never letting her live this down.

“Would you like something to drink?” Jude asks.

“Nah, I’m good.” Austin replies, wanting to be completely clear headed during this conversation.

Jude walks around to the front of his desk sitting on the edge. “I’m having déjà vu…” he states, arms crossing in front of him.

“Yeah…I keep fucking up, don’t I?” Austin say’s sadly. “Jude…I know I disappointed you last night. I’m not proud of the way I acted. I let my emotions get the best of me. I seem to do that a lot…” he huffs.

Jude silently nods, letting the man continue.

“I had some people…try to talk sense into me, and it’s made me do a lot of thinking. I realize now your love for Zero…and…his love for you. You never looked at me the way you look at him Jude.” He says shaking his head. “I know now how happy he makes you.” He continues with a slight smile, but there’s sadness in his eyes. “I had no right putting the two of you through that. I’m truly sorry.”

Jude stands up from the desk walking closer to the singer. “I’m not gonna lie…last night…I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to get over it. You just keep throwing these curve balls. And your whole thing with Zero was almost the last straw. But… then it dawned on me that you’ve just recently accepted yourself, accepted who you really are. I’m the only one you’ve ever truly opened yourself up to. The only one who knows the real you. I can understand why you’re having such a hard time moving on.”
“I think this is a new chapter for you Austin, in so many ways. I know you’ll find love again when the time is right, now that you’re open to it, or should I say open to the possibilities. I can’t abandon you right now.” He grins, shaking his head. “You need support now more than ever. You need your friends by your side. And first and foremost that’s what we are.”

“So…apology accepted. I meant what I said. I still want to be your friend, if that’s possible.”

Austin’s smile is genuine now. He can’t believe the forgiving heart of the man standing in front of him. Him getting this second, or is it third chance with Jude is a gift he won’t be fucking up anytime soon. He’ll always love Jude to his core, but true love means that you want nothing but the best for that person. And right now, that’s Zero. Although it is a hard pill for him to swallow, swallow it he will…for Jude.

“This time when I say it’s possible, I mean it…” he responds, relief evident in his voice. “And I think you may be right Jude.” He swipes at the moister in his eyes. “I know I have some soul searching to do.”

Jude puts a hand on his friends shoulder, comforting him. “Just remember you’re not alone.”

“Thank you Jude…that means a lot.” Austin answers with a sigh.

“I’m sure you’ve seen all this?” Jude states, hand dropping to his side, as he gestures towards the two magazines sprawled on the desk.

“The day of reckoning is upon me.” The singer responds when he glances down. “But…yeah. It’s time I’m honest not only with myself, but everyone else. It actually feels really good. No more hiding. Sorry I got you in the mix though.”

“Nothing I can’t handle. Not like Zero and I haven’t been there before. By this point, he can handle the press in his sleep.”

“Yeah, Player…Zero, he’s all right.”

Jude’s taken aback by that comment and quick correction of the derogatory nickname he had for the baller, but he only lets it mildly show. There’s something he doesn’t know, but it seems like those two men in his life somehow, somewhere in this short time made a truce. Who says miracles don’t happen?

“Yes he is.” He responds with a grin.

“What happened to your lip?” Jude finally says, noticing the large cut when the man first walked in.

“Oh, nothing…just cut myself shaving.” The singer answers quickly, making Jude doubt his sincerity.

Jude looks at him skeptically, but doesn’t say anything further.

“So Jack’s coming with us on tour.” Austin states, quickly changing the subject.

“What? Seriously!?"

“Yeah, he’s joining us for part of it, roadie, sound man…you know whatever extra help we need.”

“What about his wife?” Jude asks.
“She’s going with us!”

This gets a genuine laugh out of Jude. “That’s awesome!”

“Yeah, old guys so excited, he’s even temporarily closing down shop.”

“Damn, I better hear all about it!”

“Oh you will. Trust me, Jack’s gonna do some bragging.”

“We’ll be in the studio for the next several days then we’re heading out.” Austin says a bit solemnly.

“I know. I’m sure you’ll have some killer songs coming out with all this recent angst fueling you.” Jude says, leaning on that old familiar teasing the two always shared.

“That’s no lie.” Austin huffs. “At least I’ll get compensated for it somehow.”

“You know anytime you change your mind about playing with us, you’re welcome to. It’s not just me in the band, the guys would love it too.” He says staring down at his feet. “No strings attached.”

“I’d like that…maybe sometime in the future when you all are back in this area.”

Austin doesn’t answer he just looks back up, deep into Jude’s eyes. Taking him in as if it was the last time. Small wistful smile on his face, silently saying goodbye.

“Take care of yourself Suit.”

“You too Austin.” Not able to help himself, Jude pulls the older man in for a warm hug.

They pull back, both affected by the brief contact and the accumulation of emotions over the past few days.

Their eyes meet and lock. The singer nods, seemingly coming to a conclusion before turning and silently walking out the door.

Jude watches the man walk away, straight back and proud. This won’t defeat Austin, Jude knows. He’s taken so many knocks in his life, and always came out on top. He’s stronger then he gives himself credit for. One more thing he has in common with a certain baller he knows.

Jude’s relieved the older man didn’t bring up the encounter in the alley. While Jude knows both he and Austin were affected, he sees no reason to analyze it. The physical part between them has never been the issue, he’s never denied the attraction he has always had to Austin. But, it’s not enough, it was never enough. He’s at a point in his life he wants the whole package. Fulfillment in his heart, mind, and body. A package that Zero delivers.

Jude knows the singer will always hold a place in his heart, but he’s not the one who stole his heart away.

Instantly his thoughts turn toward the blonde. Jude looks down at his watch. Shit…has he seriously been here that long!?

He shakes his head clearing it from the emotional fog, and walks over to his computer. He quickly finishes off and sends an e-mail to Pete he started earlier, thanking him for giving Zero the time off. He hopes that will smooth over any hostility the man may be harboring for Zero’s dinner diss
with the commissioner.

He feels his phone buzz as he closes his laptop. He once again glances at his watch, tempted to just ignore it so he can finally start his evening with Zero. He decides he has a few minutes to spare pulling it out of his pocket.

Happy he did, he grins down at his phone. Speaking of the devil.

He swipes his phone, Zero’s smiling face fills up his screen. “There you are, I was beginning to think I would have to come over there and drag you out.”

“Not a chance!” He beams back. “I was just about to get the hell out of here.”

“Perfect. I was thinking maybe we could hang out at the house for a little bit, before we head out to dinner.”

“Sure, we can hang out, got something in mind?” he says biting his lip, thinking of the glorious possibilities.

“Well, you know I’ve got this guitar here…and now all I need is a certain someone to play it for me.” The blond replies pulling his phone out to angle down the length of his body.

Jude almost swallows his tongue at the sight before him.

Zero’s naked sitting on their couch, Jude’s guitar casually laying across his lap covering certain parts of his anatomy.

“Damn…” Jude whispers.

“What was that?” Zero teasingly asks.

“What are you trying to do to me, kill me before our date?” Jude responds, louder this time.

“Hell no.” Zero replies licking his lips. “Quite the opposite…get over here, I want to see those talented hands in action.”

Jude gulps, he’s never yet had the chance to play just for Zero in an intimate setting. He sucks in a quick breath at the thought, pulse rate quickening.

“Oh my way!” Jude states, obviously flustered, as he gathers his things.

“See you soon rock star.” Zero chuckles, as he hangs up. Pleased the phone call succeeded in its intended purpose.

Jude stumbles a little in his rush to fill his briefcase. Jesus, Lionel’s not the only one tripping all over herself. He doesn’t waste any more time as he grabs his case, and heads out the door.

His pace quickens, and excitement surges in his veins at the prospect of not only finally getting Zero all to himself tonight, but also for the next few days. After this emotional roller-coaster of a week, being alone with his love is exactly the boost they need.

And it will all start with the two loves of his life…Zero and his guitar. What more could he ask for?
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