Shiver At The Sight Of You

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Shiver At The Sight Of You

by isitandwonder

Summary

Armie Hammer goes to Crema to shoot a movie. Little does he know that it will turn his whole world upside down. Because he falls hard for his co-star, scrawny theater kid Timothée Chalamet. Who has nothing to loose. Contrary to Armie, who has a wife, a mother, a daughter and a career.
Some think love conquers all. Others know better. This will be a dark angst-fest. You've been warned. I promise nothing.

Notes

Okay, my take on what might have happened, from Crema until now.
Usual disclaimer: This is a work of fiction. Nothing of this ever happened.
Prologue

Armie’s pounding hard into the lean body in front of him. He’s holding the slim boy in a death grip by his waist and watches his dark curls bounce as the sound of flesh slapping against flesh fills the grimy alley.

Armie shuts his eyes and tries to forget where he is and what he’s doing. He wants to loose himself in the tight heat enclosing him. It’s sordid, it’s wrong – he knows all this. He also knows that he needs this like air. Without these little forays into the gutter he would simply have gone mad a long while ago.

He speeds up, sinking deeper into hormone-fueled abandon, and eventually his mind goes blissfully blank. The thoughts and fears that have plagued him all day are drowned out. Will he be up to the challenge his new role presents? How long can he hide his true predilections from his wife? What will his daughter say should she ever find out what a perverted freak her dad is?

“If a man has sex with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is abhorrent”

Armie grinds both his hips and teeth as his mother’s voice suddenly fills his head. He hates her in
moments like this, remembering the endless bible lessons he and his brother were subjected to while his friends went skateboarding, surfing or just hung out.

As he thrusts deep inside the pliant body pressed against the dirty concrete wall he hates himself almost as much as her.

He shakes his head and tries to make her snarling voice go quiet by fucking the boy harder. The blood roars in his ears, silencing the reproaches he knows are cruel and devious but which he can't suppress all the same. The self-loathing was implanted in his brain a long time ago and having to deny his true disposition only made it grow and fester like an inflamed wound until it became his second nature, even in moments like this.

Especially in moments like this.

Armie is suddenly on the verge of crying. But instead of giving in to self-pity he buries himself balls deep in the warm, willing flesh he's bruising with his huge, strong hands. One, two hard thrusts and he can feel himself spill into the condom as his abdominal muscles clench.

He still feels sad and hollow but a little less than half an hour ago.

He pulls out quickly, fighting for breath, leaning his back against the graffiti-covered wall while removing the condom. He throws it carelessly onto the littered ground where other sad evidence of pathetic illicit encounters bear witness to the use of this dark side street.

He doesn't bother with the boy. He doubts that he enjoyed their meeting. Well, he gets compensated nicely for his inconvenience. Armie's sure he had worse customers than a Hollywood movie star.

Not that the skinny dude has any clue who just came inside him. Armie's wearing a nondescript t-shirt and shorts, donning shades and a Lakers cap to obscure his face as best he can without raising suspicion.

Nonetheless, the boy asks as he turns around and straightens his hoodie and sweat pants, reaching out to receive his hard-earned fee: “Hey man, I think I know you. You seem familiar.”

Armie freezes inside but he's an actor - a pretty good one actually, for he plays the husband and father so convincing that sometimes even he himself believes in the charade – and doesn't twitch.

“Nah, that's impossible. I'm from Omaha, Nebraska, just in town for a few days.”

“That's funny,” the boy smirks. He's so thin, with a gaunt face and huge eyes (definitely on drugs). “'Cause I can swear I saw you around just the other day, cruising downtown.” His grin is both feral and dangerous. Armie swallows but takes out a packet of cigarettes and lights one to disguise his panic.

“I have such an ordinary face. I hear that quite often.” But he slips the boy another fifty bucks along with the cigarettes before turning around and walking away.

Shit! He thinks. Fucking, fucking shit! He wants to bang his head against the delapidated facade of an empty block of flats to his left, its smashed windows staring at him like fathomless dark eyes, and only the knowledge that he'll have to fly to Italy tomorrow and explain his injuries to his director stops him from giving in to the impulse.

He has to stop this. He can't afford to get arrested for soliciting. With a man! More a boy honestly. Armie desperately hopes the hooker didn't lie to him when he said that he was eighteen. Getting busted for possession is one thing, he'd been able to talk himself out of it (and by paying a huge fine)
but this would make the headlines. TMZ would have a field day. Buzzfeed hates him anyway and those vultures would indulge in ripping him apart.

And then there's Elizabeth. She already puts up with way more than she's comfortable with for the sake of their family (and probably her own benefit but Armie doesn't allow himself to become cynical). If adultery wasn't where she drew the line, buggery sure is.

Which would mean he'd lose Hops. Armie's not able to think past this scenario. His daughter is the fucking best thing that ever happened to him. He knows that he doesn't deserve her but he'd be damned if he's not trying hard every day.

At least he'll be away for a few months tomorrow. He needs time. To calm down. To put his filthy inclinations behind himself. He has a beautiful wife, everybody tells him. If he really tries hard enough, he's sure he can make it work. This is the last time he's been downtown, he swears to himself.

It won't be a problem that he's shooting a gay movie in Italy. On the contrary, the professional environment will keep his desires in check. Nothing is less erotic than filming sex scenes. This film will be his purgatory, burning out his dirty yearnings.

Liz even made vague plans to join him in Italy. Good. Fine. With her on set nothing could happen.

Besides, he's googled his co-star, a thin, pale theater kid from New York. Absolutely no temptation there. He's seen a few pics of him in badly fitting suits, grinning sheepishly on red carpets of premieres of mediocre films. If it hadn't been for Luca Guadagnino, Armie would have outright refused this project. Who'd believe him and that stick figure falling passionately in love? But Armie has nothing better on and his career hadn't been thriving over the past few years, to put it mildly, so eventually he had accepted. Some work was better than no work at all. Plus, Italy in late spring was beautiful, Nick had told him.

When he reached his car, parked a few blocks away from that alley of shame, Armie looked left and right before climbing in. The boy he'd fucked was nowhere to be seen. A few bored teenagers watched him drive away, but they posed no threat. They seemed so spaced out they wouldn't have recognized their own mum.

Okay, Armie thought. Now that he felt a little more relaxed he would go home, open a beer, pack his suitcase, search for his passport and order a taxi to take him to the airport tomorrow. Then he and Liz would have a nice dinner before he'll put Hops to bed for the last time for the next few months, cuddling with her until both of them would fall asleep.

Looking back on that evening, Armie always wondered later if he could have prevented what was about to happen. If he had called his agent that evening, turning the project down, making excuses on behalf of his family for example – would it have saved him? Or had meeting a young man named Timothée Chalamet on the set of a movie called Call Me By Your Name always been his destiny, predestined since the day he'd slipped his hand inside Matt Cunningham's bathing suit in his freshman year in high school?

Armie would seriously give his right arm to know. Because if he'd thought he'd been fucked up when he left for Italy, his experiences there would teach him better. In retrospect, he'd discover that he had no idea what it meant to be fucked up before he'd set eyes on that skinny, precocious half-French boy who'd ruin him completely.
First Meeting

Chapter Summary

First contact.

The past month Timmy has spend in Italy had been filled with hard work: language lessons, music lessons, film history lessons with Luca and Ferdinando... and no one around his age or at least American with whom he could share his experiences and frustrations.

That's why he's actually glad that today his lead will arrive. Timmy's under no illusion who sold this film. Not him, the scrawny, unknown struggling young actor from Manhattan who has only a few small film credentials and one Off-Broadway play to his CV, that's for sure.

No, of course, it was *Il Movi Star* Armie Hammer. Timmy knows him from *The Social Network* but has watched virtually everything with him in it since he's been informed of his casting, from some obscure horror shocker (he rather liked that one) to artsy stuff like *Nocturnal Animals*.

And now he's about to meet him face to face. Even the thought is intimidating. True, Timmy has worked with some pretty big names but not on a project like this where their parts are equally strong. They are co-stars, though Hammer will have first billing.

It's both daunting and exhilarating. Finally, Timmy will get the chance to show what's in him. If it works out between them.

The whole project stands and falls with their connection. Timmy just hopes he won't be stuck with an asshole for the next six long weeks. Because if he grows to hate Hammer the film will turn out a non-starter.

It helps that Luca is sure. Timmy feels save in his director's hands and trusts him and his decisions. And he has decided on Hammer. So all will be good.

But when 6'5 of Californian beauty – golden hair, blue eyes, tanned, muscled body – bursts into his piano lesson in the afternoon, Timmy feels simply overwhelmed. To Hammer's credit he senses it and gives him space, leaving him to finish his practice.

He doesn't hit one right key afterwards but is still grateful for the time he's given to cope. His teacher just smiles and nods.

Later, Hammer is waiting for him downstairs in Luca's flat.

“Hey! Sorry for disrupting your lesson. I'm Armie.”

“Timothée.”

Timmy grabs the large hand offered – firm handshake, blond hair even on the second knuckles – and holds it perhaps a moment too long. Their eyes meet. There's a surprisingly wicked gleam in Armie's azure gaze.
He's a little less perfect up close, which reassures Timmy a bit. His eyes are puffy, there's stubble on his cheeks and throat, his lips are dry and his hair has gone floppy from the moist heat. But still, he's a stunningly beautiful man. Timmy feels both glad and unworthy to be allowed to climb all over him during the next few weeks for the sake of making art.

Timmy has pronounced his name the French way ('Timotee') – or the correct way as his mum would have said – and Armie's eyebrows shoot up in mocking shock.

“Seriously? That's what you call yourself?”

Timmy grins and shrugs, still very French in hunching his shoulders and turning his hands palms up.

“Mind if I just call you Tim?”

“No, man, it's fine.” Suddenly, Timmy fears he came over pretentious. Fuck, Armie is the star here, he's just a very small mediocrity who should be glad he got hired. Great work, Chalamet, pissing your partner off on your first meeting.

And as if on cue, Armie turns away from him with a sigh that sounds faintly exasperated.

Luca and Ferdinando leave to get more drinks, shooting Timmy a look. So he does what he always does when he's overwhelmed by nervousness and self-loathing. He talks. And talks.

The flight had been horrible. Armie was simply too tall for airplanes. Even in first class it had been torture. The no smoking signs everywhere hadn't lightened his mood. To make matters worse, his go to tactic for long distance flights hadn't worked out either. Usually, a mixture of stiff drinks and two Ativans knocked him out for good but this time sleep didn't come.

He'd felt just dizzy. The alcohol and pills had lowered his walls, allowing his thoughts to wander off to his good-bye from Liz and Hops. Did he just imagine the strange look his wife had given him? Hadn't she behaved cold, side-eyeing him over dinner? Or was he just getting paranoid, ridden with guilt and stress from leading a double life? But if she truly suspected something? He'd been so careful but lately he feared his control slipping.

He'd tried and failed to distract himself by watching a movie. The films on the flight had all been shit. There had even been one with him in it.

In the end, he'd gone over his script again, wondering how this would all work out. He had to stop when he came to the midnight scene. The description by Ivory had just been too graphic for his hazy state of mind. Getting a boner on a plane when surrounded by other passengers wasn't something even Armie thought funny-

He had felt absolutely whacked when he'd arrived in Milan where Ferdinando, Luca's partner, had collected him. Sensing Armie's exhaustion he'd kept quiet during the drive to Crema for which Armie had been truly grateful.

When they'd finally arrived, Ferdinando had taken him to his apartment first, located at the Piazza dell Duomo. It was small and neat, with high windows, two rooms, a bath and a kitchenette.

As Armie threw his bags down and flopped onto the bed, Ferdinando smiled.

“No rest for the wicked. Luca wants to see you. Now.” His voice was soft, with a very charming Italian accent.
“Now?” Armie groaned, dramatically throwing one arm across his face. “He's a slave driver.”

“Some call him Mussolini. But only behind his back.” Ferdinando stretched out a hand to pull Armie upright again. “Come on, meet the family.”

Luca's flat in a three-hundred years old Palazzo is apparently just around the corner. When Armie enters on the heels of Ferdinando, he can hear piano music wafting down the gloomy staircase. He stops and listens. He thinks he knows the piece but can't name it.

When Ferdinando turns on the landing and looks down his face is in the shadows but his voice is warm when he says: “Beautiful, don't you think?”

Armie's not sure if he means the building, the music or Italy in general but he nods either way because it's true.

Luca waits for them in his lavish sitting room furnished with a mix of modern and antique pieces. He offers Armie water, café or an aperitivo and Armie accepts all three which makes the men laugh. It helps to play down his nervousness. They have only met a few times but Armie's fully aware that Luca is a fucking intellectual and auteur whereas he's a high-school drop-out mostly hired as eye candy.

In this moment, Armie very much doubts that he's the right choice to play Oliver. He knows that he won't be able to wing it like he did on other projects. The man in front of him looks at him as if he wants to dissect him, to flay him and lie his innermost thoughts open for anyone to see.

And Armie can't allow that to happen. So why the fuck did he sign on for this?

The piano music is even louder here in this room, an airy sonata that calms Armie's racing thoughts a little.

“That is your Elio playing.” Luca explains as he hands Armie a glass of water and a tiny cup of steaming hot beverage that might be able to revive the dead. Armie feels instantly better after downing it in one go.

He might be on the verge of falling a little in love with this place.

That's when, on a whim, he decides to meet his co-star. Luca tells him that he's just upstairs in the flat of his piano teacher and Armie takes two steps at a time running up there to surprise him.

He'd only seen pics of that kid and they must have been a few years old he realizes because when he crashes through the door the face that is staring back at him from behind a grand piano is so delicate that it could either belong to a boy or a girl. Below a mop of short dark curls the features are tight with concentration, the tip of a pink tongue darting out between cherry red lips as a long, lean back is elegantly bend over the keys. The eyes gazing back at Armie in both shock and amazement are of many colors – are they green, blue, gray or brown? - set under thick dark brows above prominent cheekbones that curve down to a pointed chin. That kid looks like a naughty faun, Armie thinks, before a smile transforms Chalamet's features and he suddenly seems very young, insecure and vulnerable.

When he gets up and rounds the piano to step up to Armie he sees that the boy is wearing an oversized hoodie and sweat pants shoved into his socks. He's tall and lanky, with developing shoulders and a slim waist. The deja-vu almost throws Armie off-kilter.

“Hey, man, I'm in the middle of a lesson here...” Chalamet trails off, and Armie can see a million emotions cross his face: joy, surprise, uncertainty, hope, anxiety...
“Of course, sorry, it's alright. Sorry.” He stammers and is actually glad to take his leave.

He leans against the cool walls of the staircase and listens to the now hacked off notes coming from the apartment until he has his breath back and feels able to meet Luca again. Because he could swear he fucked the exact same kid back in LA yesterday against a grimy alley wall.

The drink Luca offers him helps. It's something red and bitter and suits his mood just fine.

While waiting for Chalamet to finish, Luca talks about Crema and Italy in general. Armie only listens with one ear as the other is attuned to the piano sounds drifting by. Luca looks at the ceiling from time to time as well, slightly shaking his head and smiling a little.

Eventually, the door opens and Chalamet walks in. As Armie is already on his third aperitivo without any food in his stomach, he feels prepared. That is until the boy opens his mouth and talks fucking French!

Armie has to turn away, a wistful sigh escaping his mouth. He catches Luca's gaze as he and Ferdinando excuse themselves to do whatnot... Armie is unable to hear their voices and that should really alarm him only it doesn't as all his nerve endings are buzzing because he's highly aware that he will be left alone with Chalamet, standing just a few feet away from him, looking like a gangly kid and sex on legs at the same time. White noise crashes over him and drowns out anything else.

He has no idea how he landed on the sofa he's sitting on right now with Chalamet – Tim – perched on the armrest next to him. He can smell him, a mixture of fresh sweat, lavender fabric softener and something lemony beneath and it almost takes his breath away again. He must be a much better actor than he's giving himself credit for when that boy hasn’t realized by now that Armie is in the middle of a veritable panic attack.

He resurfaces after some time – a minute, an hour? – and starts to make out phrases as the boy talks and talks. About gelato. And pizza. And coffee. Definitely coffee. Bikes... motorbikes? Vespas? Armie owns a Vespa back in LA but thinking about his home only throws him into another fit.

He’ll have to mimic fucking that boy next to him while probably his wife will be on set and that thought makes him ponder booking the next flight out of Italy, or even better, running for the hills and contemplating the life of a recluse.

He can only hope that this kid will stop looking like a delectable bit of rough when they shoot or Armie might not be held responsible for his actions.

Suddenly, he realizes that Tim has fallen silent. Armie looks up at him and meets outright fear in that pretty face. No, not fear. Open undisguised panic. His eyes are wide and his mouth hangs open a little while his breathing accelerates.

In this split second Armie understands for the first time that he’s not alone in this. They are in it together. That boy is as terrified as he is. And as he is the more experienced, it is his fucking duty to make that kid comfortable. He’s not here for fun. That boy is not a hooker on crack from downtown LA. They have a movie to shoot here. Get a grip, Hammer!

_I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments._ – he can hear his mother say in his head. To banish her admonishment, Armie gets up and stands in front of Tim, smiling.

“Sounds good.” He says, trying to sound gentle. Tim visibly calms down, though he still seems a little weary.
“Sorry, I talk too much when I’m nervous.” He admits, biting his lower lip, and that is so adorable that Armie has trouble not to take his face in both hands and assure him that everything will be fine.

Instead he says: “That's actually not a problem because I zone out when I get nervous. We seem to be a perfect match.”

Tim grins up at him now, playfully punching his chest. His fingers are long and slim – pianists hands – and Armie forces himself not to think about how they'd look tugging on black hemp rope. That’s not a road he'll go down right now.

“So, Timotee, with a name like that, I'm sure your friends have something they call you instead.”

When ten minutes later Luca and Ferdinando walk in on them Armie is literally rolling on the wooden floor, laughing, holding his phone in front of his face while Timmy is jumping up and down on one of Luca's antique sofas, shouting silly lyrics into the large sitting room.

Armie sits up, wiping his eyes and says to their bewildered faces: “Meet Lil' Timmy T, the savior of New York Hip Hop,” before collapsing back down again.
Careful Approaches

Chapter Summary

The boys are getting to know each other. There are films and food and brotherly wrestling matches late at night that reveal more than they can deal with yet...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next week passes in amiable companionship – at least that's what Armie tells himself they have every night when they part to go to their apartments, just a stones-throw apart on the Piazza after a day filled with bike rides – actual bicycles, Tim as a city kid has to train – sightseeing, opulent lunches and even grander dinners. They swim in the pond like Elio and Oliver, have their first coffee of the day together in the same spot around the corner of their apartments every morning, try the local pastries and indulge in Italian gelato (Tim's favorite being pistachio).

It's relaxed, laid-back. They have time to get to know each other, their quirks and habits. They only part when Tim has a music or language lesson, and that is when Armie hits the gym to get in shape for all the topless action required in the movie. He doesn't have Tim's metabolism but a love for greasy food. Of course Armie knows the tricks but he really doesn't want to resort to them. So he lifts weights and runs and swims and hopes it will be enough.

He and Liz talk daily, usually in the evening just before bed time. She tells him about their daughter and her day and Armie tells her about his. If he downplays the amount of time he spends with Tim it's not a conscious decision. Or is it? Why does he feel he has to hide what's blossoming between them? Armie doesn't dare to examine this aspect too closely.

He's an accomplished liar when it comes to how he feels.

After those phone calls, sleep doesn't come easy. Talking to his wife is kind of sobering, it pulls him back into his real life despite that he'd prefer to stay in the bubble he, Tim, Luca – the whole of Crema – are creating. He sits on his balcony for hours each night, gazing at the stars, drinking whiskey until he passes out.

That's when he reflects on his day. To his surprise, Armie has to admit that he'd never experienced such a sense of safety while working on a movie. It's both reassuring but also dangerous because he might lower his guard and show sides of himself he has carefully, expertly hidden since childhood.

A good example for those ambiguous feelings are his talks with Luca. They meet most evenings for food and films. On the second night, they watched The Night Porter. Armie's still not sure why Luca chose it and how he made it through it. Tim had ended up rigid and wide-eyed on the couch, so close that Armie had been able to feel his body heat and hear his breathing speed up. Luca had been sitting in an arm chair, apparently watching the movie but Armie had caught him one time looking at them both, a frown on his face.

Armie had felt exposed.

Between preparing the shoot, Luca makes it a habit to pop in on Armie every day, to chat over an
espresso. The topics range from Italy to Armie's films (most of which, to Armie's utter embarrassment, Luca has watched) to the character of Oliver. That's where the traps lie.

“Professor Perlman says he's shy. Do you think he's shy?” Luca asks.

“Not so much shy as reluctant.” Armie answers after a moment. This is thin ice. “He has another life in the States. He knows he can't commit. So he's torn between desire and … what he would call doing the right thing?”

“You tell me.” Luca retorts gently and there's something in his gaze that makes Armie lower his eyes.

Silence stretches until Luca says: “There's a famous phrase coined by Adorno, a German philosopher who wrote a critic on Paul Celan's poetry. *Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen*. There cannot be a right life amidst wrongs. We often know what's right. But if we don't follow it, we lose ourselves and wither. Therefore it is imperative to do what we know is right and change our circumstances to be able to follow that path. What do you think?”

“I think that is very radical, absolute, and not always achievable.” Armie balls his fists.

“Why?” Luca tilts his head and looks at him intensely.

“Because... we are not alone in this? Doing what we deem right can mean wronging other people?” He really should stop talking.

“But it's not about what we *think* is right. There are eternal truths that simply are good and right. Like love.”

“Love.” Armie snorts. “That's a four letter word, don't you think?” But his attempt to make fun of the topic backfires.

“No. I don't. I think it's beautiful and true and has to be cherished when found.”

After that talk, Armie goes on a long bike-ride alone, racing down Lombardian country lanes until his legs are burning before lying in a field, staring at the darkening sky and smoking a spliff.

That evening, they watch *Just Before Nightfall* and Armie hates Luca with a fierce passion that surprises and disturbs him.

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Timmy's just going with the flow this first week, willfully allowing Armie to take the lead. It seems only natural. He's just glad that his co-star turned out to be a genuinely nice guy. Easy-going. Most of the times.

But then they watch some kind of artsy Nazi bondage porn and the look on Armie's face both frightens and arouses Timmy. This is a world he's never ventured in. It's dark, disconcerting – but it also turns him on.

It's not that he doesn't know about these things – he's from Hell's Kitchen for fuck's sake – but he never thought of bondage or whipping as being his thing. He never understood the appeal of surrendering to someone, being used, of offering himself up to somebody.

Seems that their film will teach him a lesson. Love is love is love – but it's not always gentle, it can hurt as well.
He thinks of the end of their film and what it means, to be hurting for someone body, soul and mind, and how to transform that pain into something he'll be able to handle. Would suffering physical pain heal him – or Elio?

And what does the intense way Armie had watched this particular movie say about his co-star?

Up until now, Timmy has seen him as a family man, father and husband, jolly, settled, content with his life. But is he?

They talked during this first week, but mostly about superficial stuff like music, books, films, their favorite foods... they didn't pierce the surface, not yet, but it is inevitable, at least to Timmy, if they are to find the intimacy needed to portray their characters.

But suddenly, he's afraid what they might unearth.

He starts to watch Armie more closely. When they go swimming, he imagines how his skin will feel against his, the weight of that large body holding him down. The contrast in their shape couldn't be more distinct but that is where the sexual tension will be drawn from.

Only, doesn't that mean they have to address this issue prior to filming? Of course, they have to negotiate, define boundaries – they both have agreed to the terms in their nudity riders, so Timmy has an idea what will be expected from them. He's sure the crew will handle it sensitively – but what about them both? How much do they have to open up to each other as Armie and Timmy to be able to convince the audience of Oliver's and Elio's love?

It's a tricky business, especially for Timmy. Because... well, he's not entirely sure where he stands on this issue. He's been attached to this project for over three years now and his attitude might have... shifted a little. Usually, he doesn't dwell too much on this. It's private, it's his concern and nobody else's – but is it? Now? Should he come clean to Armie? And why does he feel the need to do so? Does he want to?

To be honest, Armie's not his type. Too old. Too perfect. Too ripped. And yet...

It might just be the script, the surrounding, Luca urging them to get to know each other, to spent time with each other. There's not much else to do.

His constant staring at Armie doesn't help. Who is he really trying to figure out – his co-star or himself?

In short, Timmy's very confused by the end of their first week together.

At least a friend will arrive in a few days. Perhaps someone from his old life – old life? Seriously? But that's how it feels... - might be able to ground him, to find his footing again.

For the time being, though, he watches Armie, watches how the muscles stretch in his back when he bends down to grab his towel after swimming, how his thighs flex when they ride their bikes, how his blond hair turns dark when wet with sweat, and wonders.

Their carefully poised equilibrium is disturbed when Tim one night, a good week in their stay in Italy, accompanies Armie to his apartment. They are both a little tipsy from too much Frizzante over dinner during which Armie has proposed to watch some boxing videos together.

It's a risk he wouldn't have taken sober but he's happy and therefore might overestimate the grip he
has on the situation.

So they end up on his couch together, watching De La Hoya against Mayweather. Armie feels in his element and tries to explain the beauty of the sport to Tim, who seems a little taken aback by the testosterone-infused brutality of the fight.

Armie insists that it's sport, that it's graceful. In response, Tim says he'll show him graceful, gets up and turns a perfect pirouette before losing his balance, crashing back down on the couch; right into Armie's chest, to be precise.

Armie laughs, wraps his arms around Tim, buries his nose in his curls – and freezes.

Just for a second, though, because Tim is unabashedly laughing against his sternum. No harm done, it seems. Armie releases him and tries to push him away but Tim outright clings onto him. So Armie decides to tickle him and as this has no other effect than to make Tim giggle even more Armie playfully punches him. Tim huffs and rolls off of him, clambers to his feet, balls his fists and starts to bounce up and down in front of the couch.

“Show me then, Mr boxing expert. Come on, fight like a man.” The sight of this beanpole boy challenging him is so silly that Armie loses his shit as well and slides to the floor, laughing until tears run down his face. Tim starts to hit him then, gently at first but harder and harder with every punch.

“Stop that. You don't want me to hurt you.” Armie snorts, trying to calm himself in the face of Tim's ridiculousness. Harder said than done.

“I'd like to see you try.” Tim answers and there's something fierce in his look that has Armie suddenly sit up straight and stare at him.

“I'm warning you, Tim. Don't fuck with me.” He says, and that's when Tim's fist makes contact with his zygomatic bone.

Armie's vision blurs. It hurts.

Armie can feel his skin starting to pound. There will certainly be a bruise. With much more aim than his inebriated state should allow for, he jumps to his feet and goes for Tim, his right arm lunging forward. But Tim is fast and agile, dodging the blow. Armie stumbles and almost crashes into the low coffee table, gripping Tim's shoulder to steady himself.

They both trip. Armie's momentum throws them backwards until Tim's body hits the wall. His head is lolling back and there's a loud thud as his skull makes contact with the bricks. His eyes flutter shut. What has he done?

All Armie can think is that he's pinning Tim against a wall.

He should step back, let go, take his hands off of him – but he can't.

All he hears is the blood pounding in his ears as he's frozen to the spot. Tim's cheeks are flushed, he's breathing hard and the warm summer air has plastered his wild curls against his forehead. Armie can feel his muscles flex under his palms. It's almost like holding a fragile bird.

Tim is not even struggling. He just let's Armie hold him down, surrendering. When he eventually opens his eyes his pupils are dilated. There's blood on his lip – he must have bitten himself – and his tongue darts out to taste it. Everything stops.
Armie has to look away or he’ll do something unforgivable. So he lowers his gaze down to the floor. That's when he sees. There's an unmistakable bulge showing at the front of Tim's shorts.

Shit.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

Armie desperately wants to touch him but is unable to move, paralyzed by fear.

His thoughts race: Ignore it, he tells himself. Tim's just a young man. Who knows when was the last time he got laid. When Armie had been his age he'd been so horny he would have fucked a letterbox.

This means nothing. Certainly not that Tim is available. That he wants this – with Armie.

“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

Armie can feel bile rise in his throat as the familiar voice echoes in his head. He knows she's right. That's the worst.

They'll have to work together, for fuck's sake!

And yet Armie doesn't step away. He just continues to press Tim against the wall so hard he might leave bruises. Good! His eyes slowly travel up Tim's wiry body again as he imagines his delicate white skin beneath the ratty t-shirt, marked by his fingers, breathing in his tangy smell, almost tasting the salt gathered in his armpits on his tongue...

“Sorry.” Tim whispers, blushing even harder under Armie's gaze.

“Don't be.” Armie answers, still not stepping away.

“I think we have to talk.”

“We don't. Not if you don't want to.”

Tim's just staring back at Armie, confusion in his eyes and it almost breaks him. That boy is so young and yet so honest and open, more mature than he'll probably ever be.

He sees it coming but doesn't stop Tim as his head falls forward, resting against Armie's shoulder as his thin frame starts to shake with violent sobs.

Chapter End Notes

I'm overwhelmed by the response to this story. What can I say, it just flows at the moment. Thank you all for reading and commenting!


Damage Control

Chapter Summary

Armie's unable to deal with Tim's breakdown. In the aftermath, they both built up their walls and gather their forces to cope.

Chapter Notes

There's mention of what I would call child abuse and implied self-harm in this chapter. Just so you've been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One of Armie's earliest memories consists of him, being about four or five years old, they were still living in the Cayman's, and his younger brother fighting over something. He can't remember what it had been that had sparked the vicious anger only very young boys are capable off but it soon got violent. In the end, Victor, despite being smaller, had pushed him down the open staircase of their house. He'd tried to brace his fall with his outstretched arms, resulting in him hitting the hard marble floor with both hands.

He still remembers the sharp pain scooting up his left arm when the soft bone fractured, though he hadn't known at the time what had happened; it had just hurt like hell, so he'd been running through the house, howling, blind with tears, his left arm cradled to his chest. He'd been a chubby boy back then, still hadn't lost his baby fat, so the damage hadn't been visible.

When he'd found his mum, he'd thrown himself at her, trying between heaves and sobs to tell her what had happened, snot running down his round face. By that time the pain had been so fierce he'd seen black spots dance before his eyes.

He also remembers to this day how his mum had held him at arm's length and had told him that boys didn't cry; that she wouldn't listen to him for as long as he'd behave like a sissy. That he had to learn to be a man.

And he had tried, he really had, biting his lips as not to make a sound, wiping his wet face with the hem of his t-shirt to remove the stains his tears had left but his arm had hurt so much that he'd been unable to suppress his whimpers.

Because he'd apparently refused to learn his lesson, his mum had sat him down on one of the hard-backed chairs in their lounge and had started to read him bible verses about the silent suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross until he'd vomited all over the carpet. That had finally shocked his mother into action and she'd called an ambulance.

She'd never said sorry.

The next time that Armie had cried had been the birth of his daughter.
Therefore, he feels not just ill-equipped to deal with Tim sobbing at his shoulder, he feels outright terrified of all the emotions suddenly bubbling to the surface between them.

What the fuck is he supposed to do in the face of the boy's breakdown?

He doesn't move. He doesn't even hold Tim or pat his back or stroke his hair. Because men don't cry and when they do it's embarrassing and ugly, both for the one in tears but even more so for those who have to witness their distress. Pity only makes it worse.

He feels the strong impulse to yell at Tim to get a fucking grip and don't be a pussy but at the same time he remembers a hurting five year old who didn't understand why no one was helping him, why no one cared. What did he do to deserve being treated like this? He must have done something wrong, otherwise someone would have helped him because no one is supposed to suffer like this without a reason.

To this day there's a black hole inside him that gapes open when he remembers this day. In the end, a medic took care of him, carried him inside an ambulance and showed him the siren to distract him from his broken bone.

But how is he supposed to help Tim? What does he need? Surely not an ambulance and a plaster cast.

“Sorry.” Tim mumbles after a few minutes, fisting his hands into Armie's shirt, rolling his head on Armie's shoulder as to snuggle even closer. “Sorry.”

“It's okay.” Armie croaks out, feeling like a total failure. His shirt is wet with Tim's tears but he can't bring himself to say something, anything else... He's on autopilot, his mind has gone totally blank.

Eventually, Tim pulls back. His eyes are red-rimmed as he wipes them with the back of his slender hand, the fingers of his right still holding onto Armie like he's the rock in the wild sea of feelings Tim seems to be cruising. His cheeks are puffy and there's dried blood on his lip.

Armie wants to hold him, rock him back and forth and tell him that he doesn't mind but admitting that much would lead them both down a path he's not prepared to walk, ever. So he plasters a false smile on his face to cheer Tim up and gloss over his own helpless embarrassment at Tim's outburst.

Tim stares back at him and slowly entangles his hand from the fabric of Armie's shirt.

“Better go wash your face. You don't want anyone see you like this.” Armie tells him. He even dares to touch Tim, bumping his fist into his bony shoulder to set him into motion. But Tim just stands there, staring at Armie, and for a second there's some kind of irked bewilderment crossing his face.

Armie feels it like a punch to the gut. He turns around and slowly entangles his hand from the fabric of Armie's shirt.

“Sorry if I offended you.”

Armie has walked over to one of the large open windows and is leaning out, greedily inhaling the smoke of his MS but turns half-way when Tim speaks to him. The boy's shoulders are hunched and he looks like a beaten dog, standing forlorn in the middle of the room.

“No worries.” Armie says, sounding hollow and insincere even to his own ears. The cigarette is smoked down to the filter and threatens to burn his fingers but he doesn't make a move to stub it out.

Tim makes a tiny motion as if to walk up to him but then stops in his tracks, shrugs, shakes his head.
Armie nods. “Yes, we'll have the read-through tomorrow. Long day. Better catch some sleep.”

The look Tim shoots him from below his damp fringe is unfathomable. He knows he has to say something, but his mouth is dry and his head filled with an echoing of his mother's voice telling him: “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Funnily, though, Armie doesn’t feel peace as he sees Tim leaving. He feels like shit. Right now, he's not the kind of person he wants to be.

He pushes away from the window as Tim has reached the door.

“Hey,” he says. “I see you in the morning for coffee, okay?”

Tim’s face stays stony as he gives him a curt nod before shutting the door silently behind himself.

That night, Armie ends up in a drunken stupor on the couch he’d wrestled on with Tim just a few hours earlier. He still imagines that he can smell him as he buries his nose between the cushions and if a dry sob is wrenched from his throat there’s no one around to hear it or mock him for it.

Timmy doesn't know what's more horrible, the boner he's sporting from being pinned against the wall by Armie or Armie's weird reaction to him breaking down. Tim grew up with a half-French family side – emphatic, emotional, loud and loving – and his mother's family has been on Broadway for three generations. Artists, highly strung, simply overflowing with feelings.

So, when one starts to cry in the Chalamet-Flenders clan, there are always people to hug you, to kiss you, to comfort you, stroke your back, your hair, cradle you in their arms, in their laps - his mum, his dad, his sister, aunts and uncles...

Even at LaGuardia it was quite common for the kids to break out into tears during class. They were theater kids for god's sake, being dramatic and emotional was their default setting, especially as teenagers.

Armie's icy demeanor had totally thrown Timmy. How could one be so indifferent in the face of another human being's distress? There were no soothing words, no consoling gestures, not even a hug.

This could just mean one thing. Armie didn't care for Timmy. All his niceties, his friendly behavior over the last week had just been a sham. The man was an actor after all!

What had Tim thought? That a Hollywood star would befriend a virtually unknown kid from New York ten years his junior just because they had to star in a movie together? How had he ever expected more than a professional relationship developing between them? This wasn't his first movie, he's been round the block, he should know how these things work.

Only, this time, it had felt different. Special. He'd thought he could trust Armie.

He'd been such a stupid idiot!

He'd stared at himself in Armie's bathroom mirror, washing his tear stained face, and it had taken all
his self-control not to drive his fist into the glass, shattering it to pieces.

And then Armie had had the nerve to act as if nothing had happened, reminding him of their standing appointment for coffee each morning!

Timmy had just wanted to disappear, for the earth to open up and swallow him whole.

He has no recollection how he made it back to his apartment but eventually he finds himself sitting on his bed, lighting up a cigarette, toying with his phone. He thinks about calling his sister but remembers that she has a project going and might not be happy to have her little brother call her in the middle of the night.

So he dials Will's number.

“Hey, man! How are you?” It's early evening in New York.

“Hey, Will. Good to hear you. I'm fine.” Timmy swallows.

“You don't sound fine. How's your film going?”

Will just knows him too well.

“Good. We haven't started shooting yet...”

“So...?”

“Oh, fuck, man, it's all just so fucked up and... I don't know...” Timmy sighs, unable to hide his panic any longer.

“Last time we talked you were head over heals for Hammer. Did something happen?”

Timmy stays silent.

“T?”

“Shit. It got... awkward.”

“Awkward? What, did he make an inappropriate offer or what? I thought he's married. Though I've heard some talk...”

“It was me.” Timmy blurts out. Will knows. They've talked. More than talked. Snogged one evening, high on weed, just for Timmy to try it with someone safe.

“Shit, man. What have you done?” Will sounds concerned.

“Nothing. But, as I said... things got really awkward. I think he hates me.”

“Why? For being into him? Jesus, you're shooting a queer movie. He can't be a fuckin' homophobe!”

“I don't know, Will. I don't know anything anymore. I was so unprofessional. I totally blew it, man.” Timmy feels on the verge of tears again. This is all too much for him.

“Tim, listen to me. Calm down. I'm sure it's not the end of the world. Talk to your director. Sort this out. I'm trying to change my flight and come earlier. Moral support and all. Please, don't do anything stupid.”
Timmy promises before he hangs up.

He suddenly remembers middle school. He once had told Will about it when they'd discussed a girl in their class that had done the same. Will had called her a drama queen and Timmy had defended her until he'd finally confessed that he'd done the same thing. That it had helped at the time.

He can't do it now, though. All the topless action required of him would show the scars, the cuts. Yet his skin feels too tight and his teeth chatter as he rocks his body back and forth, hugging his knees as he squats on his bed, a pile of self-loathing.

Will had said he should call Luca. But it's in the middle of the night. He can't do that, not without coming over as disturbed and over-dramatic. And what should he say? 'I got hard as Armie held me down and I think he hates me now.'

That wouldn't bode well for their movie! They might find a new Elio, someone with less issues and more talent, a real actor, not a fake like him, an impostor, one that failed almost every audition last year. Too thin, they'd said. Too broody. What they'd meant was an ugly waste of space, stealing their time.

How had he ever thought he could make it?

Suddenly, there's a knock on his door. He wipes his nose and walks over. Did he wake one of the neighbors? Or is it Armie after all, who wants to talk?

But no. It's Michael fucking Stuhlbarg off all people.

“Hey, hello, you must be Timothée.” He greets him with an apologetic smile. “Sorry to bother you, but I just arrived this evening and now I got a call from Will telling me that we are lodging in the same building. I can't sleep, jet lag. How about we watch a movie together or something? You can tell me all about everyone. I've heard you practically moved here.” His voice is warm and soft and Timmy just like that invites him in.

Of course Will had Michael's number. His mother is a Broadway legend. She knows everyone. He silently thanks his friend as they skim through Italian Netflix, settling for Fargo. Timmy needs some dark humor right now and Michael was in the TV series, so he has some interesting details to tell.

They almost talk until sunrise. It's so exciting to meet this giant of theater that eventually Timmy forgets his troubled thoughts. And just as Michael leaves, a WhatsApp arrives from Will, announcing his arrival for the day after tomorrow.

Timmy will have a true friend with him in about 36 hours. He'll just has to make it through the read-through. But after meeting his on-screen father, he's somehow sure he'll survive.

^^^^^^

Despite Armie's hang-over, the read-through goes better than expected. He didn't make it to the cafe that morning, sending Tim a WhatsApp that he'd overslept.

He got no reply.

But when he arrives at Luca's, Tim is there, talking to Michael Stuhlbarg. Esther, Amira, Victoire and Vanda are all there as well. Luca fills in the other roles yet to be cast, most likely with family and friends he says.

In the beginning, they are all a little awkward and cold but soon warm to one another, just like in the
movie. There are even a few laughs.

During the midnight scene, Luca reads only the directions as there is almost no dialogue. The mood changes after that.

Despite last night, there is an undeniable spark between him and Tim. Tim throws everything he has into the role, baring himself. Armie can do nothing else but follow his example.

After the phone call scene all fall silent, listening to Luca who just reads the last page with Timothée's stage directions.

Everyone needs a break after that. Tim disappears with Esther while Armie chats to Michael and Amira.

It feels almost as if talking to Tim's parents, who Armie imagines totally different from his. The idea of such freedom as the Perlman household provides stings a little. How it must feel to have such a family, Armie wonders.

They all come together over a late lunch, and wine and good food makes them all easy-going and relaxed. All but Tim, who sits between Esther and Michael and just picks at his plate, avoiding Armie's gaze.

Luca doesn't seem to notice as he's deep in conversation with Ferdinando. He just looks up as Tim leaves early. As they have the afternoon free, Armie offers to show Michael around Crema.

They end up in a Trattoria, drinking beer, talking about mutual acquaintances. Neither of them mentions Tim, though Michael shoots Armie a somewhat knowing look as he asks about his preparation for his character, Oliver.

Armie tells him about how he'd read the novel twice, wondering how much he could trust Elio's description of Oliver and how he'd decided to mostly ignore it in the end and to go with what he had felt while studying Aciman's novel.

Michael nods in agreement.

"We can't built our actions on the hormone-soaked outpourings of a teenager."

Armie orders another round.

Later in the evening, back at his apartment, Armie avoids calling his wife and decides to call Nick instead. He's in Rome, staying with his family.

"Hey, Armz, you alright? I thought you were busy making a movie." There's chatter in the background, one of the large family dinners most likely.

"No, not yet actually. We are still preparing. Listen, Nick... I feel kinda trapped here. Everyone is really nice but also quite artsy and highbrow. They are all at least ten years older or younger than me."

"Is this a cry for help, buddy?" Nick teases.

"Fuck you, I just thought it would be fun if you came over for the weekend." He doesn't dare to ask, so he casually throws his plea out, hoping Nick will catch on.

"Oh, but what about Liz?"
“Liz?” Armie's confused.

“Oh, shit, man, I'm such a wanker, sorry. She didn't tell you?”

They hadn't spoken for a few days. Armie had simply forgotten. He'd started to switch off his cell phone when he was hanging out with Tim. No distractions from immersing himself, he'd told himself. Liz would understand.

“I'm sure it's meant to be a surprise. You know her.” He answers decidedly offhand, even managing a laugh.

“Okay, well, you haven't heard it from me that she plans to visit, flying in on Saturday.”

Armie takes a deep breath and tries to keep the smile in his voice.

“Lovely. Will you come over too, then?”

“If you want to have me. I thought you wanted perhaps some quality time with the wife before... you know...” There's a lewd smirk in Nick’s voice that Armie chooses to ignore.

“But you are almost family, Nick. Please.”

“Alright! But try not to get too excited when you speak to her.”

Armie knows that he has to call his wife next.

He sums up all his energy and manages to sound cheerful, asking about her day, telling her about the read-through. There's some trouble at the bakery but she'll sort it out. Armie's sure of that.

When they hang up, he contemplates another evening shared with Johnny, Jim and Jack. But in the end, he decides against it and instead walks over to Luca’s place. Backed by the reassurance that his family and friends will surround him soon, sheltering him from the unavoidable emotional outfall, he thinks it might be time that they have another talk.

Chapter End Notes

I have to tell you that reading those bible websites on the 'Christian' disciplining of children made me sick. There are many advocating corporal punishment as best for kids. I really don't know how folks can agree to that in the name of Jesus.
Tension is rising.

Luca buzzes Armie in and is visibly surprised to see him as he waits by the door to his apartment.

“Armie…?”

“Yeah, hi, I know… but I thought… am I interrupting?”

“No, no, of course not. Come in, come in.” Luca waves him inside and shows him into the living room. On the sofa he’d jumped up and down just last week when they’d first met, Tim is now cuddling with Esther. Well, not exactly cuddling, but his head is in her lap as they both smoke and watch a movie.

They look at Armie when he enters, Esther surprised, Tim almost defiant.

“Hey…,” he greets them, feeling like he’s intruding on something private. Tim’s eyelids are heavy, drooping, and Esther rakes her hand through his hair before turning her gaze back to the giant plasma screen where a film is playing.

“Body Double.” Luca tells him before gesturing for Armie to follow through to the kitchen. With a last lingering look at the two entangled figures on the couch Armie leaves them alone.

Why does it sting to see Tim like this? Shouldn’t he be glad for the boy? This might also minimize future embarrassments. If he can get it on with Esther there surely won’t be any more awkward boners between them. She most likely would wear him out. They are both French, after all, something they have in common to bond over – apart from being young and beautiful.

Luca offers Armie a chair at his large oak kitchen table before pouring him a glass of red wine.

“You look like you need it.”

“That bad?”

“You tell me.” Luca sits down opposite him and folds his hands on the table top. “What is it, Armie?”

“I… I don’t know.” He pushes his fringe back. He has to outgrow his hair so it can be coiffed more 80s. “That read-through today, and then I talked to Michael afterwards and now I’m just… not sure this was a good idea. What if I can’t pull it off?”

“What exactly do you mean?” Luca takes a sip of his own wine.

“Me and Tim. We need chemistry to make it work.”

“And you have it.”

Armie looks surprised. “You think so?”
“Totally. Haven’t you realized what happened today? How everyone was kind of in awe of you two?”

Armie shakes his head. “No, sorry, not really.”

“Well, then let me tell you that everyone was shaken by what was clearly feasible between you.”

Armie is quiet for a moment. He’s not sure he can believe Luca.

“Well, yeah, what else can they say? Those two fuckers are going to ruin this film, let’s get outta here?” He snorts a laugh but there’s no humor in it

“Why would they think that?” Luca sounds truly incredulous.

“Because they are the real thing. They earned their acting chops. They did theater, European cinema, Michael is a legend, even Tim has been in an off-Broadway play and acted since he was about nine and speaks fuck how many languages?”

“Two. And his French is not even that good.” Luca smiles.

Armie plays with the stem of his wine glass.

“I just don't think I belong here.” He says.

“And I think you do. Trust me. I believe in you.” Luca gives him a warm smile and Armie blushes.

“I don't know where this fear comes from but I will find out. And then I will exorcise it.”

“Good luck with that.” Armie mumbles in his drink.

“Armie, listen, you need to open up here. Look at Timothée.” Luca tilts his head towards the sitting room. Armie swallows. “Have you seen how unguarded he is? Like an open book.”

“Yeah, but what does he have to loose?”

“What do you have to loose, hm?”

Armie shrugs. He can't even begin to answer that question.

Luca sighs. “See? Your walls are going up. I am no fool. I know your potential. But if you continue to hide, than it might get very difficult for you.”

Armie lets his gaze wander around the kitchen, over sanded cupboards and brass pans, delicate china and sparkling crystal – looking anywhere but at Luca.

“My wife is coming over soon. With my daughter.” He says by way of a reply after a moment.

“Oh. Okay. Fine. If it helps you to adjust.” But there's distance in Luca's voice all of a sudden.

“Is that a problem?”

“No, I'm good. Thanks.” No way is he going to watch Tim and Esther together on that sofa. “I know
that one already. I should get some sleep.”

When Luca shows him out, he risks just one look at the couch. Tim is watching the film, enraptured, but Esther is watching him. Neither of them says good-bye as Armie leaves.

After just about three hours of sleep Timmy forces himself out of bed, showers, pulls on jeans and a hoodie and heads out to their cafe. It's not that he's particularly eager to meet Armie but he thinks it would look odd if he didn't show up.

Sleeping and talking to Michael had calmed him. He knows he has to be professional about this. There will most likely come other situations with potential to embarrass them both. So better not make a fuzz about it.

When he arrives, there's no sign of Armie though. Timmy places his usual order and sits on a table outside, not really waiting but... hell, it was Armie who said they would meet here.

What does it mean that he's not here? Does it mean anything? After last night, Timmy can't believe he just forgot. Is this a message he's sending him?

He knocks back his Espresso and finishes his bombolone, apricot jam dripping down his chin as he smears icing sugar all over his face. But he needs sustenance for today. The read-through is set for eleven o'clock at Luca's. Timmy still has got an hour. As he's about to order another coffee, a text arrives. From Armie. He apologies, says he has overslept. Timmy's not sure he believes him.

Instead of hyping himself further with caffeine, he starts to walk through the old town, one street up, down another, but avoiding the Piazza della Duomo. He's a little early at Luca's, so he decides to visit his piano teacher and play a bit until it's time to go downstairs. The music helps him to focus, to relax.

Vanda, Michael and Amira are already there. Shortly after him, Esther and Victoire arrive. Armie's the last to show up.

He looks like something the cat has dragged inside. His eyes are red-rimmed, his complexion is doughy and his voice is rough, as if he drank and smoked all night. Did he?

After a short introduction, they start. It goes better than expected. Michael is making notes in his script and Timmy watches him, fascinated and a little petrified in the face of his dedication.

The tension between him and Armie is apparent for the first half hour but then they get into a flow. Something draws them towards each other, undeniably, irresistibly. The first kiss is not that exciting read from paper but afterwards something unfurls around the table; a nervous dynamic that culminates in the aftermath of the infamous peach scene.

When Michael reads his speech, Timmy is almost brought to tears. There's silence afterwards.

Everyone shuffles around, gathers their pages, drinks some water until Luca calls a short break before lunch. Esther sidles up to Timmy.

“Hey, do you have a cigarette?” They haven't really met before, just for half an hour over coffee shortly after Timmy's arrival when Luca had her come to Crema. She's involved in another project at the same time and has to split her time between France and Italy. But of course, Timmy knows Le Garrels. Pauline had a picture of Esther's brother on her wall as a teenager back in New York.
They've also come across each other in Paris.

Timmy is somewhat in awe of Esther, but she seems just so natural and is both smart and funny in a rather sardonic way. They sit on Luca's balcony, smoking, speaking French, laughing, sharing jokes and anecdotes about mutual friends. She knows Stephane as well. It's nice. It's easy.

And yet, during lunch, Timmy's eyes wander over to Armie again and again, only to look away the moment Armie might but glance in his direction. He's entertaining the table, asking genuine questions, keeping the conversation going while Timmy just pushes his food around on his plate until he can't stand it any longer.

He excuses himself and leaves, catching Esther looking, making a phone sign with her hand. He nods and is gone.

He needs to be alone so he gets his bike and just rides it. Only when he's left Crema long behind does he stop, throws his bike in a ditch and starts to kick against a tree trunk, screaming on the top of his lungs.

He hates it here. He hates Italy. He hates this stupid movie. He wants to go home, wants to meet his friends, people his age, not all these old, pretentious fuckers who don't really care about him and about who he really doesn't care either.

He feels so fucking lonely that it hurts. Eventually, his whole body's in agony so he has to stop and crouches down on all four. He panics when he realizes that he can't control his breathing. His arms and legs start to tingle and his head feels hot while his chest feels too tight.

Shit.

Calm down.

Relax.

Breathe.

Luckily, there's an old plastic bag stuck under one of the bushes. Timmy doesn't care if it holds rubbish or dog shit, he just brings it to his mouth with shaking fingers and starts to breathe into it. Slowly, the tingling subsides as his carbon dioxide levels are restored.

He needs almost two hours to slowly bike back to Crema.

As he didn't have reception out in the countryside, he only discovers in the early evening that there are two missed calls from Esther that went to voicemail. She proposes for them to meet at a bar in about half an hour before going over to Luca. He has invited them to watch a film.

They embrace and kiss on both cheeks when meeting, ordering Aperol Spritz. Sitting in this bar with a beautiful girl by his side, watching the setting sun drench the antique buildings surrounding them in a warm orange, Timmy thinks that maybe Italy isn't that bad after all.

He tells Esther about his friend Will who'll arrive tomorrow and she smiles and nods and tells him that she's a fan of his mom.

Just when they are both a little tipsy they decide to walk over to Luca's. He gives them a long look and then decides they should watch Body Double. Timmy is shocked to see how young Melanie Griffith once was. He and Esther first giggle about the clothes and the hair styles but quickly fall silent, Timmy curling up in her lap. It feels warm and safe.
Esther stroking his hair feels good. Really good.

Until, suddenly, Armie arrives.

Can't he the fuck leave him alone?

He doesn't even acknowledge his presence, just sucks on a cigarette he takes from Esther's mouth. Both can play that game.

Armie disappears with Luca into the kitchen as they continue to watch their thriller. And if Timmy shoots a glance now and then over at the kitchen door kept ajar, who can blame him?

When Armie leaves, he doesn't even say good night. The movie ends but Timmy, despite the lack of sleep last night, is not the least bit tired. So Luca opens another bottle and they start to talk about French cinema, the films of Esther's dad, her current project. She'll have to go back to Paris tomorrow.

“So I won't meet your friend.” She sounds a little sad.

“What friend?” Luca asks.

“Oh, Will, a bro from New York. He's doing a European tour this summer and comes over here tomorrow for a start. He's into film as well. I'm sure he'll visit Pauline afterwards so you can meet him in Paris.” He smiles at Esther.

“What is this, a holiday camp?” Luca asks in mock annoyance. Upon their bewildered looks he explains: “Armie's wife and daughter will visit as well. I mean, we're all a big family but I need you to concentrate on the project.”

Timmy swallows. So Armie's wife will come as well. Perhaps it's for the better. And yet, something's gnawing at him that he doesn't dare to examine too closely.

They leave shortly afterwards. Timmy escorts Esther back to her hotel, one arm around her shoulder. They kiss in front of the entrance, their tongues shyly brushing, but Esther doesn't ask him up to her room and Timmy isn't really sorry about it.

Armie is tossing and turning in his sheets that cling to his sweat-slick body, wrapping him tighter and tighter.

He dreams of Tim, tied up on a bed – his bed? - writhing in his bounds. Black rope is slung around his body, tying his wrists and spreading his legs. His hard cock is dripping wet, a pale purple rod of flesh against his white concave abdomen. He's whimpering Armie's name, begging him for something Armie can't make out. It's not that he wants to be released.

Armie watches as a large hand – his – closes around Tim's pale throat, tightening further and further. Tim tries to scream but no sound leaves his mouth as his lips loose color and his eyes start to protrude from their sockets.

He claws at Armie's fingers, long, elegant digits trying in vain to loosen his grip until he finally stops and surrenders.

'That's it, Tim. You behaved like a slut today, making out with Esther in front of me. You know I can't let this go unpunished. You want this, don't you? You know you need this.'
As Tim's eyes flutter shut Armie wakes up, breathless, hard and utterly disappointed. His erection is tenting the damp sheets.

'Oh god!' He thinks. 'What is going on?'

He flops back onto the mattress, almost unconsciously curling his fingers around his hard cock. He forces himself to think about Liz, her soft full breasts, her firm buttocks, her silky hair brushing over his nipples as she rides him – but his thoughts spiral back to a skinny boy with messy curls and long, thin limbs. Fucking him must feel like making out with a coat stand but Armie can't help it as he jerks off in the dark – it's Tim he sees, stretched out, bound, exposed and suffering for him.

The images from last night float back – them wrestling, the sweet smell of his sweat, his hard cock bulging the front of his shorts, his shaking body pressed against Armie's. It suddenly hits him that he could have had him then, that Tim had offered and that Armie had just been too afraid to reach out and touch.

The possibility of what might have been pushes him over the edge. Images of Tim - moaning, choking, spluttering, pleading - fill his head and he doesn't even regret it when he shoots his load all over his stomach and chest.

He sucks his fingers clean, imagining it's Tim's release he swallows.

Only afterwards does shame and regret get at him, trying to pull him down, telling him he's a traitor, an usurper, a fraud. Yet as he's riding a wave of bliss right now he's able to push these negative feelings away, holding them at bay. For once, the voice in his head stays silent.

That fear that is never leaving him had shown its ugly face last night. But he won't surrender to it, not during this film, he decides. Luca is right, he has to tackle his issues. This might be the only chance he gets.
Chapter Summary

Will, Nick and Liz all arrive in Crema.

Chapter Notes

There will be mentions of suicidal thoughts at the end of this chapter. Just so you have been warned.

Friday, April 15th 2016
9:17 am
From ArmieHammer @TChalamet

Sorry, have to cancel coffee again. A friend is coming over from Rome. Maybe we can grab lunch? Don’t know though. Depends… *chicken leg emoji*

Friday, April 15th 2016
9:26 am
From TChalamet @ArmieHammer

On my way to Milan.

Friday, April 15th 2016
9:27 am
From ArmieHammer @TChalamet

Ok, call me when u get back.

Timmy and Will had spent Friday in Milan, checking into the Chateau Montfort, a hotel Luca had recommended. The New York City boys were a little overwhelmed by the old-fashioned charm combined with every modern luxury their residence provided and had to suppress the urge to jump up and down of their huge four poster bed after the valet had closed the door behind them. There were gilded mirrors and crystal chandeliers and the suites and rooms had Opera and Ballet themes. Timmy had decided to book the Madame Butterfly suite because why not, leaving them in an Asian dream with paper parasols and lacquered furniture.

Being two young struggling artists on their way up, they hadn’t the money to buy all their favorite designers but nevertheless went window shopping before having a huge dinner. Timmy was by now rather fluent in Italian and made good use of it when they went dancing, chatting up both girls and boys. They both laughed and danced and drank and snogged until the early hours up to the point
where they could only faceplant into their giant double bed, snoring fully clothed under delicate butterfly wings.

Next day, they had room service for a late breakfast – a luxury they documented via Instagram, sending pictures to Pauline, Will’s mum and Esther – before Timmy soaked in the claw-footed bathtub while Will hit the gym. Only in the afternoon did they return to Crema.

They carefully avoided the reason Timmy had broken down and called Will until they are now sitting on his couch in his apartment, both a chilled can of lemonsoda in hand.

“So… these are your digs?” Will looks around rather dubiously.

“Well, I actually cleaned for you. It's small but it’s all mine. Kind of.” Timmy grins before they clink their drinks together.

Will starts to draw patterns in the condensation on his can. “And how did it go with Hammer these past couple days?”

Timmy starts to twist the hem of his t-shirt around his left index finger. “Not bad.”

Will stares at him for a whole minute. “Meaning…?”

“Meaning we don't talk?” Timmy looks at his finger tearing at the fabric, not at Will.

“That doesn’t sound good for a film in which you’ll have to play lovers.”

“Doesn’t mean I really have to fall in love with him, does it?” Timmy knows he sounds like a petulant child but can’t help it.

“No. But you should perhaps be on speaking terms.”

“Well, I’m an actor. I can fake it if need be.”

“Do you really want this movie to be like this?” Will asks. “I vividly remember what you told me about Hot Summer Nights. How sick you were of all that shit.”

Timmy shrugs. “It’s not my fault. He’s avoiding me.”

“Have you tried to talk to him. To explain…”

“Jesus, Will, please, just… don’t.” Timmy slams his soda onto the coffee table so hard it spills over. “Shit. Fuck.” He jumps to his feet and gets a towel from the bathroom. “I really don’t know… how…” he’s mumbling while wiping up the mess. “How can I do this? He’s the fucking star of this movie. It’s not my place to… God!” Frustrated, he throws the towel onto the floor. “Thanks for calling Michael that night, by the way.” He says a little calmer.

“Sure.” Will nods. “Sorry. Of course, it’s up to you. Only, I still see you return from Hot Summer Nights filming and you were… empty, just a shell, all life knocked out of you. Exhausted, drained. I know you need others to thrive, to glow. Acting isn’t done in a bubble. We read that script together, remember? This could be your break-through. It’s fantastic. But you need to be connected. How’s that to come about if you don’t even speak to each other?”

The worst thing is that Timmy knows Will is right. But he's not ready yet to acknowledge it and act upon that insight.

“Come on, let’s go out. There’s a great bar just round the corner I want to show you.”
Crema isn’t Milan but that night they go on a bender nonetheless. Timmy drinks Martinis until he can’t see straight and is almost sick against a Bernini statue but at least he forgets the fuck up he’s created – for the time being.

Armie’s so fucking glad to see Nick that he hugs him real tight for a long while when he arrives at his apartment.

“Let’s go for coffee, bro.” Nick suggest, patting Armie on the back to release him.

“Let’s go for something stronger.” It’s just eleven o’clock in the morning but this is Italy after all. La dolce vita!

After two Negronis, Armie shows Nick around.

“Here’s where Tim and I usually have coffee in the morning.” – “Tim showed me this place. Best pizza I’ve ever eaten.” – “God, I remember when Tim and I went shopping here last weekend and bought so much food we almost couldn’t carry it back to my apartment.” – “Tim always chooses pistachio gelato here. Says he could eat his whole body weight in it which isn’t that impressive a task really, truth be told.”

Nick gives him an odd look but doesn’t say anything until they sit down for lunch in a small Trattoria Armie had discovered with Tim a few days ago. Tim had eaten so much pasta with seafood that he’d almost been sick round the corner.

After they’d ordered – Armie choosing spaghetti scoglio before checking his phone for the umpteen time – Nick remarks casually. “So, this Tim… he seems to be the real deal.”

“God, he’s fantastic. Funny, smart, quirky. Half-French, from Hell’s Kitchen. Loves Hip Hop! Like, really loves it. Lives it. All his clothes are those baggy hoodies and trousers where half his skinny ass hangs out.” Armie smiles. He’s willfully ignoring the strange tension that has arisen between them over the last couple days. Nick mustn’t know.

“Okay…” His best friend takes a sip from his Peroni.

“What?” Armie asks, tilting his head.

“You actually seem quite… smitten.”

“Smitten? Dude, just because I’m playing gay I’m not smitten by that twink.”

“Playing gay again. So you’d say he’s a twink?”

Shit, Armie thinks. He won’t tell what happened between them. Well, what actually had happened between them? He’s still not sure.

“Nah, man, what do I know? I actually think he likes the French girl who plays Marzia, Elio’s girl in the movie.”

“Perhaps he’s just keeping all his options open. There’s such a thing as bisexuality, dude.”

Armie almost snorts his beer. “No idea, man. Haven’t yet developed a gaydar.”

“But you call him a twink nonetheless.” Nick wiggles his eyebrows.
“Well, maybe it’s just his French temperament?” Armie pronounces the word with a fake French accent.

“Don’t do that, sounds camp.” Nick empties his glass and orders another. Armie has to bite the inside of his mouth as to not say something he might regret.

After lunch he asks. “So, about Liz?”

“I think she’s flying in tomorrow. I told her I was visiting you this weekend and she replied ‘The more the merrier’.”

“Not sure my apartment as safe for a toddler, though.”

“Oh, I think she booked you all into a nice hotel round here for next week or so.”

Armie’s silent for a moment. “I’m not on holiday here. I have to check with Luca.”

“And with your Tim.” Nick smirks and Armie throws his napkin at him.

In the evening, they go round to Luca like it has become Armie’s routine. He’s excited what Nick will say about Tim after meeting him in person. Are those actual butterflies in his stomach? It’s a little bit like bringing your first girlfriend home to meet your parents...

Tim’s not there when they arrive, but Luca has invited his team over. There’s Walter, their editor, and Sayombhu, their cinematographer, and Roberta who does the set decoration, and Giulia, responsible for their costumes. Armie introduces Nick who is quickly absorbed in a loud discussion Armie can only guess is about Italian politics as the only word he understands is Berlusconi.

Armie’s watching the door, waiting for the bell to ring but it stays eerily silent as if to mock him. Why does it matter to him where Tim is? They are not joined at the hip or anything. His message this morning said he was going to Milan. Armie’s dimly aware that Tim might have mentioned that a guy he knows from New York was coming over. Had that been this weekend?

Only when they sit down for dinner does he dare to ask Luca if they shouldn’t wait for Tim.

“Oh, no, he's not with us tonight. He's staying in Milan with his friend Will.” The way Luca says friend makes Armie's stomach drop as if the swarm of butterflies batting their wings down there has just collectively died.

Suddenly, his appetite is gone.

“I hope he will be back by Monday for dress rehearsal.” Giulia jokes and all start snickering, shaking their heads at the impulsiveness of youth.

Armie ends up drinking too much red wine and Nick has to kind of carry him back to his apartment. It’s not the first time this happens so he takes it with good humor and only a few raunchy comments about not being that kind of guy to which Armie remarks in all the honesty the wine induces in him that Nick’s not his type anyway. Nick only laughs louder, thinking Armie has made an exceptionally funny joke.

Armie has one arm slung over his friends shoulder but it's too muscled to belong to the person he wants next to him right now. God, he remembers jerking off to images of Tim just this morning. Something is slipping but it can't be. He has to stop this before it spirals out of control. Maybe it's a good thing that Liz will come tomorrow.
He has no recollection how he ended up in bed.

The next day is cloudy and he's hungover so they stay in, watching some movies while Armie slowly comes alive again. Around midday he takes a much needed shower and just as he got dressed there's a loud knock on his apartment door. He exchanges a look with Nick, they both nod and Armie switches on his acting mode. He'll go for the surprised look he'd given in Blackout when Aiden Gillen had slammed a knife in his neck. Why does being visited his wife feel astonishingly similar?

In the evening when Armie steps up to one of the large windows facing the Piazza, opens it, leans out and lights up a spliff. Liz is in the bathroom, taking a shower. She always showers immediately afterwards. Armie wonders how they managed to conceive Hops.

Seeing his daughter and witnessing her unabashed delight in being reunited with him had been the highlight of his day. He'd carried her around all afternoon because she had been cranky from traveling and jet-lag, being oblivious to both the concepts of time zones and time in general. In the end, Nick had offered to take her to the hotel Liz had booked and stay with her there while Liz and Armie got some quality time as he'd called it, nudging Armie's side.

He'd dutifully performed what had been expected of him and when he'd thought about someone else's narrow waist, jeans riding low on skinny hips exposing two protruding hip bones, while pounding into his wife from behind in the semi-darkness of his bedroom it was just another issue he'll add to the pile of things he'll have to deal with. Later. He was quite used to it by now; it had almost become a ritual.

Liz thought his gestures spontaneous and romantic. If she'd only knew that they always correlated with a previous trip downtown and some sleazy encounter in a dirty alleyway or squat, she might have looked differently at the flowers he brought home apparently for no reasons or the little notes he left all over the house, telling her in ridiculous words fueled by guilt how much he needed her.

A pair of diamond earrings she loved best had been her secret compensation for Armie barebacking once, fucking a young scrawny guy obviously on crack without a condom just to feel something for a change, even if it had been only disgust afterwards. Now, every time Liz wore her jewelry it reminded Armie to never again be so stupid, though he doubted that it would help in the long run. Luckily, he had left almost immediately after that hook-up for a film shot in Spain for six weeks where he'd got tested eventually.

Hearing the word 'negative' hadn't been the huge relieve he'd thought it would be. Had he tried to force it out in the open back then? Being diagnosed with HIV would have been something even Liz couldn't ignore. It would have shattered her perfect world like a glass house.

Sometimes, Armie hates himself for the asshole he is, dreaming about catching a deadly disease just to be able to finally be true to himself. God, he's such a pathetic piece of shit.

And sometimes he thinks that Liz couldn't possibly blame him as much as he's already blamed himself if she's ever to find out.

He sucks on the reefer again, inhaling the sharp smoke, keeping it in his lungs until he almost chokes.

Suddenly, he hears someone yelling down at the Piazza, shouting on the top of their lungs and it takes Armie a minute to realize that it is English and that he knows that voice, even high-pitched and
slurred as it is by excitement and drink:

'Cause I'm fucking terrified, yo this is dumb
You should find someone else
I'm not the one for you, shit, I'm still growing up by myself
And mentally you're older than me and that shit doesn't help
'Cause if they see you with T, they'll think T needs some help
So when you mention "hang, " I'm thinking about a tree and a belt
And I don't want no relation, shit no relation
Ship when my dick is longer than my intentions-
Span, it's gonna suck your shit
It's that kitchen fan
It splattered on me like my dick in my hand...

Armie sees him now, standing under one of the wrought-iron street lamps on the opposite side of the Piazza near the church. He's not alone. There's a young man with him, tall, blond, well-build. They are both laughing while the other man – Will? - tries and fails to shush Tim, pressing a finger to his lips.

And suddenly, it's not just a finger, it's his mouth and they kiss, deep and eager, in full view of Armie at his window who can't avert his eyes even if he knows he should.

When the two men break apart they rest their foreheads together for a moment before dissolving into giggles and playful punches. His friend takes Tim's hand and pulls him around the corner into the shadow and just before he disappears into the darkness Tim looks up, right at the bright square that is Armie's lit window. It's too gloomy to see properly but even in the dim light Armie's sure that Tim sees him and grins sardonically before giving him a finger, mouthing 'fuck you' before the night swallows him like a specter.

Armie wants nothing more than to run downstairs and follow them, immersing themselves in their world. He never was so young and carefree like them and for a second the longing hurts so much that he has to grab the window sill. His apartment is on the third floor. The cobblestone below looks suddenly both sufficient and inviting. He'd just have to lean forward a bit more and he'll loose his balance. It might even be written off as an accident, sparing Liz the embarrassment of having to explain why he toppled himself.

You know how he was. Probably high, definitely drunk.'

Would she mourn him? How long? Maybe Nick would comfort her...

Thinking of Nick makes him think of Hops and he pulls back, closing his eyes, still feeling dizzy. It's the THC, he tells himself as Liz wraps her arms around him from behind, pressing her wet naked body against his back.

"A penny for your thoughts, husband?" She purrs against his shoulder and for a moment he's tempted to tell her that if he can't run after a skinny boy and fuck him against the wall of an ancient church right now he might as well throw himself out the window and be done with this shit his life has come to but then he only shrugs and closes the window, murmuring: "I just remembered my mother often read to me: If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

"And that's why I like your mum so much." Liz whispers in his ear before pulling him into bed. "Let's make the most of Nick babysitting, honey."
This is the hotel Will and Timmy stay at in Milan.
The song Timmy is serenading Armie with is 'Fucking Young' by Tyler The Creator
They all meet for dinner. Tension rises.

They finally all meet at Luca's on Sunday night. Ferdinando has made tortelli cremaschi and they all flock around the table, praising his cooking skills.

Armie watches Nick watching Tim and Will while Liz happily chats to Luca about interior design, Hops perched on her hip while the aperitif is served.

When she's introduced to Tim, their daughter reaches out for him. Quite naturally, Tim opens his arms and Liz lets Hops slide from her embrace into Tim's hold. Seeing him rock his daughter on his hip, pinching her little nose and scrunching his face up to make her laugh does something to Armie he didn't anticipate. Suddenly, he feels all warm and happy, especially when Tim looks directly at him for the first time that evening over the blond fuzz on his daughter's head, an unreadable impression on his face. Will, half-turned away, whispers something in Tim's ear that makes him shake his head and laugh.

“Salutè.” Says Nick next to him. “Remember when we were so young?”

“Hey, there's life in the old dog yet.” Armie downs his drink and looks for another. Nick just sighs.

Luca comes over to them. “I heard you moved to a hotel, Armie?” He asks, handing him another Campari-soda.

Armie shrugs. “The missus wanted to stay somewhere child-safe which my digs definitely weren't.”

Luca nods. “I understand. You can all have your little holiday for the next week but after that I want no distractions. You have to become Oliver who doesn't have a wife and child yet.” He pats Armie's shoulder and Armie wants to kiss his director. Five days – then it's back to just him and Tim again. He can manage that.

The conversation flows easily during dinner. Will is funny, Armie has to admit, and Liz is occupied with their daughter who's not allowed to eat with her fingers but has to use a spoon. From time to time Nick says something in Italian that makes both Luca and Ferdinando chuckle but leaves Tim looking lost between the three of them.

Armie wants to ask him about Milan, about getting wasted last night but he doesn't dare as he's not sure he can deal with the answers. So he stays quiet and digs into his food.

“We have costume fitting tomorrow. Better cut it short on the pasta, Armie.” He suddenly hears Tim say and smiles with his mouth full of creamy tortelli. 'You little shit,' he thinks, 'staying thin as a stick no matter how much pizza, noodles and ice cream you scarf.'

“And you better take a second helping, string bean, or I might wear you out.” He says out loud,
unable to keep a certain sharpness out of his reply beneath his jovial tone. Tim just raises his eyebrows in mocking shock. Armie has to remind himself that the boy doesn't know about most of Armie's issues, that he doesn't do this on purpose. He's not mean. It's a bit like playing battleship; only in Armie's case it's not really hard to score a hit.

Will wolf-whistles next to Tim who rolls his eyes. Liz does the same.

“Armie.” She swats his arm, taking her attention away from their daughter for two seconds which is enough for Hops to smear sauce all over her face and into her downy hair.

“Listen to Timothy, you know he's right... oh, no, darling! Armz, look what you've done?”

He's done nothing but knows that doesn't prevent his wife from blaming him for their daughter's misbehavior. Whenever Hops does anything remotely transgressing her mother's set of strict rules it's always Armie's fault. Yet for the sake of peace he plasters a smile on his face and says sorry while Liz gets up and carries their daughter over into the bathroom with an air of passive-aggressive rebuke.

Nick excuses himself and follows her.

Will looks down onto his plate while Armie stares at Tim, munching on his pasta, apparently oblivious to what is going on. Armie's eyes narrow and he's about to add insult to injury when Luca tops up their glasses and insists they all hail the cook.

The rest of the meal passes in chit-chat about the weather, wine, Italian cuisine and sights to visit in Lombardy.

After dinner, Liz says she's still tired and takes Hops back to their hotel while Tim offers to clean up.

“Come on, Armie, you're the standard of purity, help your string bean or he might drop that expensive china.” Will tells him with a broad smile on his friendly face and it's true, Tim is precariously balancing a tower of greasy plates in one hand while trying to carry a tureen in the other. It almost slips his grip and Armie instinctively reaches out and grabs it.

“Thanks, man.” Tim huffs and just like that Armie follows him over into the kitchen.

The others congregate to the sitting room for Brandy and coffee. Armie feels like he's stranded in an Agatha Christie movie. Who'll be the victim tonight, he muses.

Suddenly, he finds himself alone with Tim in Luca's kitchen but before he can get too broody or uncomfortable, making an excuse and leave, a linen towel hits him in the chest.

“You can dry.” Tim says and it sounds like a challenge. Armie rises to it.

“Fine.”

They work side by side in silence for a few minutes, Tim running water into the sink, rolling the sleeves of his hoodie up, exposing his thin, veined arms, before starting to attack the dirty dishes covered in a mountain of foam. Army waits for him to hand him the wet pieces which he rubs carefully dry before setting them onto the large oak table at which he'd been talking to Luca just a few nights ago.

“You have a lovely daughter.” Tim eventually says. He sure knows the way to a man's heart.

“And you have a lovely way with children.”
“Well, I have a bunch of younger cousins over in France. I loved meeting them during summer. We older kids were always employed as babysitters.” He shrugs.

They fall silent again.

“Meeting your wife was quite a surprise, though.” Tim says after a while.

“Yeah, she makes it a habit to visit me on set.”

As Tim gives but a curt nod and doesn't say anything else the atmosphere turns suddenly thick and heavy between them. Armie can't take it.

“Will's nice.” He offers while drying one of the large, heavy plates, his eyes lingering on Tim to catch his reaction.

A grin spreads on Tim's face as if waking up from a bad dream. “Yes, I know.” He doesn't meet Armie's eyes though.

“So he's your boyfriend?” Armie has no idea why he's suddenly so blunt but perhaps he's just tired off beating around the bush.

Tim nearly drops a crystal salad bowl. “What?” He asks, his voice rising a few octaves while drawing out the single syllable.

“Oh, come on. We both know I saw you two on the Piazza.” Armie feels his face heat. “Did someone have a good night last night?”

Tim snorts a laugh. “Did you like our little show?” He asks slyly.

“Show?” Armie has apparently forgotten that he's still rubbing the plate in his hands so he's confused when Tim tries to pass him the salad bowl. Tim makes a goofy gesture for Armie to set the plate down before wiping his wet hands on his trousers and carefully taking the plate out of Armie's limp hands. When their fingers brush it's like an electric current.

Tim's eyes are beautiful up close with their long dark lashes and blown pupils. He's suddenly so close that Armie could count the freckles on his nose if he could remember how to string numbers together.

“Oh, Armie, don't you just kiss your friends sometimes when you're in a mood?” He hears the boy say over the rush of blood in his ears.

“No. Why would I?” They are moving on very thin ice here.

“Why not? Because you just want to? It's no big deal, really.” And with that Tim steps right into his personal space and presses his soft lips to the corner of Armie's mouth. “See?”

Armie doesn't see anything because he might just black out any moment. He actually gasps when Tim steps back.

“Fuck off.” He hisses through gritted teeth, clenching his fists at his sides, dropping the wet towel to the floor.

“Jesus, sorry.” Tim's face has gone pensive. “I had no idea you have a problem with this.” He grabs the scrubbing brush again to continue to wash the dishes. “You know that we'll have to kiss for this film. Repeatedly.”
“I am aware of it.” Armie grinds out, putting the towel he’s just dropped over a rack to dry and getting a new one.

“So maybe we should get used to it.” Tim muses, watching Armie from under those fucking gorgeous lashes.

“You think so?” Armie, for anything better to do, is wringing the towel in his hands.

“Yes, definitely.”

Next thing Armie knows, he’s pressing Tim against the huge fridge by his shoulders, mirroring the pose they’d found themselves in just a few days ago. Only now, Armie knows exactly what he wants. “You are such a fucking tease.” He groans as his hand closes around Tim's throat. “But let me tell you, little Timmy, don’t mess with me, alright.” He can see Tim choke in his grip. His lips turn white and his eyes start to roll back in his head while Armie feels his pulls hammer against his palm.

Yet he doesn’t fight.

Armie suddenly knows that he could do anything to him right now and that Tim would let him. It's not even a shock. Instead, it's a warm buzzing reassurance that is flooding Armie's system.

Takes one to know one.

Is this what he's been looking for his whole life, the missing piece in the puzzle?

'Too late.' A voice whispers in his head and for once it's not his mother. Instead, it's his seventeen-year old self who just hitchhiked to Hollywood after running away from home. These few weeks had been the only time in his life he'd been truly free but he had been too afraid back then to grasp the chance offered to him. He could have invented himself anew but he'd chickened out like the coward he is.

Now he has to live with the consequences.

The realization what might have been and what he's lost hits him like a punch to the gut. What has he become that he's choking his young co-star in his director's flat after dinner with his wife and kid while anyone could just walk in on them?

When he releases Tim and steps back, the boy just topples forward, grabbing the counter as not to crash onto the tiles.

“Fuck....,” he coughs. “Are you mad?” But his pupils are still blown so wide that they almost drown out his fluorescent irises.

Armie just turns and continues to dry the dishes, acting as if nothing has happened. He's very good at that. “Don't provoke me, Tim. Just don’t.” It sounds more like a plea than a threat.

Tim coughs a bit more before stepping back up to the sink, rubbing his neck with his right hand. “Will's not my boyfriend.” He says with a raw voice. “But I do like men.” As he turns his head, his eyes bore into Armie's as if searching for something. Acceptance? An answer? Compliance?

Armie puts down the last plate and dries his hands before squaring his shoulders and looking Tim right in the face. 'I like men too,' he wants to says, imagining how it would feel to share the heavy burden he's been carrying all his adult life. He's waiting for his mum's voice to start screaming in his head but all stays quiet and that's when he allows himself to smile a little.
Tim answers his smile with a wide grin.

“That's fine with me.” Armie says and knows he's blown it when he sees Tim's face fall. ‘How many chances do you think you'll get in life, motherfucker?’ Seventeen-year old Armie yells at him before running away into the darkness of his memories, giving him the finger as a last salute.

As if on autopilot, he takes a step towards Tim. The boy almost jumps. Shit!

“I mean it. I...” Armie tries but it's no good. Too little, too late.

“Okay. That's okay.” Tim says, staring down at his sneakers. “I sometimes like women as well, just so you know.” He looks up at Armie then through his dark fringe, biting his lower lip and that's when Armie almost looses it again. Tim tenses up even more and Armie fears he has truly spooked him but after a beat the boy in front of him relaxes and exhales, returning Armie's gaze with open invitation.

“Listen, “Armie says, lowering his eyes to Tim's slightly parted lips, “I can't talk about this. Not now, not here.”

“When? Where?” Tim whispers and his breath ghosts over Armie's face, smelling of wine and chewing-gum and just a hint of something else.

Armie is aware that the tone has shifted completely. “This is not...,” he starts, shaking his head but who is he kidding, that is exactly what he means. What he wants. What he needs.

He's about to lean in and give an honest answer when Nick barges into the kitchen.

“Hey, dudes, where's the tiramisu?”

Will offers Timmy a water bottle and he takes it, just for the sake of not throwing up. He's drowned more Martinis than he'd thought humanely possible and feels rather sick right now. His movements have become uncoordinated and he'd almost spilled his last drink over a girl's dress.

In the end, he allows Will to pull him away and walk him home. Time seems to slow down at one moment, then rush the next. He's already starting to forget some occurrences of the evening. There had been a dark-haired boy with whom he might have danced. He still feels his soft wavy curls against his neck but can't remember his name. Too bad. Also, did he have a jacket? Where's his phone?

He asks Will who only shrugs and hugs him tighter.

They are both more than tipsy and when they near the Piazza, Timmy feels the urge to sing. There's a song that has been going around in his head for a few days now so he just shouts out its lyrics at full blast.

And this is where the story and confusion begin
’Cause I was in a problem but I had to pretend that I wasn't

When they reach the Piazza and he looks up, he can clearly see Armie standing at his window, smoking.

Will tries to silence him as his voice echoes from the ancient walls but suddenly Timmy feels brave, reckless and starved of human contact. Will is touching his lips and fuck it, fuck them all, and
especially fuck Armie Hammer with his perfect looks and his strong hands, so tall and almost too beautiful to look at, who smells so fucking good and sometimes stares at Timmy with an expression that can't be misread but apparently Timmy got it all wrong because he's a stupid fucking idiot but at least Will's here and Will's nice and Will's offered before so why not just kiss him while Armie fucking Hammer is watching from his fucking apartment window in fucking Crema on a fucking Saturday night?

They are young, they are free and Armie can kiss his gay ass for good as he slides his tongue into Will's mouth who doesn't pull back but just holds him, understanding perfectly well without being told that this is what Timmy needs right now. It's nothing sexual, it's not even something personal, it's just a body seeking contact with another body and if Armie fucking Hammer gets a hard-on watching them all the better.

Timmy hopes he'll rub one out to their image later when he lies alone in his bed, that he'll miss him and that it will eventually hurt so much that he'll make a move because no way are those looks he shoots Timmy just platonic. He must know how he comes over, what he's doing to him. Earlier that evening, after their third or probably ninth Martini, Will had started to spill some gossip about Armie fucking Hammer. Will knows everybody and whom he doesn't know his mother does. Apparently, there had been TALK during *J. Edgar* filming with Leo. And it hadn't died down afterwards. Not about the bondage, that was a thing everyone knew by now but it might have been spread to distract from other... predilections.

The idea of Armie tying him up had made Timmy so hard in his drunken state that he'd almost taken that beautiful boy he'd danced with back to his apartment. Rafael, his name had been Rafael. Timmy's proud to remember it while sticking his tongue down Will's throat. He's nothing if not a considerate trick.

When they eventually part for breath, they press their foreheads together, mostly not to fall over.

“Better now?” Will mumbles and Timmy nods, grinning widely. He's not sure who had started the tickling that follows but only seconds later they are both giggling and gasping, trying and failing to fight the other off.

“Let's go home.” Will says between shrieks and Timmy agrees. Will takes his hand and starts to pull him round the corner but Timmy simply has to look up at that bright square one last time against which Armie's silhouette is showing. He knows he can see him so he flips him the bird and mouths 'Fuck you' before trying to remember the lines of the song that had haunted him.

He can't see Armie's face against the backlight but he doesn't have to, it's enough to see him step back inside. Suddenly, Timmy hates himself. He's acting like a child.

Somehow, they make it back to his apartment. Will forces him to drink some water before he falls asleep on the couch, his head in Will's lap who watches TV after getting a bucket and a blanket. Timmy will use the former and get rid of the latter during the night, waking weak and cold.

Next day is still overcast and Timmy feels like shit. Anyway, Will takes him on a hike and when they return sweaty and exhausted in the afternoon, Timmy feels much better to his own surprise. They shower and dress and then walk over to Luca.

It's a minor shock not to just meet Nick but also Armie's wife. She's tall, thin and of an intimidating beauty that makes Timmy feel very young and clumsy.

Timmy has only rarely met women like her. They are a special breed, shallow yet smart, perfect but
soulless, their teeth too white, their eyes too big, their hair too silky, their waist too trim. There's nothing natural about her and yet she seems surprisingly nice. He can totally understand why a man like Armie had married her – but he doesn't understand how a man like Armie can truly love her.

Their daughter is simply gorgeous.

Timmy's so glad to have Will by his side that evening. He's his rock. He tries not to judge. His sole priority is Timmy and that feels really great. Especially as Armie continues to look at him like that even with his wife sitting next to him, feeding their daughter.

It's making Timmy nervous so at some point, he lashes out just to say something. Anything. He's always had a lose mouth when under stress, he even told Armie as much.

When his wife storms off Armie looks at Timmy as if he wants to swallow him whole.

And then Will has the nerve to set them up to do the dishes! Timmy had just offered to get away from it all but suddenly he finds himself alone in the kitchen with Armie – who's still staring at him like if he's something he wants to devour.

So he decides to go for it. After last night, he has nothing to lose.

The kiss is meant to provoke Armie but Timmy hadn't anticipated to be choked in return. Apparently, Armie's desires are even darker than he'd expected. Somehow, that only turns Timmy on all the more.

He has toyed with this stuff a bit, being from New York and all. He went to a club a few times where men in leather hung out with young boys. Just to satisfy his curiosity. It had been shortly after filming One & Two which had piqued his interests into all things darker. Nothing had happened. Some men had approached him but he hadn't felt ready yet and they'd understood. But the curiosity had lingered.

He's surprised that he doesn't fight Armie, that he instead gives in and lets him hurt him. Watching Armie's face as he tightens his grip around Timmy's throat makes him almost come in his pants. No way is that man straight.

And just as Timmy almost has him at the point where he's about to open up and acknowledge what's been building between them, that fucking dickhead Nick walks in.

Chapter End Notes

The 'standard of purity' remark from Will refers to Arm & Hammer, a major American manufacturer of household products.

Thank you all for reading, subscribing, kudoing and commenting.

You can find me on tumblr for more Armie x Timmy content.
Hungry Heart

Chapter Summary

Sorry.
"Our social personality is a creation of the minds of others..."

Chapter Notes

Don't try this at home. TW for purging.
I was unsure if I should really publish this but it is what I came up with. There will be call-backs to this as the story progresses.

Armie hates fittings, people accessing, measuring, judging and staring at his mostly naked body. Those who don't know him look at him and think that he was born with the physique of a Greek god. Well, surprise, he wasn’t.

Italy is especially challenging. The food is just too good. Armie loves eating. He's not a gourmet, it gives him comfort.

It has always been like this. When he was a kid he'd spent all his pocket money on candy. He was a chubby child. Other kids called him fatty, laughed and didn't want to play with him but he always had something sweet in his mouth to soften their bitter insults. Food was never mean. Food was always there for him. Until his mother put him on a diet. But he found ways, hiding chocolate bars in his school bag and sandwiches under his bed. The housemaids were easily charmed by the little boy and swapped food for booze he'd nick from his dad's house-bar. He was home so infrequently that he didn’t realize when a bottle of gin or scotch went missing.

When they eventually moved to LA, Armie had been fat. Really fat. Which didn’t help, being the new guy in school. But a few months after arriving he suddenly started to grow. And he didn't stop. Not until he reached 6'5 at seventeen. That had helped; not so much his golden boy looks, though. Going from Fatso to Prince Charming had been a shock for Armie and anyone around him that had taken some time to recover from.

Now, at 29, his metabolism isn't the same as when he was a teenager. Only his appetite is. When he'd been younger, sport used to do the trick. But you can only run that much. When he'd met Liz he discovered other ways.

She wasn't the usual two fingers down her throat bulimic. No, she used much more sophisticated methods: emetics, laxatives, diuretics and douches. Armie had first been impressed by what that woman could eat and still look trim and in shape. When he’d found out how she did it he'd been even more impressed by her regime. She was in control of her body and he could do the same.

When he returns to the hotel after dinner at Luca's Liz is already asleep. But she has left all he needs in the bathroom. They are a team in this.
First, he takes two spoonful of Ipecac, bringing up everything still in his stomach. It's not much, mostly alcohol and cream from the dessert.

He doesn't like it very much but because he has waited too long he will have to use an enema as well. He does it quickly, emptying himself, feeling lightheaded afterwards. It's good to know that he's expelled all solid food. He's used to the pain in his stomach and knows it will subside.

The most unpleasant business is the Lasix. He won't sleep much tonight as he'll have to piss a lot but it will all pay off nicely in the morning. By then his body will have got rid of all excess fluid. He'll look much thinner and muscled.

He probably wouldn't have slept much anyway remembering his encounter with Tim. He'd been so confused afterwards that he'd spooned up two servings of tiramisu without even tasting it and had followed that up with maybe one grappa too many.

Anyway, that's all water under the bridge now. He grins at his own bad pun.

He spends the night on the couch, dozing off only for moments before he has to run to the bathroom again. When he's eventually dry after about six hours of restlessness it leaves him with a pounding headache, parched mouth and severe thirst. But he knows he can't drink or all his efforts would have been in vain. To distract himself he takes to the hotel's gym until he feels so dizzy that he actually fears he might black out.

But he's a professional, he gets a grip and, at ten o'clock, he meets Tim at Luca's to drive over to Milan to visit Giulia's studio.

Armie shows up at Luca's wearing dark sunglasses, a Ralph Lauren polo-shirt, slacks and a loose cashmere sweater, looking all pristine glamour. Timmy had been a little afraid to meet him again this morning. Last evening, he'd been brave, fueled by Dutch courage and desperation but when he'd told Will what had happened in the kitchen, he'd just gaped at him.

"What?"

"Yeah..." Timmy had touched his neck almost unconsciously and back at the apartment, Will had looked at it under the bright neon lights of the bathroom lamp. There had been small violet bruises as proof.

"Jesus..." Will had mumbled. "That guy's manic."

"You could say I provoked him."

"You know you sound like a beaten housewife making excuses for her violent husband, don't you?"

"It's not like that."

"No? Why?"

"Because I kinda liked it?"

"Whooo, T, just give me a break. You know that man a week and suddenly you are into what? SM?"

Timmy had shrugged and thankfully, Will had let him be.
Today he has to wear a scarf atop one of his usual hoodies and baggy jeans.

It's kind of a relieve that Armie's rather uncommunicative. He's definitely not a morning person and even keeps his shades on in the back of the car taking them to Milan. So Timmy talks to Luca while Armie nods off, leaning in his corner of the back seat, his long legs almost touching Timmy's ankles.

Giulia's atelier is an airy loft with large worktables under high windows and white-washed walls, one of which is covered by a floor to ceiling mirror. There are numerous cloth racks, a tailor's dummy, three sewing machines, an ironing board and piles of fabric samples strewn both over the concrete floor and the workbenches. A bowl of fruit and some bottles of water sit on a sideboard as refreshments. The air is warm and dry and smells of wool, herbal tea and moth balls.

Timmy had feared that he would have to wear a neon string vest under a puffy rayon blouson or something but Giulia explains to them that she wants to go for a moderate, timeless 80s look that doesn't hurt the tastes of today's audiences. No big shoulder-pads and pleated trousers in pastel colors. They are not remaking Miami Vice or Denver Clan. Instead, they'll wear classic male summer attire and European brands, Lacoste for example; but also American apparel like Levi's jeans and Converse sneakers because Elio and Oliver obviously have strong connections to the States.

As it's a summer's tale they won't be wearing much anyway.

Timmy feels a little shy when he's the first to get fitted. Giulia presents him with what she's chosen for Elio's outfits. "These polo-shirts belong to my husband. They are original 1980s." She smiles.

Timmy quickly sheds his hoodie, t-shirt and scarf and tries them on, turning the collars up to hide the light bruises on his neck. The shirts fit just loose enough to show off his slender body and slim waist.

"Perfect!" Giulia exclaims and Luca nods. Armie's staring out the window, fiddling with his sunglasses. His eyes are bloodshot. Timmy remembers him still knocking back grappas as he'd left last night as if there was no tomorrow. No wonder he's been so quiet. He should at least drink some water.

Giulia has also found Timmy a few heinously patterned bathing trunks, one even missing the netting.

"Wow," Timmy whistles. "Those are short." He says as he steps out from behind a sheet thrown over a cloth line to function as an improvised changing booth.

"Well," Giulia looks him up and down, "you can wear them for sure."

He scrunches his nose in reply, absentmindedly touching his neck before wrapping his arms around his torso. Standing in front of the huge mirror in nothing but those tiny bathing suits, his skin pale and blotchy, his chest too narrow, his arms and legs like sticks, he decides he'll have to hit the gym as well as a tanning saloon.

This decision is enforced when Armie's decked in. Giulia has plain t-shirts and linen shirts for him in bright blue, off-white and forest-green – as well as the legendary green, red and yellow bathing trunks Andre wrote about in the novel. His costume is completed by some Adidas shorts. That's it.

Armie scoops it all up in his huge hands and gets behind the sheet. When he emerges again it takes Timmy's breath away.

"Where's the rest of it?" Armie jokes and Giulia giggles like a school girl.

The red swim shorts he's wearing are hugging his plush ass tightly, leaving nothing to the imagination. Armie's thighs, arms and torso are all perfectly defined, covered in a fine golden fur that
thickens on his chest and in a broad line below his navel, disappearing in those sinful shorts. His nipples are peaked and a reddish brown, his stomach is flat and his ribs are showing as he stretches to pull a t-shirt over his head. Timmy has to remind himself to pull his chin up from the floor and shut his mouth before he starts drooling.

Yet he can't avert his eyes as the t-shirt is exchanged for a buttoned shirt. The way Armie's shoulder muscles work beneath the smooth tanned skin of his back makes him feel hot all over. The urge to touch him is suddenly so strong that Timmy grabs a water bottle just to occupy his hands, turning it over and over in his hands but not opening it.

Luca suggests not to button the shirt all the way up but to leave it hanging open so Oliver's hairy chest will be visible, a stark contrast to Elio's alabaster skin. Their director explains something about visual tension arising from their contrasting body shapes but Timmy's preoccupied by staring at Armie's huge hands rubbing his strong legs below the hem of his shorts. As he remembers those hands around his neck he has to lean against one of the worktables, crosses his ankles and stuffs his hands into the front pocket of his hoodie to hide the erection swelling in his jeans.

God, what's happening with him?

When Armie next steps out in nothing but a pair of white Adidas shorts just barely covering his crotch Timmy feels the sudden need to lie down and breath in a paper back. He might even have made a sound because Armie suddenly looks at him and frowns.

"I've no idea what kind of rating you have in mind for this film but when I have to sit down in these there's no way to keep it PG."

Luca chuckles and assures him they'll find a way but that the shorts will stay. All Timmy can think off is Armie's cock and balls falling out of those shorts and it makes his mouth water. It's not that Timmy has never seen Armie in various states of undress, they have gone swimming for example, but there his trunks had hung down to his knees. Timmy's underwear covers more than those garments Giulia and Luca have decided Armie should wear.

The idea of having to roll around with Armie, kissing him, grinding down on him while he's dressed – or rather undressed – like this makes Timmy's heart rate speed up.

As his cock twitches in his trousers, Timmy decides that he will have to resort to a resolute regime of early morning wanking to get through filming with his dignity intact.

He stares at the floor as Armie walks up and down the room in front of the mirror, his naked feet making soft noises on the concrete. His toes are surprisingly long and slender and Timmy wants to suck them into his mouth, twirling his tongue around and around until Armie is writhing with need, offering him other parts of his body to lick.

God, what has he gotten himself into?

After taking a few pics for reference, both Giulia and Luca are satisfied with the garments assigned to their characters. Timmy has hoped they could leave now. But no. Now Giulia needs their measurements. They were of course provided prior to filming but there's always something that might have changed so Giulia wants to take them herself (maybe not trusting the conversion from inches to cm?). She starts with Armie as he's almost naked anyway.

So he stands for solid ten minutes in nothing but snug boxer shorts in the middle of the room while Giulia and her measuring tape are all over him, mapping out every inch – or cm – of his body.
Timmy can't do anything else but watch and wish he was allowed to roam Armie's body as freely and without restraint. Their eyes meet in the mirror and Timmy can't look away.

He expects Armie to grin at him or frown or something but his face is utterly devoid of any emotion, just a blank mask. Still, Timmy feels called out and blushes so hard he fears his head might explode.

When Armie's finished, he quickly gets dressed and then asks for a place to smoke. Giulia points him to a balcony at the other side of the corridor leading to her studio.

When it's Timmy's turn, he feels like cattle on the meat market. While getting undressed, he thinks of a pair of socks he'd forgotten in his gym back over a hot summer while still in high school. Remembering the smell that hit him when he'd eventually opened the zipper on the last day of the holidays usually does the trick of killing any arousal he might feel.

Luckily, it works this time as well. As Giulia's hands brush over every part of his over-sensitive skin his pronounced self-doubt actually helps keeping his cock in check. He's self-conscious enough when it comes to his underdeveloped body without people noting down every flaw of it: that his legs are too long and his arms too thin and his shoulders too narrow and too hunched; that he has a his pigeon chest and a neck like a scrawny giraffe baby and so on and on and on. Having to watch all this in the mirror is just the icing on the cake of his humiliation.

When he's finally finished, Armie isn't back yet.

So he gets dressed and for nothing better to do he goes looking for him as Giulia and Luca are deep in conversation about Mr and Mrs Perlman's costumes.

He finds the balcony easy enough but peering through the glass door there's no sign of Armie. Only when he steps outside and looks it up and down does he see him crouched on the tiled floor among bird droppings, leaning against the wall. He doesn't lift his head when Timmy approaches and the hand holding his cigarette is shaking so violently that he can't bring it up to his mouth.

“Fuck off.” He mumbles as Timmy's shadow falls over him.

“Shit, Armie, what's going on?” Timmy feels totally silly and helpless. Something is obviously very wrong but all he can do is stand there and stare. Seeing healthy, strong Armie crouching here in a pile of misery totally throws Timmy off kilter. Armie's white as a the sheet they just changed behind.

“I'm alright. Piss off.” His voice is raw and shaky.

“No!” Timmy has no idea where this boldness comes from but he won't leave Armie like this.

“Tim, just...” Armie's voice dies as he tries to breathe. Timmy squats down beside him, takes the cigarette from between his fingers and stubs it out. Up close, his lips are dry and flaky. Timmy can see the broken vessels in the whites of Armie's eyes. His chest his heaving rapidly as he tries to suck oxygen into his lungs.

When Timmy touches his fingers to Armie's forehead, it's hot. He pinches the back of Armie's hand, pulling at the skin and it stays like this, not sinking back.

“Through his sister, Timmy's met enough ballet dancers to know these signs.

“You are dehydrated. Just wait here, okay.”

He almost runs back to Giulia's studio, grabbing a water bottle and a banana from the fruit bowl. Luca and Giulia don't even notice him.
Armie hasn't moved when he returns.

“Here, have some water, but slowly. And eat this. Small bites.” Timmy sits down next to Armie in the dirt and feeds him tiny pieces of banana interspersed with sips of water. “Slowly, I said. Or you'll throw it all up.” He doesn't say 'again'.

To Timmy's endless relieve, Armie just does as he's told. Timmy gently brushes his long fringe out of his blue eyes. There's a metallic stench to his body that he can smell sitting this close.

“Jesus, Armie.” He whispers. For a brief moment, Armie’s head drops and rests against Timmy's shoulder.

“Fuck.” He mumbles. “Don't tell Luca, okay?”

It only occurs to Timmy then that they perhaps should call an ambulance or maybe Liz but he doesn't say anything. He just rubs Armie's back and offers another bite of fruit.

“Just breathe, okay. Don't worry. It's okay.” He tells Armie over and over again until the bottle is empty and some color has returned to Armie's face.

“Shit. Don't know what that was.” Armie tries to sound back to normal as he moves to get up, grabbing Timmy's shoulder for leverage. “Maybe a bug from the dessert last night.” He adjusts his shades as he steadies himself with one hand pressed against the wall. “Thanks, man.”

Armie's about to leave but Timmy holds him back, wrapping his long fingers around his tattooed wrist.

“You don't have to lie to me. Don't lie to me.” All he sees is his reflection in the dark glasses hiding Armie's eyes. He wants to wipe those off Armie's face as much as he wants to wipe that false jovial expression away.

This is bad and Timmy knows. Fuck this shit.

“I know what this is.” He bites out.

Armie's face hardens. “You have no idea... I have no idea what you're talking about.” And with that, he turns around and leaves Timmy standing on the windy balcony. In that moment, he hates Armie Hammer with a fierce intensity he didn't believe being capable off just moments earlier. In his frustration, he kicks the empty plastic bottle across the tiles but that doesn't help much.

In the end, he follows Armie back to Giulia's studio

They drive home to Crema soon after. Both stay silent. Timmy pulls his headphones on as soon as he sits in the backseat, filling his head with Kid Cudi’s words.

^^^^^^

The drive over to Milan is no fun at all. Armie feels too exhausted to talk and just rests, his thoughts drifting off as he tries to listen to Tim and Luca talking.

When they arrive at the costume designer's loft, he's glad that Tim has to start because he needs time to get his breathing back under control. His heart is hammering in his chest. Maybe he's overdone it?

As soon as Tim takes off his scarf, Armie's heartbeat accelerates further. There are marks on his neck in the shape of Armie's fingertips. Suddenly, the whole room is spinning.
It doesn't get better when the kid just sheds his hoodie and t-shirt to try on the polo-shirts Giulia hands him. His skin is milky-white and smooth, a hairless chest, only a dark dusting under his arms.

He's so delicate.

Now that Armie knows how easily Tim bruises he can't stop thinking about leaving other marks on his skin: the beautiful parallel circles of ropes cutting deep into sensitive skin; the angry swelling of bites; violet-blue spots blooming on his inner thighs where blood got sucked to the surface, breaking the vessels; bright red imprints where a hand has firmly smacked his buttocks... Armie's usually not into spanking but Tim's creamy skin makes him reconsider.

He has to lean against the wall and is grateful that his body is simply too drained to show how much watching Tim turns him on. The air is warm in the studio, too warm, and the smell of moth balls makes Armie dizzy.

When Timmy steps out from behind the sheet in nothing but small swimming trunks, showing off his miles of legs, Armie has to take a deep breath. Does Tim even know how gorgeous he looks? That mixture of boyish innocence paired with the confidence of youth makes him irresistible, magnetic. Armie has to force himself to avert his gaze and look out the window, otherwise he might be unable to control his reactions to the almost naked man merely five feet away.

Armie can even smell his fresh sweat. God, this is going to end badly. His head is pounding as his vision starts to blur.

When it's his turn, getting in and out of various pieces of closing is tiring. Bending over is a challenge and Armie has to brace himself against the wall behind the sheet a few times to keep his balance.

Those shorts are so short that his dick almost hangs out. He catches Tim's look and the boy seems flushed. Is he horrified being confronted with so much blatant maleness? Armie can't tell in his fuzzy state but Tim surely looks weird. He's playing with a water bottle and Armie desperately wants to take a sip but he doesn't allow himself, not until this is over.

The worst part is when he has to stand almost naked in front of that mirror while Giulia measures his body. He has gained half an inch around the waist but his upper arms and thighs are leaner. He'll have to work out even more. He'd love to ask Tim for a bike-ride tomorrow but Liz has already made other plans.

He watches Tim watching him and hates every second of it, carefully schooling his face into an expressionless mask.

When it's all over he needs a cigarette.

But as he lights up on the balcony his vision goes suddenly dark. Next thing he knows, he's on all fours down on the tiled floor which is shaking and swaying, only that's impossible. His head is swimming. His heart is almost pounding out of his ribcage and he feels sick.

Help. He needs help.

Somehow, he manages to sit up and lean against the wall. He tries to concentrate on his breathing. He can't swallow, his mouth is parched. When he coughs his whole body is spasming. His legs start to cramp and he's sure he'll pass out any minute now when a shadow falls over him.

It's Tim.
Oh god no! He off all people shouldn't see him like this.

Luckily, he's gone the next moment, or is he? Because then he's suddenly back again, pouring water into Armie's mouth, making him eat something sweet. Is this a dream? Armie's not sure but as he coils up against the warm body next to his he doesn't care. He allows himself to feel good for a little while regardless if this is a fantasy or not.

But as he slowly comes back to his senses, he realizes that Tim is really sitting next to him, witnessing his sorry state. Embarrassment tightens Armie's throat, especially as Tim seems to know what's going on.

That can't be. So Armie does what he always does when he can't face a situation: he flees, leaving Tim behind, pulling down his shutters. He's not sure if it's the humiliation of it all or just a physical reaction that makes his stomach reel.

He's such a pathetic fucker. He truly deserves the pile of shit his life has become.
Cruising

Chapter Summary

Armie has to let off some steam...

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all your lovely comments especially on the last chapter <3!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Timmy wakes early the next morning and decides he needs a decent coffee. It's a beautiful day for once, the spring sun shining brightly through the window, its warm rays falling on the bed he shares with Will.

Poor Will. He had to take care of Timmy most of the previous nights so Timmy lets him sleep, slips quietly out of bed, just puts on sweat pants and a hoodie and runs downstairs to their little cafeteria.

To his utter surprise he sees Armie sitting at a table outside, his daughter sleeping in a pink buggy next to him.

Timmy stops in his tracks. After yesterday he's not sure how to face Armie. Should he act as if nothing has happened? Armie very obviously didn't want to talk about it. But they both know and that knowledge won't just disappear because they're not addressing it.

Timmy hates these situations. He feels young, inept and stupid when he doesn't know what to do. He thinks about retreating silently and get coffee somewhere else but Armie has already seen him. He takes off his shades and raises a hand to wave at him. Now Timmy has no choice but to walk over.

„Hey, good morning.“ He says. „Didn't think I'd meet you here.“

Armie rubs the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger. „I've been up since five. The little princess wanted to play. This is actually my second breakfast.“ Timmy looks at the remains of an espresso and a chocolate croissant but says nothing.

„You staying?“ He asks instead. When Armie nods after a look at his sleeping daughter he continues: „Okay, so I'll just get me something.“

Timmy orders his usual, an espresso and a bombolona, puts it on tray and sits down next to Armie in the sunshine.

„Wow, this must be Italy.“ He sighs, stretching his legs. The weather has been pretty bad up until now.

„Yeah.“ Armie agrees.

They fall silent as Timmy bites in his pastry.
“Where’s Will?” Armie asks.

“Still sleeping. Didn’t want to wake him. He’s on holiday after all.” Timmy takes another bite. “And Liz?”

“Spa.”

Timmy nods, licking apricot jam off his thumb and forefinger. He feels Armie’s gaze on him but doesn’t return it.

“You feeling better?” He asks after taking the last bite. It’s a risk but Timmy has decided not to ignore what happened yesterday. Armie should be aware of that.

As an answer he puts his shades back on. “Listen, this is not what you think it is,” he says.

“What do you think I think this is?” Timmy shoots back.

“I... fuck! Stop playing games with me!” As Armie raises his voice Hops stirs in her buggy and they both freeze.

“Same.” Timmy whispers, staring at Armie while anger, frustration and concern fight inside him for the upper hand. He can’t make sense of Armie’s behavior and it annoys him to no end. “Take those fucking sunglasses off when you talk to me.” He erupts, frustration winning. To his surprise, Armie complies. “Thank you!”

They look at each other for a moment before the sheer ridiculousness of their conversation makes them both snicker.

“Sorry,” Timmy huffs. “It’s really none of my business.”

“Thanks anyway for yesterday.” Armie says, and he sounds sincere.

Timmy bites his lip. “You know, my gran’s a dancer, my mum’s a dancer, my sister’s a dancer... I have seen this a lot. With guys as well. It’s just... really dangerous.” Timmy’s playing with the crumbs on his plate, looking up at Armie from below his fringe.

Armie’s quiet for a long moment. Then he nods. “I know. I’m careful. I have everything under control. Just don’t tell anyone, please.”

Hearing Armie plead makes Timmy blush. “Of course not.” He wants to believe him.

“I mean it. Not even Will.”

“Promise, man. You’re my friend.” Timmy is surprised that he actually means what he says.

“Thanks, man.” Armie gives his shoulder a firm squeeze.

“Does Liz know?” Timmy asks a little reluctantly.

Armie snorts a laugh. “Are you serious?” His eyes crinkle at the corners as he grins but there’s something underneath his joking manner that Timmy fears is cynicism.

“Okay, sorry, stupid question.” He lets his gaze wander over the square before looking at his phone. Armie does the same.

“Sorry, I think I have to...”
“Is it already that late...?”

They both speak at the same time, then look at each other and burst out laughing again, this time much more free.

“Go.” Armie says, getting up. “Say Will hello from me.”

“I will. Same goes for Liz.”

There's nothing more to say but they still gaze at each other for a beat and something transpires between them, an unspoken understanding. Neither Will nor Liz mean anything at this moment, time doesn't mean anything, their fucked situation means nothing either – they are just two young men looking at each other, liking what they see.

They meet as if by chance at their cafe every morning of every day of that week until Friday when all their visitors have been told to leave and they are finally alone again.

By Wednesday, Armie is about to climb the walls. The last two days have been a constant shopping trip in Milan. He has lost count of all the designer boutiques they've visited, Hops strapped into her buggy. As a reward for being a good girl, Liz gave her new clothes as well. Armie smiles a little to himself because she doesn't really care. Daddy’s girl.

Their only breaks from the shopping marathon he gets are when he takes his daughter to a park to let her roll around on the grass or walks her around, holding her little hands in his huge palms. She especially loves that. Afterwards, Liz gives him a dressing down for soiling her precious pink silk dress with grass stains but he thinks it worth it.

On Wednesday afternoon, he visits the Duomo with Hops while Liz has a face treatment. She doesn’t care for anything older than herself but Armie is fascinated and a little in awe as he sits down in one of the benches, gazing at the ceiling. He has long stopped to believe in anything that bears a cross but the ancient building evokes at least some form of respect in him for all the artists that had given blood, sweat and tears to build its glory.

He cherishes the peace and quiet he gets here despite the hordes of tourists and even lights a candle for what it’s worth, stuffing a hundred bucks into the offering box. But after about half an hour, Hops starts to whine and needs changing, and even Armie with his long-lost faith in anything divine wouldn't do that in a church.

He meets Liz and Nick in the bar of the Hilton hotel in the early evening and just after their first drink he knows that he can’t spend another hour with them or he’ll snap. They chat idly about shoes and facial treatments and even try to persuade him to get chest sandpapered – as if after yesterday he needed more criticism directed at his body and its imperfections.

So he invents another costume fitting – yes, sorry, it has to be tonight as he already is in Milan – no, it won’t take too long, he'll surely be back in Crema by ten. Nick can take Liz and Hops to the hotel in their hired car and he’ll just get a cab later – yes, sorry, he really has to go now, Giulia is waiting.

They accept without putting up a fight.

Armie steps outside, takes a deep breath and hails a taxi to take him to Piazza Trento.

It’s an ugly square, fenced in on one side by concrete high-rises, on the other by a dirty wall smeared with obscene graffiti. There’s a little park - more a grass verge - in the middle where men and boys
linger on benches while Johns are cruising, ogling what’s on offer.

Armie knows it’s stupid and risky but he just doesn’t care anymore. He needs to fuck someone with a cock.

He sees him after walking under the trees in the twilight for maybe five minutes: tall, young and thin, with dark hair and a pale face, wearing an oversized tracksuit, big headphones dangling around his neck. Their eyes meet briefly and the boy looks Armie up and down before tilting his head slightly towards a dark corner near the dirty wall. Armie steps into the shadows and doesn’t bother if he might get stabbed and robbed. Whatever happens to him here can’t be worse than what awaits him back at the hotel in Crema.

And right now, he just can’t do that anymore.

“Si?” The boy asks. It’s so dark that Armie can’t make out the color of his eyes but his voice is a soft tenor.

“Do you speak English?”

The boy shrugs and nods. “Tourist?” He asks with a heavy accent. “From USA?”

Armie doesn’t answer that. “Do you bottom?”

The boy looks at him bewildered, clearly not understanding what Armie means.

“Can I fuck you?” He first points at himself and then at the rentboy.

Now he seems to get it.

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“Hundred Euros.” Armie has no idea if that’s the usual rate or if he’s taken to the cleaners but he honestly doesn’t mind. The boy’s beautiful, has good skin and a nice voice and that’s all that matters. So he just nods in agreement.

“Fifty now, fifty after.” The boy demands and Armie hands over the cash. Liz had today spent ten times the amount on a handbag so he doesn’t even feel bad for it.

The boy stuffs the money in his hoodie and gestures for Armie to follow him around the corner. There’s a low structure, maybe an old garage or shed or something, and the boy leads him inside. He switches on his mobile to shine some light and something – man or beast – shuffles quickly away into a corner. It smells of piss, debris and rot and Armie wonders briefly what the headlines would say if he’d been found killed in such a dump but then the boy braces himself against a wall, pulls down his sweat pants and shows Armie his lovely little ass. All his doubts fly out the broken windows.

“For hundred you can do not with condom.” They boy says in his simple English, smiling over his shoulder, but when Armie shakes his head he seems to relax a little and shrugs.

There’s nothing more to say so Armie takes a condom from his wallet, opens his fly and rolls it onto his already half-hard cock. The boy is fumbling in the front pocket of his hoodie and for a brief second Armie fears again he might bring out a knife but it’s just a small bottle that he opens, holds under his nose and sniffs. The sharp scent of Poppers hits Armie's nostrils and he has to jerk his head
“You want?” The boy offers but Armie declines.

Next, the boy hands him a bottle of lube.

“Please...?” He asks and Armie almost bolts. Did that boy really think that he would go in dry? Shit, what that poor kid must have seen... But it’s no use dwelling on that. They all have their burden to carry. It always comes down to services exchanged for money; that’s how it works everywhere.

Armie slicks himself up, giving his cock a few firm strokes to get fully hard, then pushes in. The boy tenses a little at first but the Poppers has made him relaxed enough, numbing the pain. He is tight and Armie loves it, pounding hard into that wet hot whole, firmly grabbing the boy by his hips. He makes a few noises sounding like fake moans but Armie doesn’t fall for the illusion that the boy is enjoying himself. It doesn’t really matter. What matters are bony hips under his palms and a deep voice, his balls slapping against another pair of balls, short dark hair, narrow shoulders and the unmistakable smell of male sex.

The twilight helps and Armie thrusts harder, remembering the dark bruises he left on Tim’s neck, his rosy nipples, his smooth hairless body, his cock bulging his jeans, the tingle of his curls against Armie’s skin, his tears, his dark wide eyes as Armie had choked him…

It doesn’t take long until he spills into the latex, biting his tongue as to not shout “Tim” as he peaks. Afterwards, he quickly pulls out, carelessly dropping the condom onto the filthy floor, zips up and hands over another fifty Euros before the boy guides him outside again.

They are about to part when Armie says on a whim: “The Poppers. Can I have it? Buy it? Money?”

The boy seems to take some time to understand but then he shrugs again, showing Armie the small bottle.

“Poppers?” He asks and Armie nods.

“Twenty.” Armie knows that the boy is shitting him but he doesn’t want to dicker. Maybe it’ll spare the kid another handy and buy him some food. Well, probably not, he’s just getting romantic, but hey, he has the money so why not?

He hands over the blue banknote and receives the half-empty bottle in return.

He has to walk up to the next main road to get a cab back into town. There, he has a drink in a bar near the main station before he takes another taxi back to Crema, making the driver's day. During the whole drive, he plays with the small brown bottle in his pocket, imagining Tim sniffing it before he spreads his legs to welcome Armie's fat, hard cock with a sultry moan.

He doesn’t even shower before he gets into bed with Liz. He fucks her in the dark, hating every minute of it, only getting hard because he can still smell the skinny boy he’s had earlier and fantasizes that it had been Tim instead.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry, but I probably won't be able to update before Sunday night. My whole family clan is traveling to the mountains for a festive gathering and that might get a little
exhausting. Also we will probably be drunk all the time. And I have no idea how and if WiFi will work there... therefore, please be patient. I have already written chapter 10, 11 and 12 so updates will proceed every two days I guess next week.
The infamous first rehearsal. Listen, at least in the screenplay I have, there's no scene saying just 'Elio and Oliver roll around on the grass, making out' as we were so often told by Armie and Timmy. So I took the Monet's Berm scene for that - and I took certain artistic liberties. The lines they say here are entirely retrieved from James Ivory's screenplay (that is not like how it was shot eventually).

Sorry for the wait! I hope this chapter will compensate for the delay... it's getting physical.

On Saturday, Luca has literally ordered them over to his apartment for ten in the morning. Out of habit, they meet at their cafe at nine and walk over together after breakfast.

“Good morning.” Luca offers more coffee which they both happily accept. “Now we are alone again.” He smiles at them expectantly. They exchange an uncertain look.

“Yes…” Armie says hesitantly, not sure where this is leading.

“So, all distractions gone. Just the two of you, becoming Elio and Oliver.” Luca still beams and that's when Armie starts to get suspicious.

“That's why we are here, after all.” Truth be told, Armie's still not absolutely sure that he's up to it but for the time being he'll go with placating both Luca and Tim, who nods earnestly next to him.

“I thought we could rehearse a scene today, as warm-up. An icebreaker.”

Armie's stomach drops a little. This sounds too casual to be something harmless. What does Luca have in store for them?

Tim just nods again, outright enthusiastically. That kid is way too eager sometimes for Armie's liking.

“Have you finished your coffee? Yes. Great. Look at the weather, isn't it beautiful?” It is, they had sun all week. “Let's go outside into the garden. You need to experience Italian nature. Immerse yourselves.” Tim is already up on his feet and half-way down the stairs when Luca calls him back because he has forgotten his script.

The palazzo Luca resides in has a large square inner courtyard, more like a tiny park really. There are citrus and palm trees, a few wrought-iron benches and a patch of fresh green grass drenched in sunlight. It's warm, insects buzzing in the air, and the first thing Tim does is to take off his hoodie,
leaving him in just a ratty off-white v-neck long-sleeve. He stretches and basks in the sunlight like an elegant cat, exposing a stretch of white skin at his midriff, and turns his face up, eyes closed, wrinkling his nose. The sun brings out the deep brown glow of his unruly curls while his lashes fan out dark against his pale face.

Armie swallows and looks way.

Luca sits down on a bench but doesn't invite them to do the same so they keep standing. “Okay, lets have a look. Why don't we start with... scene 58?”

It's their first kiss. Armie knows and tries to keep a cool face while Tim turns page after page looking the scene up. When he finds it a smirk ghosts over his face.

“Oh.”

Great! They'll all have so much fun showing the 'straight' guy how it's done. If they only knew... thank god they don't.

As they both stand on the grass a little awkwardly, Luca gives them a nod and indicates with a wave of his hand that they should start to read their lines. It goes well, they instinctively find a rhythm, not too close yet but already familiar with each other.

Tim truly opens during that scene. When the script calls for an I-dare-you-to-kiss-me stare, he delivers.

Armie suddenly means it when he says: “You are making things very difficult for me.”

“Why am I making things difficult?” Tim asks

“Because it would be very wrong.” And it would. Not just that Armie is married – they have to work together. Armie never was one for showmannces – well, mostly because he'd been coupled with women or straight man. Still, you don't shit where you eat – it only makes things messy.

“Would?” Tim doesn't back down. No, not Tim. Elio. This is Elio talking to Oliver, not Tim talking to Armie. He has to remember that. It's important.

“Yes, would. I'm not going to pretend this hasn't crossed my mind.” No use lying here. They both must know by now that temptation is their constant companion.

“I'd be the last to know.” Tim bites out and Armie snorts. Luca looks up from his script and makes a note. Fuck! Armie has to be more careful not to let on too much.

“Well, it has. There!” Armie makes a gesture encompassing them both. “What did you think was going on?” He stares at Tim now, intensely, unblinking.

“Going on? Nothing... nothing.” And he looks so honest and open, innocent even when he says it. That fucking little tease! Armie knows he can't pin him down and choke him like last time to teach him a lesson, not with Luca around, but he really has to fight the impulse.

Words will have to do here this time.

Armie stares Tim square in the face and says: “If it makes you feel better, I have to hold back. It's time you learned to do that too.” He pauses, then adds wistfully, remembering watching Tim kiss Will openly a few nights ago: “You are the luckiest kid in the world.”
Tim – no, Elio – shakes his head: “You don't know the half of it. So much of it is wrong.”

Tim's face is serious. Is that still Elio talking? Or Tim? Is he talking about himself – or about Armie – or about both of them and their situation?

Armie fails to deliver his next line, gazing speechless and outright terrified back at Tim. After a moment, he just shakes his head, holds up his hands and steps out of the scene, walking into the shadow of a large palm tree with his back turned to the other men. Luca calls a break and goes inside to fetch some drinks.

Armie lies down on the grass, staring up into the sun through the leaves of the tree until his eyes burn and he goes almost blind, his head pounding not just because of the heat. Until Tim flops down next to him and hands him a glass of water.

“Drink.” He says, and Armie does, too emotionally drained to fight him. Let Tim have this small victory.

“Is this becoming a habit, you looking after my physical needs?” Armie smiles at Tim above the rim of the glass as he sits up to take a sip.

Tim just shrugs. “Could be. I don't mind.” His eyes are wide and soft. Armie wants to ruffle his curls.

“Do you mind if I smoke?” Armie asks to otherwise occupy his hands, fishing out a packet of cigarettes from his shorts.

Tim grins. “Not at all.” He reaches over and takes the lit cigarette from between Armie's fingers and puts it in his own mouth. Armie gapes, then lights a new one for himself, shaking his head. “You never back down, do you?”

“I'm just nervous.” Tim narrows his eyes and looks endearingly young all of a sudden.

“Are you?”

“Well, you'll kiss me very soon.”

“Not me. Oliver. And not you. Elio. And he doesn't know it's coming.”

“Oh, but he does.” Tim smirks. “We don't have to use tongue.”

Armie snorts a laugh and shrugs. “Whatever.” He fixes Tim with a long stare. “We have already kissed.”

“No, we haven't.” Tim says with a vengeance that surprises Armie.

“And what was that at Luca's last Sunday night?”

“That wasn't a kiss. Not a real one.”

Armie's head starts spinning again. What does Tim mean? Not a real one? Has it been a joke? A dare? To mock him? Did Will set him up? Or Nick of all people? Was that why he marched in on them just at the right – or wrong – moment?

But before he can dwell too much on that or give a snide retort, Luca walks over to them: “I don't want to direct you too much for the next part. Just try to go for the right mix of awkwardness and desire. Whatever feels good for you to get used to one another. It's okay if it's a little restraint... it's a
first time. Go.”

He sits back down on the bench a few feet away but Armie is aware that he's watching them with curiosity. This is it, then. Sink or swim.

He's glad that it's his character who initiates the first kiss, that it's Oliver who starts to get physical. He needs to feel in control right now, otherwise he would simply freak out.

Tim is lying on his back, his hands behind his head. Armie quickly banishes the image of those slender wrists tied together as not really helpful and concentrates on Tim's mouth instead. His lips aren't full but very red, slightly parted. His eyes are closed as the sun shines down on him. The heat has made two dark patches on the washed-out white of his t-shirt, right at his armpits. Armie can smell his fresh sweat and it's intoxicating.

He blocks out everything around them – Luca, the buzzing bees, other neighbors who might watch as he's about to kiss Tim. No! Stop it!

As *Oliver* is about to kiss *Elio*!

Like it's written in the script, he reaches over, his thumb touching Tim's lower lip. He opens and his tongue darts out, wet and pink and Armie flinches like as if he's gotten an electric shock. He jolts back and takes a deep breath before he hears Luca say: “No, no, no. What is it? This is exactly what Oliver wants! What he's been waiting for. What he tried to suppress. Go for it.”

‘*God, if Luca only knew...*’

Armie feels his face flush. Tim doesn't move, doesn't even open his eyes, just lies there, passive, submissive, and waits for Armie's caress to continue.

Armie leans in once more, bracketing Tim's oddly beautiful face before touching his lips again. This time he doesn't pull back when Tim's tongue licks his index finger. It's so pink, like a kitten's, but much softer. Armie swallows before bending lower, and just as he's about to press his mouth to the corner of Tim's, cupping his upper lip as it's taught on all the film-sets he's worked on, Tim opens his eyes, turns his head ever so slightly and meets Armie's lips full on, his tongue still in play, brushing it oh so gently over Armie's lower lip.

‘I thought we said without tongue’ he wants to scream but then remembers that he never gave an answer to Tim's question.

Though he will be damned if he allows that kid to take control here!

Two can play this game and Armie's been round the block, he knows a trick or two. So he doesn't back away. Instead, he very tenderly bites down on Tim's lower lip and worries it between his teeth while moving his knee upwards, pressing it gently between Tim's thighs.

Tim squirms and Armie grins a little through the kiss, sucks just a little harder and that's when Tim moves against his leg, rock-hard.

Armie almost jumps to his feet.

“What the fuck!” He shouts while Tim rolls onto his stomach, an innocent smile on his face. But there are two red spots blooming on his cheeks so he's at least a little embarrassed. Or just turned on. Fuck!

“What is is with you two?” Luca asks, sounding a little exasperated. “That started very nice, very
natural, but then? What are you doing? Armie?"

Armie wants to scream that Tim is a fucking slut, unprofessional, yes, it's unprofessional to get hard during a film scene, no matter what you're shooting or rehearsing; that he has no idea what's going on here but that he doesn't like it, and why is it always his fault? But he stays silent, tries to breathe and looks to the ground, confused, frustrated, annoyed with himself.

It's Tim who says “Sorry” in the end. To both him and Luca.

“It's just... it's strange. I never did a scene like this. I never did a real love scene, just one sloppy kissing scene with a girl... I just don't know... and then there's Armie...”

“What's with me?” Armie asks a little too loud, still agitated.

“You are fucking huge, man. So much... body, all over me. We haven't even talked that much all last week and now we shall somehow summon trust and passion between us. I's just... hard, really hard, man.”

'You are surely hard, man!' Armie thinks but holds his tongue. Tim suddenly seems sincerely distressed and Armie has to remind himself that this is his first big movie as a lead. He sits back down next to him, eventually giving in to the impulse to ruffle his hair and sighs.

“Yeah, sorry... I know it's weird.”

They both look up at Luca for guidance.

“You know what?” Their director tells them, resting his face in his hand. “Sod the script here. Forget the scene. It was too much to start with. Just... make out. Kiss a bit. See how it feels. What feels good, what feels not so good. Map it out. I'll be upstairs. Come back inside when you feel you have found your trust in each other.”

And with that, he gets up, turns and walks away.

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Tim just stares at Luca's back as he leaves them on their patch of grass. His erection is still throbbing in his jeans and Armie sitting so close to him won't make it go away any time soon.

After a moment, he dares to look over. Armie meets his gaze, looking a little dumbstruck.

“Well, what was that?”

Timmy isn't sure if he means Luca leaving or him grinding against Armie's leg so he just shrugs and mumbles “sorry” again.

“Is that true? You never shot a sex scene before?”

Tim just nods.

“Me neither.”

“What? Armie fucking Hammer has never made out on screen?” He can't believe it.

“Nope.”

Tim laughs, relaxing a little.
“Okay, so how about we figure it out then, like Luca said?”

Armie nods. “Okay. But no games. I'm at least as nervous as you are so just play along for once, will you? I'm sure we both want this to be the least unpleasant as possible.”

'Least unpleasant' – not how Timmy would say it but he just nods anyway.

“So, tell me, what are your hard limits? Don't laugh! Where am I not allowed to touch?”

“You can do anything.” Timmy just says and means it. “Anything you want. It's okay. I'll let you.” He sounds a little breathless but at least it's out.

“Tim.” Armie sighs and shakes his head, sounding disappointed. “I said no games...”

“I'm not playing games!” Timmy lowers his voice. “I mean it. Are you really that blind that you don't... “ He suddenly has enough. If they go on like that it'll take ages for them to even peck each other on the lips. So he pushes against Armie's chest and almost crawls into his lap, straddling him, burying his hands in Armie's golden hair.

“I let you choke me. I let you bite me. I'm so hard I have trouble staying upright. “With that, Timmy grinds down, making a point. This time, Armie doesn't flinch. He just stares up into Timmy's green eyes, mesmerized. “There are no limits, Armie. Just fucking take me, will you.”

For a heartbeat, Timmy's sure Armie will just push him off and walk away, leaving him in a puddle of want and shame on the grass. But he doesn't. Instead his right hand comes up, wrapping carefully around Timmy's neck, his thumb gently stroking his Adam's apple.

“Are you sure?” Armie asks, his blue eyes suddenly a deep indigo.

“Yes.” Timmy almost whines with need.

Armie's thumb moves up all the way to his jaw, tracing the sharp ridge of bone up to his ear before he pulls his face down. He doesn't kiss him on the mouth though; he sucks Timmy's earlobe between his lips and bites it, hard. Timmy's whole body goes rigid as Armie's other hand slides over his waist and cups his arse. His hands are so big. He presses Timmy firmly down into his lap where he meets his massive erection and gasps.

“Can you feel what you do to me?” Armie breathes against his ear and Timmy moans, throwing his head back, exposing his neck. He knows the marks have faded but hopes that Armie gets the hint and gives him new ones.

“You liked that, didn't you? Wearing my marks, showing them off to the world?”

Timmy can only whimper.

“Beg for it.” Armie's voice is deep and firm and Timmy melts like wax in his huge hands.

“Please.” He huffs. “God, please...”

And finally, finally, Armie presses his soft lips to Timmy's hot skin and bites down at the junction of neck and shoulder, so hard that Timmy's sure he broke the skin. He yelps and squirms but Armie holds him in place with his big strong hands. There's no escaping. Armie bites him again before he sucks, fiercely. Can he taste blood? Timmy wonders.

He gets his answer soon enough as Armie moves his lips up his throat, grabbing his face with both
hands before kissing him, deep. The taste of copper fills his mouth as Armie's tongue pushes in, not bothering to ask for consent because they both know that has been given almost the moment they met.

Timmy just opens with a low growl, sucking on Armie's tongue, his lips, tasting his own blood. It's wet and messy. They are all over each other and Timmy doesn't even realize that he's started to rut against Armie's crotch until he feels warm wetness spread between his legs.

God, he just came in his pants like a horny teenager!

But Armie doesn't laugh. He isn't shocked either. He just holds Timmy through it, cradling his head against his strong chest, telling him he's gorgeous, beautiful, and just for a moment, as Timmy sinks against Armie, feeling filthy, used, relieved and happy, he dares to believe him as Armie presses his lips to his curls and mumbles “I want to. I want to.”
Chapter Summary

As it's my birthday I give you dirty talk (by Armie) and awkward wanking (by Timmy).
But remember that the tags say UST...

They part eventually. Armie's still so fucking hard that he has trouble walking but Tim needs to clean up. He throws him his hoodie to cover the bite mark on his neck where he sucked his blood. It's already an angry red and will probably color purple soon.

After exchanging one last heated look, Tim's eyes still glazed over, they go back inside and knock on Luca's door. Armie distracts him with a wide smile and a funny story about them snogging so Tim can slip away into the bathroom to clean up a little.

As Luca offers to mix some drinks, Armie walks down the corridor and waits outside the bathroom, subtly adjusting himself. When Timmy emerges a few moments later, it's evident that he took off his pants. He's pulled his jeans, usually riding low on his hips with literally half his arse hanging out, up to his waist to disguise that he's going commando underneath.

“What have you done with your boxers?” Armie asks, bracketing Tim against the wall of the corridor.

The boy blushes a deep red. “Put them in the front pocket of my hoodie.” He mumbles, avoiding Armie's gaze.

He quickly slips his hand inside and retrieves the soiled garment, still warm and damp from Tim's body, and folds his script around it.

“So it'll smell like you when I learn my lines. Olfactory memory is a great thing.” Armie whispers next to Tim's ear and Tim grins and shakes his head.

“You are sick, Armie Hammer. Are you really keeping my boxers?”

“Your creamed boxers. Yes, Timothée, I am.” Armie presses his lips against the spot just below Tim's ear and the boy moans and melts against him. “See, we'll need them.”

“What for?” Tim asks, his voice low and rough.

“I'll stuff them in your mouth to keep you from screaming the place down when I fuck you tonight.” Armie tells him, throbbing in his jeans. Tim presses against him from shoulder to thigh, grabbing the back of his neck as if in need for support to stay upright.

“You serious?” He whispers, eyes black with pupil.

Armie takes Tim's free left hand and brings it to his crotch so he can feel what's in store for him.

“Have you ever been fucked?” Armie asks, his voice all husky, and Tim just shakes his head, blushing even more. “Then it's about time, don't you think?” God, he'll be his first.
Tim actually trembles in his embrace as he kisses him sweetly on the lips.

“Now go and look for Luca. He's preparing some drinks. You look like you need one.”

“What about you?” Tim asks, squeezing Armie once more. “You need a … hand or something.”

Armie is tempted, but then he doesn't want his first time getting off with Tim to be a quickie in Luca Guadagnino's bathroom – as beautiful as that bathroom surely is. So he just shakes his head.

“Later.” He says before locking the door to take care of himself alone.

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Timmy had been so dazed by what had happened between him and Armie and Armie's sultry words that he had totally forgotten to arrange when to meet him that evening.

Downing a stiff Gin and Tonic at Luca's had calmed his nerves a bit but hadn't helped to clear his thoughts.

He had fidgeted on the sofa, staring at Armie, only to quickly avert his gaze when he'd looked over at him until Luca had asked him if he was all right.

“Yes, I think I'm just... hyped. And I'm not used to drink during the day.” At this, Armie had snorted a laugh, staring into his own G&T. “In fact,” Timmy had continued, “I think I'll go back to my place if nothing's on for the afternoon. I need to lie down a bit. I feel... dizzy.”

“Perhaps too much sun.” Armie had suggested, winking at him.

Timmy had felt himself blush. God, he'd been acting like a bloody virgin.

“Have you ever shot intimate scenes?” Luca had asked him, full of understanding, slightly reprimanding Armie's teasing with his warm tone.

Timmy had shook his head. “Not on this level, no.”

“You'll get used to it. It's nothing special. I won't treat it as anything special. You ride bikes, you kiss, you swim, you eat, you get naked into bed. Of cause it will be a closed set. But just don't overthink it. Armie told me it went well after I left, that you two found a rhythm.”

Timmy had nearly spat his drink all over the expensive Persian carpet.

“Yeah, I think we broke the ice.” He'd managed to say, decidedly not looking at Armie who had been in the middle of a coughing fit.

“Fucking cigarettes, I should really quit.”

“I don't mind.” Timmy had blurted out.

Luca had given him a strange look.

“The taste.” He'd felt the need to explain. “When we kiss.”

“Oh, yes. Good of you. Armie, you alright?”

Timmy had known that he had to leave right then or something disastrous would happen. He doubted that their director, in spite of all his easy-going manner, would condone an affair between
his two leading men, let alone an affair with decidedly weird undercurrents like choking, gagging, biting and whatever other dark kinks Armie indulged in.

So he had excused himself, almost running from Luca's flat.

Now he's lying on his bed, naked, fisting his hard cock as he imagines the things Armie could do to him tonight. He'd felt huge when he’d put Timmy’s hand on his crotch. Timmy shudders as he imagines such a big cock breaching him. As if to try, he spreads his legs wider and sucks the index finger of his free hand before pressing it against his asshole.

It's not that he's never fingered himself before, just not very often. It feels weird and not altogether pleasant. As he pushes in - just a little - he revokes pictures of an almost naked Armie in his mind, wearing just small red shorts and nothing else.

Mmmmm – that's nice.

Just to get a better idea what it will feel like to have a giant cock shoved up his ass, he tries to add a second finger but it burns and he flinches. No, this isn't working. He stops and pulls out.

Fuck! He's so hard that he can't see straight, leaking onto his stomach. He needs to get off.

His cock is nicely slick and slippery by now as he strokes it lazily.

Lotion – his lizard brain helpfully supplies.

In search of some lotion he stumbles over into the bathroom, his hard cock jutting out obscenely and a little ridiculous in front of him, red and throbbing, bobbing up and down. Looking around, he sees his sun tan lotion sitting on a shelf below the mirror, grabs it and gets back on the bed. Reclining, he squeezes a generous amount of the cream onto his palm and coats the index and middle finger of his left hand. The rest he uses to rub his cock.

Yes, that's much better.

It's still a challenge to press two fingers inside himself. But he manages. Slowly, he moves them in and out experimentally.

It doesn't do much for him.

That is, until he twists them a little and crooks them upwards while pushing just a little deeper.

Wow! It's like fireworks. His balls draw suddenly tight and tingle as a jolt of pleasure sears through his whole body, making his toes curl.

God, that felt good!

He probes for that spot again and when finding it arches off the bed, his spine taut like a bow string.

Oh god!

This feels so fucking good. He speeds up but quickly loses his rhythm. The angle is strange and his arm starts to strain and hurt because he has to twist his wrist to touch just there. But he's so close...

He looks around, thinking about what he could use instead of his fingers to fuck himself. He doesn't own sex toys. Hell, he doesn't even have condoms. Shit! He hopes Armie has some. Otherwise they'll have to find a drugstore or something. Do those sell condoms in Italy? The people here are catholic after all. God, he doesn't know shit!
These thoughts have his erection slightly flagging. Damn! He needs something to shove up his ass. Now! He walks over into the bathroom again. His hairbrush? He stares at its rubberized, ribbed handle and shudders. No.

Back in the bedroom and through to the lounge of his apartment there’s nothing remotely phallic in sight. But as he rummages through the cupboard in the kitchenette he finds a box of long white candles, perhaps stored there in case the electricity goes off. This could work. He takes one out and gives it a long hard look: about six inches long, not too thick…

He takes it with him into the bedroom and drops back onto the bed, quickly slicking up the waxen stump before almost ramming it inside himself. His little excursion has only dampened his arousal; his cock quickly becomes interested again.

The candle slides deep, deeper than his finger could reach. Timmy waits only a moment to allow his body to adjust before he starts to fuck himself in earnest.

Yes! He rotates his hips a little, palms his cock, moans. He’s getting the hang of it and spreads his legs wider. God, he must look like a slut!

His movements change the angle just a little; pressing up, he outright howls when the candle brushes over his swollen prostate. Suddenly he understands why Armie feels the need to gag him.

The thought of his filthy boxers stuffed into his mouth, silencing him, making his breathing difficult while Armie ploughs into him without mercy quickly does it for him. He bites his lips and shoots his load all over his hand and chest right up to his chin.

He’s rather proud that he still has the presence of mind to pull the candle from his ass before he passes out, falling into an exhausted, dreamless sleep.

He’s woken by his phone as he receives a message: “8.00 pm, my place.”

Now it's a little after seven.

Timmy smiles at his phone. He feels relaxed, well rested and stretches – ouch! Should he have used more lotion?

The dried cum on his body itches.

He sees that there are more messages – from Esther, Victoire, Pauline, Stephane, Will and Giullian – but they don’t matter right now.

What matters is that he cleans up and gets ready to get fucked.

As he takes a shower he washes himself very, very thoroughly.

Drying off, he decides to shave. Not that he really needs to but it passes the time. When he’s finished with the flimsy fuzz on his face his eyes travel lower on his reflection in the mirror. Should he shave there as well?

He’s heard that gay men do.

Is he a gay man?

Suddenly, he feels apprehensive. The excitement he’d felt all day turns almost into dread.

What if he doesn't like it? What if it hurts? What if he comes too fast – or not at all? What if he can’t
even get hard?

He's snogged Will and a few other boys, sometimes with hands down each others pants, stroking, rubbing until they both came.

Once, when he'd just turned eighteen, there had been a bit of half-hearted fumbling at a party of his agent's where a producer – certainly almost twice Timmy's age – had started to make out with him in a dark corner of the hallway where Timmy had been searching for his coat. It had been okay until the guy had tried to push Timmy onto his knees, insinuating very clearly that he expected a blowjob.

Timmy had disentangled himself and politely refused. The man had taken it in stride, smiled at him and given him his card. He'd never called. He's aware that this could have ended much worse.

That's about all experience he has with men.

Not that he has much more with women. He's had a few girlfriends, but not in the last two or three years, at least nothing serious. The only girl he'd slept with was a friend of Kiernan he'd met during filming One and Two. Before that, in high school, he's had a reputation... quite unjustified though. It had mostly been kissing and some heavy petting. Still, when he and Lola had made the headlines it had certainly boosted his fame as a womanizer. Womanizer? They'd both just been seventeen, for god's sake!

That had been about the time when Call Me By Your Name had first been pitched to him. Since he's been attached to this project for three years now, he has started to dwell more and more on his sexuality. Not that he feels the need to define what he likes or needs a label for it; he just could do with some clarity.

To achieve that, his conclusion had been that he has to get fucked by a man to know if he likes it, and if he likes it more than fucking a woman.

And now Armie has offered.

Perhaps it’s for the better that he’s married, so there won’t be a risk for one of them getting too attached. They both know what they deal with, what’s on offer here. Armie isn’t available but if what Will has told Timmy is true than he has loads of experience with guys.

Perfect. What could go wrong here?

Timmy can get a good fuck and try if he likes it without fearing emotional attachment.

Yet some unease lingers. Not just because of the pain. Somehow Timmy is sure that Armie isn’t a sick fucker who gets off on hurting people. Dominant, yes, but not sadistic. He’ll be careful. Especially as he knows by now that it would be Timmy's first time.

But wasn't that in itself embarrassing? Timmy hadn't gotten properly laid at the age of twenty!

Another thing that bothers him is that Armie’s a ‘real’ man - big, strong, hairy. The boys Timmy had messed about with had been just that – boys his age. But Armie’s ten years older than him. If he likes older guys, what does that say about him? Daddy issues? He almost laughs when he thinks about his lovely, soft-spoken father who’s always been there for him.

Oh god, what was he getting into here? There’s no denying that he’s going over to Armie Hammer in half an hour to get his dick up his ass. Jesus, what would his friends say if they knew he contemplated an affair with a married man?
He stares hard at himself while he brushes his teeth and flosses.

He remembers Armie looking at his daughter as if she was the most precious thing in the universe.

He remembers Armie leaning against Timmy's shoulder, too weak to get up while he held a bottle of water against his parched lips.

He remembers Armie’s hand around his throat as he pressed him against Luca’s fridge.

He remembers them play-fighting in Armie’s apartment, leaning against his solid body, crying at his shoulder.

Where is this going?

He shakes his head and decides to at least trim his black pubes a little with his nail scissors. Imagining Armie brushing his fingers through the curls between his legs makes his cock twitch again.

Whatever happens tonight, getting it on might actually help forming the chemistry Luca demands. Timmy smiles at himself in the mirror, feeling a little more confident.

They might have a summer romance like Elio and Oliver.

After this shoot they’ll both go their separate ways and probably never see each other again. If the movie ever makes it into the cinemas, there might be some promo, the odd festival. But it won't be like they'd spent months on end together. Their affair will have a fixed demarcation line, ending by the first week of June.

It’ll all be fine.

And still... Timmy touches the angry red mark at his shoulder with trembling fingers, both fascinated and repelled. What will he discover about himself on this journey?

When he stands in front of the pile he keeps throwing his clothes on for solid ten minutes, contemplating what to wear, his insecurities creep back up on him. It's not that he has much choice – he didn't bring that many clothes and those he has are mostly crumpled and unwashed – but he still ponders if he should make an effort (which would mean this is a date) or just wear the usual?

Well, as it's Saturday night, he thinks he can go a little extra so he decides on his snugger black Calvin Klein boxer briefs. He also finds a tight black v-neck t-shirt he's only worn once last week when he went out with Will. It should have aired by now. He smells under its arms and decides that it'll do. It barely covers the hickey at the base of his neck but that might turn Armie on.

Next he pulls tight black jeans from the pile – really tight, even on his skinny frame. He thinks they hug his bony ass nicely. But then he hopes that he won't stay dressed very long anyway.

God, the things Armie could do to him. He knows about the bondage stuff by now. Would Armie tie him up? Would he let him? Despite having come already twice today his cock stiffens in his pants. That answers that.

He finishes his ensemble with black Doc Martens he's brought for hiking. It's still warm outside so he doesn’t need either hoodie or jacket.

He looks one last time in the mirror, rakes a hand through his still damp curls, pockets his phone, wallet and keys and steps out into the night. He wonders if he'll be the same when he sets foot in his
apartment again – or how and if he’ll have changed. He will know tomorrow.

Just as he walks over the Piazza, butterflies in his stomach, his hands a little clammy, he hears someone call his name. It's a female voice that seems vaguely familiar. As he turns, he sees both Esther and Victoire walking arm in arm towards him, laughing.

“Bon soir, Timothée. Ca va?” Esther asks, kissing him on both cheeks. “Oh, you smell nice.”

“What are you doing here?” Timmy asks, totally taken by surprise.

“I have the weekend off and thought I come over here. Luca encouraged that. Building some chemistry.” She smiles at him. “I actually texted you.”

“So did I.” Says Victoire.

Timmy remembers the unread messages.

“Yes, ugh… I’ve been busy.” He smiles a little sheepishly.

“Well, we met anyway. It's destiny! Where are you going?” Esther asks. “Are you going out?”

He's too confused and nervous to lie so the truth simply falls from his mouth: “I'm going over to Armie's.”

The two women exchange a look.

“Oh, to Armie. Are you two going out then?”

“Ugh, I... Why?”

“Because you look hot.” Esther giggles.

Timmy can't tell them that he dressed up because he hoped Armie would fuck him through the mattress.

“I think we'll just have a few beers, watch some films.” He tries to make it sound really boring.

“Then you won't mind if we join you.” It's not a question. They both link arms with him, taking him in the middle as the three of them walk the last few meters over to Armie's building. Timmy can't even text him a warning.

Esther continues, sounding excited: “I met your sister in Paris. She’s really fun. She knows Lily-Rose. I know her as well and so we had a mutual friend. We hung out. Lily knows Lola, did you know? That’s your ex-girlfriend, isn’t it? It's such a small world…”

Timmy feels a little sick. They all know each other so if they suspect anything, all his friends and foes will know as well. Social media will see to that.

He just hopes Armie won't open the door half-naked or just in his underwear – or even starkers. He totally thinks him capable of doing so.

Luckily, Armie's dressed when he comes to the door of his apartment – very nicely dressed indeed. He's wearing tight Levi's and a plain white t-shirt. His hair is wet and combed back. He looks like a young James Dean with his soulful blue eyes, long lashes and full lips. He has shaved thoroughly and taken off his wedding ring.
Timmy tries to smile but there's a warning in his eyes that Armie immediately gets. The two girls march into his apartment, flopping down onto the couch, giggling some more and demanding drinks. After shooting another look at Timmy, arching his eyebrows, mouthing 'why?', Timmy watches Armie putting on his best movie star smile, all teeth and insincerity, and slowly turn around to ask politely what they're having.
Dazed and Confused

Chapter Summary

Sorry, but this night is not their night.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Armie watches Tim leave Luca's flat and forces himself not to stare at that gorgeous ass he knows is naked underneath those jeans. He rolls his script a little tighter in his lap as he remembers that Tim's pants are now his to keep.

Luca looks at him when Tim is gone.

“What happened? Timothée was outright giddy but seemed a little... confused.”

“Well, we broke the ice.” Armie shrugs but can't suppress a small smile.

Luca is silent for a moment and just looks inquisitively at Armie. When he speaks his voice is soft: “He's very young. Impressionable. So open.”

Armie's suddenly on guard.

“Yes.” He agrees noncommittally.

“You could teach him a great deal, Armie.”

“I don't think he needs anyone to teach him anything, least me. You remember the read-through?”

“Yes. But he needs to feel secure. We must all help him. To carry a whole movie at his age... it's difficult for the best.”

Armie somehow feels called out. “I'll be there for him.” He assures Luca.

“Just be gentle.” Luca pats Armie's knee. “Okay?”

Armie's not entirely sure what Luca means but he agrees anyway.

Later, in his apartment, he presses Tim's soiled pants to his face, inhaling deeply. His scent is sweet, heavy, a little sharp. Armie sucks experimentally and Tim's taste floods his mouth, a bit stale but delicious all the same. Armie shoves the pants under his pillows to have them handy for later when he'll have Tim spread out on his bed, ready to devour him.

He can't believe this will happen tonight. Finally.

From what he's gathered so far, Tim doesn't have much experience. So he'll go slow. Nothing too extreme for their first time. He's got condoms and a large bottle of lube; chilled beer in the fridge but also some water. The small bottle of Poppers sits ready on his night stand to ease the way. He wants Tim to enjoy this.
He puts fresh towels in the bathroom after showering and shaving. He also puts a Fleet enema on top of the fluffy pile, hoping Tim will get the hint.

Then he sorts through his equipment. He didn't bring much but he never travels without. You never knew when you needed some.

In the end, he chooses black hemp ropes, a soft silk scarf and a medium sized dildo and puts it all on the bed. Tim will see those items when he enters and get an idea what Armie has in store for him. He's also bought a pack of cloth pins. A thick white church candle next to the Poppers completes the arrangement.

After having finished the preparations, there's no denying that he's been at least semi-hard all day and the itch is getting at him. He texts Tim around seven, giving him enough time to get ready. As he waits for him he tries to watch some TV to distract himself but nothing can hold his interest. His thoughts wander again and again to the things he'll do to Tim, how gorgeous he will look tied up and spread open, how tight he'll be, the noises he'll make when Armie teases him with the dildo...

He decides to quickly call Liz and ask if she arrived home all right to get that conversation out of the way. Afterwards, he switches his phone off. They won't be disturbed.

His mother's voice in his heads chooses this moment to remind him “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

Well, it's a bit too late for that, isn’t it, mum?

To quiet her reproachful voice he goes onto the Tiffany & Co. website and orders a golden diamond hoop bangle to ship over to LA with a note attached “To the most wonderful woman in my life”.

On a whim, he also orders a bracelet made of Chrysocolla beads with a sterling silver clasp to be send over to Crema because it reminds him of Tim's eyes.

At a quarter to eight, he starts to get dressed. Nothing too fancy, just a nice pair of jeans and a classic t-shirt. He's not much of a leather ’n gear guy.

To say that he's surprised when Esther and Victoire arrive together with Timmy is an understatement. Didn't he make it clear what would be happening here tonight? Did Timmy bring those girls on purpose, to derail him? Is he chickening out?

Or does he want a threesome? Armie's not sure he's up for that. Not that Esther and Victoire aren't attractive – but them all hooking up might complicate things further and he doubts the fuck is worth it.

He mouths 'why?' but Tim looks like a deer in the headlights. The boy seems about to panic.

Okay, drinks then. He's glad that he closed the door to his bedroom.

“Sure you can use the bathroom.” He tells Tim over his shoulder as he makes his way over to the fridge and hopes that the boy gets the hint. The sound of a closing door answers his silent prayers.

He offers the girls a beer and chats with them until Tim returns, flushed, and gives him a small nod. Armie's still not sure what's going on.

“I just met Esther and Victoire on my way here.” Tim says, sitting down next to the girls on the
'Sure you did', Armie thinks and downs half his bottle in one go.

“Well, I already told you that I texted you this afternoon.” Esther smiles at Tim. Armie finishes his beer and gets another one. Tim can't look him in the eye.

“So, what's up for tonight?” Victoire asks.

“You should ask Tim.” Armie knows he sounds a little bitter but can't help it. God, he's been such an idiot. Why would a gorgeous boy like Tim hook up with an old fucker like him? He could have anyone – he sure doesn't need fucked up, supposedly straight, married Armie Hammer, an actor that never quite made it and will soon reach middle-age as supporting actor in small indie movies because he failed spectacularly more than once in big franchises.

The world is just waiting for Tim and he sure as hell will shine brightly. All Armie will ever have are hookers on meth who let him fuck them because they need the money. And even they are disgusted by him.

He stares down at his hands wrapped tight around the chilled bottle and has to swallow hard because he really, really wants to punch something. Or someone.

“I don't know....” Tim mumbles, obviously aware how awkward the whole situation is.

Good! Let him squirm. He brought that upon himself, the little shit.

“Then why don't you let us decide?” Esther chirps, grinning at Victoire and raising her bottle.

“Someone told us there's an illegal party happening at a desolated club between Offanengo and Romanengo,” she says.

Armie can't stand sitting here and staring at the three bright young things one moment longer. “Sounds fun. Okay, let’s go.”

He gets up and grabs his wallet and phone before walking to the door.

There, he turns. The kids are still sitting on the sofa, looking up at him. “You coming or what?”

“Now?” Tim asks.

“Now.” Armie bites out before walking on, leaving the three of them to follow him.

The 'club' turns out to be a somewhat derelict flat-roofed building with a broken neon sign at the entrance. Somehow someone had done some wiring so there's power. A dull beat hammers on, forcing the sweaty bodies on the dancefloor to jerk and twitch. The bar is crowded and just sells beer and shots.

As much as Armie usually hates dancing, tonight he doesn't stop. After hitting the bar, knocking back a few suspiciously sweet shots, he'd made his way right into the middle of the crowd and simply let go, losing himself in the monotone beat, the strobe lights, the heat and noise.

God, he really wishes he'd some E he could drop!

He has no idea how long they've been here. He has no idea if the others even still are here. He
thought he saw Victoire a while ago but Tim and Esther seem to have vanished. The idea of what they might be doing right now makes his chest go tight. He shoves through the crowd to reach the bar, to wash down the vile taste in his mouth with another beer.

Leaning against the counter, suddenly someone touches his shoulder. It's Tim. He says something but Armie can't hear him over the deafening music. And to be honest, he doesn't care to listen to Tim's pathetic excuses and explanations.

'Message received, loud and clear, boy. Just go and fuck your French chick. I don't need your pity.'

He tries to turn away but Tim grabs his upper arm and leans in closer.

“I ... to talk .. you!” He yells into Armie's ear.

Armie knows that his smile is bordering on cruel but he's had enough for one evening.

“Fuck off!” He yells into Tim's ear by way of an answer, takes his beer and dives back into the crowd.

Tim follows.

When Armie starts to dance again Tim moves close, their bodies almost touching. His tight black t-shirt clings to his body, damp with sweat. Armie can smell him, sharp and sweet, and remembers pressing his pants against his face, inhaling his scent. That had just been hours ago but it seems a lifetime away, in a life where he was filled with hope and anticipation. Who’d said the past is another country? He suddenly understands this quote way better than he would prefer.

He makes a point to angle his body away and closes his eyes, just swaying to the music. But Tim doesn't get it. Instead of leaving him alone he presses his chest against Armie's back, puts his hands on his hips and grinds his groin against Armie's ass.

Armie spins around so fast he almost hits Tim in the face with his bottle, grabs one of his wrists and drags him off the dancefloor. He doesn't stop before they've left the building and stand outside in the chilly night air on the deserted carpark.

“Are you mad?” He shouts, squeezing Tim's arms, grinding the bones together so that the boy flinches in pain. “What were you doing? There are tons of people in there. With their fucking phones! You might wanna get filmed rubbing yourself against me but I have a wife and kid, I don't need pics of you living your fluid sexuality. Especially not with me!”

He's so angry his vision starts to blur. He spews all the pent-up frustration of the evening right into Tim's beautifully flushed face and when he sees his eyes fill with tears all he can do is smash his bottle against the wall behind him.

Tim jumps as the glass shatters. His lower lip starts to quiver. Armie pushes him away with one hand into his chest.

“God, you're such a pussy.”

He turns and starts to walk away into the night.

“Armie!” Tim screams, his voice too high but Armie doesn't look back.

“I said fuck off!” These are the last words he says to Tim before he hits the road.
He has no idea where he's going, he just has to get away from those huge green eyes staring at him and that trembling lip. Stumbling forward through the darkness, he has trouble coordinating. He must be way more drunk than he thought for he repeatedly stags into the middle of the road.

After a few hundred yards that felt like running a marathon a car honks behind him, then stops. Armie turns to apologize but the people who get out seem more concerned for him than angry.

They gesture for him to get in and explain in broken English that they are going to Crema. Armie nods and signals with a thumps-up that he agrees, folding himself onto the backseat. They drop him in front of his building, the young woman in the passenger seat patting his shoulder as he climbs out of the small Fiat.

That's the last thing he remembers when he awakens the next morning in his own sick on the bathroom floor still cradling an empty bottle of scotch to his chest. His brain is pulsating with pain, making him gasp when he opens his eyes.

When he tries to stand up the whole room tilts, so he has to grab the sink for leverage.

After washing his face and mouth, he literally crawls over into his bedroom on all fours. There he sees the ropes and toys still sitting on the duvet and buries his face in the sheets he had hoped to ruin with Tim.

God, he's been such an idiot!

He rubs his damp eyes and takes a few deep breaths until he feels able to get up and look for his mobile to check the time.

He finds it in the lounge on the coffee table next to an overflowing ashtray, still switched off. As he touches the screen it comes to lives again, revealing that it’s just a few minutes past eight in the morning.

There are some new messages from Liz, his agent, from Nick. One is from Tim. It has a video attached. Armie thinks it's better to get it over with than wait until later, because he knows he'll watch it eventually anyway. Right now, he thinks nothing Tim does can shock him anymore as he’s still half-comatose.

Turns out he's been wrong.

After watching the twelve seconds of footage Armie stumbles back into the toilet, dry-heaving over the bowl.

How could a night that had started with so much anticipation go so utterly wrong?

^^^^^^

Timmy stands in that godforsaken parking lot for nearly ten minutes, gazing into the pitch-black night.

Armie has to come back!

But he doesn't.

His tears have dried when it eventually dawns on Timmy that he's gone. He slowly turns and makes his way back inside the club. He tells himself that he's looking for Esther and Victoire but the truth is he doesn't care if they are still there.
He just has nothing else to do and nowhere else to be.

Earlier, a boy had offered him some pills but he’d declined. Now, he sees him at the corner of the dancefloor and as if on autopilot walks over, smiles and extends his hand as their eyes meet.

The boy grins, reaches into his pocket and brings out a small plastic bag filled with white pills. Instead of putting one into Timmy’s hand, however, he holds it in front of his face between thumb and forefinger, waiting for Timmy to open his mouth to place it on his tongue.

Timmy quickly discovers why it’s called Ecstasy. Over the next hour, he dances, not only feeling but seeing the music, becoming one with the beat, the light, the moving, sweaty crowd. Someone passes him a water bottle at some point which he downs while on the dancefloor before tipping the rest over his head to cool down. A few boys and girls come close and rub against him and it’s all warm and dopey and amazing.

When he eventually looks up and around, his eyes stay glued to a blond guy sitting at the bar, watching him. He’s a little older than the rest of the crowd, tall, muscled but with longer, fairer hair than Armie and darker eyes.

Timmy smiles over at him and he smiles back, his look becoming decidedly interested. Timmy feels pulled towards him and starts to move a little more lasciviously, swaying his slim hips, throwing his head back while closing his eyes, exposing his neck, his hands traveling down his chest over the damp cotton of his t-shirt.

When he looks again the man is still staring but now with an outright predatory expression. Their eyes lock.

Gotcha!

He’ll have some fun tonight.

Fuck you, Armie Hammer!

Timmy walks over to the bar in a confident swagger, determined to score, putting on an innocent, boyish grin, his eyelids fluttering in invitation.

Chapter End Notes

Will they ever shoot their movie? Maybe it’ll start in chapter 15...

This is the bracelet Armie orders for Tim. I kinda stole this idea from Senza Parole by CMBYN (Pmzilla) I hope you don't mind. It's an amazing story, check it out if you haven't read it.
Too Far Down

Chapter Summary

Timmy starts to remember what happened last night. When Armie discovers his way to cope it finally breaks down some of his walls. They both start to open up to each other but there's a price to pay for that.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for blood and self-harm. Proceed with care!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Timmy wakes the next morning in his bed the events of last night are blurred. First thing he discovers is that his whole body aches. He tries to access the damage and notes that he has slept in his socks, boxers and t-shirt while his jeans lie crumpled on the floor. His mobile sits on his pillow next to his face.

He slowly turns onto his back and looks down at his body, carefully lifting his head. There's a flaky white substance at the front of his pants and smeared into his t-shirt. His mouth feels furry and tastes horrible, like too many cigarettes and cheap liquor and something truly vile mixed with it. Did he throw up? He’s thirsty, his throat hurts, the corners of his mouth feel sore and his head is pounding in a painful rhythm. There are small violet bruises on his left forearm.

Oh god, what has he done?

He recalls being at the club, drinking, dancing with Esther and Victoire; dancing alone; looking for Armie.

Finding him.

They had gone outside where Timmy had tried to talk to him but Armie had been… angry? Pissed? There had been a smashed bottle and then Armie had left…

Afterwards, he thinks he remembers dancing until the early hours… but to be honest there is a black hole in his memory. Vague pictures float around at its edges but they are too hazy to draw a coherent sequence of events from them.

His hand searches for his mobile and he has to blink a few times to clear his vision before he's able to read last night's messages.

None from Armie.

A few from Esther and Victoire, asking where he is and later telling him that they are leaving. He has no recollection of reading those so he goes into his send file to see if he had responded.

There he sees that he has sent a video to Armie at exactly 2:24 am.
What the hell?!

His stomach turns as he touches a shaky finger to the screen, swiping over the icon to call up the file. What could he have sent to Armie in the middle of the night after getting ditched?

The video is just twelve seconds long. It starts with Timmy's face. It's very dark and in the background he can hear a distorted, pounding beat. Timmy seems to lean against a wall, an almost cruel grin on his face, his eyes huge like saucers. When the phone pans down a blond man comes into view, crouching in front of him, staring up at the phone while sucking his dick, taking him deep. The video stays on his face as Timmy bucks his hips once, twice. There are slurping noises and then a moan from Timmy. The caption reads 'me having fun'.

Then it's over.

Fuck!

FUCK!

He sits up too fast and feels nauseous.

What did he do last night?

Not only did he send this video to Armie, he also got a blow job from a stranger.

He closes his eyes, shakes his head and tries to jock his memory.

It stays blank.

He clambers out of bed and blindly stumbles over to the fridge, taking out a bottle of water. After downing half of it in one go he forces himself to remember, touching the bruises on his arm.

Armie had pushed him. He'd called him a pussy. Timmy still has no idea why Armie got so worked up. He'd tried to talk to him, ask him what was wrong but somehow that hadn’t worked out. Instead, Armie had bolted, leaving him behind.

He’d felt abandoned, humiliated, hurt… Why had Armie faked sympathy for him that very morning, more than sympathy, even made a pass at him, just to drop him like this mere twelve hours later? Had it just been a joke, had he just taken the piss, winding up the pathetic little twink he was stuck with?

But, honestly, what else did Timmy expect and deserve? Armie was a Hollywood star. And married! He must have been disgusted by Timmy grinding against him until he came in his fucking lap and had made sure that this would never happen again in the cruelest way possible. The rumors Will had mentioned were certainly just that – rumors.

‘Cause Armie was straight and had taught Timmy that lessons last night. Perhaps he’d even phoned his wife afterwards and told her about how Timmy had made a pass at him, embarrassing himself. He can hear both of them laughing in his head before Armie tells Liz how much he loves her.

A hot wave of shame washes over Timmy as he sinks down onto the kitchen floor, fearing another panic attack.

Crouching down like this, gasping, saliva collecting in his mouth he’s unable to swallow, more memories come back as his mental barriers start to disintegrate.
Did he really drop some E? Or at least what he thought had been E? Not that he has that much experience, he usually stays clear of pills and sticks to booze and weed.

He’d danced. A lot.

And then there had been a blond guy at the bar...

Oh god! Well, apparently, they did a little more than just dance and flirt, according to that video. It explains Timmy's soiled clothes. He absent-mindedly touches his neck, then rakes his fingers through his hair. There’s a little painful bump at the back of his head and it fills Timmy with a foreboding unease that he has no idea how it got there.

He can’t think right now on the impact last night might have on him and Armie; if there still is such a thing as him and Armie. His mind just goes white when he tries to picture the consequences of his actions. His head hurts too much. He needs a shower.

Before he steps under the scalding spray he throws his pants and t-shirt into the bin.

Afterwards, standing in front of the mirror, naked, his pale skin flushed pink from the hot water, he recalls last evening. He had stood in the exact same spot, fantasizing about getting fucked by Armie.

God, what a mess he's made!

He touches the by now purple mark on his shoulder, squeezing it to feel something, to wake him from this numbness. But he only feels more ashamed.

The self-loathing wells up in him like thick black tar, oozing into every nook and cranny of his soul, drowning out all hope and joy he’s felt recently. How needy had he been to hook up with some anonymous stranger? And to film it? And to send it to Armie! God, he's a pathetic little turd! How on earth can Armie continue to work with him after this?

He's ruined everything!

He feels his body start to tremble as his thoughts go round in circles. 'sad – pathetic – weird – a fake – overrated – sick – unworthy – scrawny – ugly – an abomination…’

No, please. Not again. It had all been going well but of course he had to wreck everything. Doesn’t he always?

There’s no use fighting it. The downward spiral has been set in motion. He knows how this will end.

There’s only one way to stop this. He hates doing it but he has no choice. He’d been so proud that he abstained from it for some time now, but desperate times call for desperate measures and pride comes before the fall.

Having reached a decision, all goes quiet. The ritual of laying out what he needs with eerie precision calms him. Only the razor blades are missing. As a precaution he makes a point these days not to carry any in case he might feel the urge to use them.

But now his probation is over. He needs the pain to ground him, to allow him to think, to pull out of this dark well he threatens to drown in.

He wraps a towel around his waist and walks over into the kitchenette, looking through the drawers. He finds a sharp fruit knife with a black handle.
It'll do.

Timmy stands there for long minutes, weighing the blade in his right hand, testing its sharpness on the prick of his left thumb. Blood wells up almost immediately. Still, he’s prolonging the inevitable, fighting the impulse while knowing that he will succumb to it eventually because there's nothing else he can do to silence the derogatory voices filling his head.

God, he’s such a wimpy coward that he can’t bring himself to move and do what has to be done. Armie was right, he’s a pussy, fearing the pain, recoiling from what he knows he needs. Medicine has to be bitter, otherwise it’s no use at all.

He deserves to hurt. He needs his punishment to achieve forgiveness, at least from himself.

The pain will serve as a distraction. It’s the only way to take his mind off things and allow him to focus to sort this mess out.

He takes a deep breath and pushes away from the counter.

That’s when he hears a loud pounding at his apartment door.

“Tim! For fuck's sake, are you there? Tim? Open!”

Armie?

Tim can’t believe it. This must be his twisted mind playing tricks on him. Dazed, he walks through the lounge and over to the door and opens it, knife still in hand, blood dripping down his left hand.

He expects to find an empty corridor.

This has happened before, the last straw his wacky brain offers him to grasp onto before pushing him over the edge.

But instead there’s a disheveled Armie Hammer, face gaunt, eyes red, hair still tousled from sleep, reeking slightly off stale scotch and old sweat, staring at him in a mixture of relieve and blatant horror.

“Tim,” he gently says, looking at him while reaching out. “Tim, please, just give me the knife.”

Armie's slowly extending his hand, holding Tim's gaze. 'Don't spook him now, don't upset him!'

There's blood on Tim's left hand, dripping onto the tiled floor. His eyes seem far away, his face a stony masks as if he doesn't even recognize Armie. He might have seen a ghost.

“Tim, please. It's me.” Armie says and fears his voice might break.

As if in slow motion, Tim turns and walks away back inside his apartment, still holding the knife. With just a little hesitation, Armie follows.

Tim comes to stand in his living room, looking around as if he doesn't know where he is. The small towel around his waist threatens to drop but he doesn't seem to care. He's too pale, too thin, the only splash of color apart from his bleeding finger are dark bruises on his arm and the bite mark at his neck. Both have been made by Armie.

God, what has he done?
“Tim?” Armie tries again. Tim's lips are moving now, as if mumbling a silent litany to himself. Armie can't make out words but suddenly Tim shakes his head, violently, steps up close to Armie and reaches out with his left hand to touch him, smearing his t-shirt with blood.

“Armie?” Tim's voice is small and shaky, as if he can't believe Armie's real.

“Tim, it's me, I'm here. Please, give me that knife.”

Tim looks down at his right hand as if seeing the knife for the first time. Armie thinks he's succeeded until a manic grin blooms on Tim's face and he shakes his head. “No, no, no. I know what you're up to.”

Armie feels a cold shiver run down his spine.

“Tim, please, you are bleeding.”

Tim stares at his left hand, still fisted into Armie's t-shirt, as if it doesn't belong to his body. “It's nothing.”

“Why don't you let me take a look?” Armie asks, trying to keep his voice even, remembering how he soothingly talks to Hops when she's upset. “Let's go into your bathroom and put a plaster on it.”

To his surprise, Tim allows him to take his left elbow and steer him into the bathroom. There, on the rim of the bathtub, are laid out a clean towel, antiseptic wipes and gauze dressings. Armie stares for a moment. Seems as if Tim knows what he's doing. It almost breaks Armie's heart.

“Look, there's everything we need.” He says, shying away from acknowledging what Tim was obviously about to do.

Tim swallows, exhales, and finally hands that fruit knife to Armie, sitting down on the closed toilet lid. Armie puts the blade on the side of the sink, out of Tim's reach, before he takes his bleeding thump into his hand, disinfects the cut and wraps some gauze around hit.

“Hey,” he says, taking Tim's chin between his own thump and forefinger, squatting down in front of him. “You alright? What was that?” Does he really want to hear the answer?

It's quite clear that Tim is not alright; but he only shakes his head. The towel is gaping open and Armie desperately tries to look anywhere else than at Tim's exposed groin.

“Let me get you some clothes, okay?”

When Armie walks into the bedroom that still smells of drunken sleep and sweat and Tim he discovers his habit of keeping his clothes in a pile on the floor. It reminds Armie of his own first apartment that he shared with a friend ten years ago and he can't suppress a grin. His parents had cut him off so they lived on junk furniture and slept on a mattress. Carefree times.

Armie quickly sorts through the crumpled clothes until he finds some clean pants, a gray hoodie and matching track suit bottoms. He doesn't want to leave Tim alone for too long.

Yet he should have known to never underestimate the determination of an addict.

When he steps back into the bathroom, Tim has once again grabbed the knife. Only now, there are three thin cuts at the junction of his groin and thigh, approximately three inches long, bleeding
profusely. Crimson rivulets run down Tim's pale skin, soaking the towel underneath him a bright red.

Now it's impossible for Armie not to look where his eyes didn't dare to wander mere minutes ago, but he doesn't even register Tim's flaccid circumcised cock in its nest of short black curls as he grabs a towel and presses it right onto the wounds.

“Fuck, Tim! No! No! Stop it!”

He tries to grab Tim's wrist to force him to drop the knife but Tim is too fast and lashes out, slashing Armie's upper arm. It's not deep and doesn't really hurt but it starts to bleed immediately.

“Shit, Tim! Are you mad? For fuck's sake!” It's a reflex when Armie slaps Tim's face before stepping back, out of Tim's reach, staring at the blood running down his biceps.

He must have hit him harder than he thought, however, because Tim's head whips around as he's thrown to the floor, crashing onto the tiles with a pained whine. Gladly, he drops the knife in the movement but his head hits the hard floor with a dull thud and his eyes flutter shut.

Shit! Fuck! No!

What has he done?

Armie doesn't care that he's still dripping blood all over the tiles as he kneels down beside the naked boy on the floor, pressing the towel over his cuts with one hand while the other cradles his head.

“Tim! Hey, Timothèe. Hey... please, please...” Armie is about to panic, on the verge of tears. Tim is so delicate, almost like a frail bird, when he lifts his slack face. He must have bitten his lip or tongue when Armie hit him because blood is running down his chin.

“Tim... oh god, please...” Armie has no idea how to administer first aid, where to feel for Tim's pulse, how to put him into a recovery position...

His breathing speeds up as he helplessly stares down onto the unconscious boy in his arms. He's just unconscious, right? He hasn't done any real harm... he can't...

“Tim... wake up... just... please...” Armie can't hold it together any longer. Tim feels cold and limp in his embrace so he pulls him in even tighter, burying his face against his neck as the tears finally start to fall, Armie's body shaking with ugly, wretched sobs.

“I'm so sorry... please... I'm such an idiot... just don't... I... I didn’t mean to...” He can't say it. He rocks Tim's body back and forth, crying like a baby, his salty tears watering down Tim's blood. “Oh god... please... why?”

But he knows why. It’s all his fault.

He makes a silent vow to change, to keep Tim safe at all costs, to never hurt him again, to be honest with him if the deity he doesn’t believe in grants him a wonder and brings him back.

“Armie... please... I can't breathe.” Tim squirms in his hold, struggling to free himself to get some space and air.

“Tim...” Armie whimpers, not letting go. But he turns Tim's head a little, stroking back his hair again and again to look him in the face, his green eyes now open and just a little unfocused. “Tim.”

It’s his new mantra.
Not even the blood dripping from his mouth can stop Armie as he kisses Tim, too hard, too deep. Tim moans, almost coughing as he tries to wriggle free but Armie is having none of it. He doesn’t want to let him go. He’ll take care of him, make it all good, make all the pain go away.

As if he could.

But he needs this right now, holding this boy, crying over him, over his hurt and self-loathing, because he can’t cry over his own.

And somehow, Tim seems to understand because he stills and goes pliant, allowing Armie’s mouth to devour him, giving in until Armie has to come up for some air.

“You’re crushing me.” Tim says, his voice weak as he tries to raise a hand and touch Armie’s wet face. “God, Armie, please stop.”

“No,” Armie sobs. Now that he’s started to cry he seems unable to ever calm down again; all the pent-up feelings of the last twenty-four hours finally burst through the cracks in his armor, seeping out. It’s overwhelming and terrifying so he goes back to kissing Tim because it’s the only thing right now that offers any consolation.

Tim seems to sense what he needs and accepts him, his mouth welcoming Armie’s tongue, offering himself up. Instead of fighting, he rests his head against Armie’s chest and takes the towel from between his legs to wipe the snot off his face as best he can while caught in Armie’s vice-like grip.

“God, look at us,” he whispers. “We are a battlefield.”

They stay on the bathroom floor for long minutes, Armie desperately crying, the blood dripping from both their bodies mixing as they embrace, holding onto each other for dear life.

Eventually, Armie's so drained and exhausted that he has to let Tim go but instead of moving away he clambers up in his lap, stroking his face, his hair, his shoulders.

And Armie has to admit that Tim fits there just perfect, despite his blood still soaking Armie’s shorts.

“You okay?” Tim asks eventually and Armie nods through his tears, just happy that Tim is alive and breathing and talking to him.

“I’m so cold.” Tim sighs against him and that’s when Armie realizes that his teeth are chattering.

“Let me take you to bed and keep you warm.” Armie says, lifting Tim up and carrying him like a bleeding virgin over into his bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, next chapter will be equally hard to stomach but I promise it’s getting better after that.

There's a slightly similar scene of Timmy taking a video of himself with another dude and sending it to Armie in MonikaKrasnorada's great fic White Ferrari. I don't know how hers will play out but in this story here, there's a very unpleasant twist to the whole thing to come.
Confessions

Chapter Summary

As they talk, finally some things get out in the open.
I sometimes hate these two fuckers.

Chapter Notes

There's a slightly similar scene of Timmy taking a video of himself with another dude and sending it to Armie in MonikaKrasnorada's great fic White Ferrari. I don't know how hers will play out but in this story here, there's a very unpleasant twist to the whole thing to come.
This is a trigger warning for non-con.

Armie gently sets him down onto his unmade bed and pulls the sheets over his naked body before he starts to get out of his blood-stained shorts and t-shirt. As he slides beneath the covers next to Timmy he's just too far away, staying almost cautiously on the far side of the mattress, avoiding skin contact, but Timmy rolls over, right into his arms.

"I'm so cold. Just hold me."

Armie does.

Timmy must have dozed off in his embrace because he suddenly jerks awake, a little disorientated, when his phone starts to ring, still sitting on the nightstand. It can’t be as important as to stay right where he is, nuzzling against Armie's bare, furry chest (has he drooled a little on him?), therefore he doesn't summon the energy to answer it. Drowsily, he sighs against Armie's skin, breathing him in.

"Hey, there you are. You were out like a light." Armie says somewhere above him.

"How long?" Timmy asks, his voice rough from sleep.

"About an hour."

"Oh." He hums and presses his naked body against Armie's, seeking his warmth, the heat of his skin but Armie shifts a little, putting some distance between them.

Timmy tilts his head and looks up at him, frowning.

"What's wrong?" He asks.

"Well, considering that I found you dissociating and cutting yourself, don't you think that I should ask that question?"

"That's not what I meant." Timmy starts to get irritated. He doesn't like being reminded of the silly shit he did. Doesn't everyone do this, from time to time? It's no big deal, really. Armie should know.
He has his own shit to deal with in which Timmy doesn't poke around either.

Better concentrate on the good things: They are finally in bed, together, almost or fully naked after Armie held him and kissed him – so what is the problem here?

There obviously is something Timmy has missed because Armie just answers: “I know,” and scoots back even further as he tries to catch Timmy's gaze. “Tim, listen, we need to talk.”

“Talk?” Timmy hates how young and petulant he sounds but talking is the last thing on his mind right now.

“Yes, talk.”

“Fuck you, what is there to talk about?” His hand reaches out, grabbing Armie through his boxer shorts. He gasps and tries to move away but Timmy feels his cock twitch in his grip.

“Stop that.” Armie hisses through gritted teeth.

“Am I offending you?” Timmy asks sultry, throwing one long naked leg over Armie’s hip, wincing when he feels a sting where he cut himself.

Armie takes first his hand and then his thigh and gently but firmly pushes him away. “Just don't.” He says quietly.

Timmy sits up, suddenly angry, his wounds burning with every movement. “You are sending rather mixed signals here, Armie Hammer. Yesterday you said you wanted to fuck me, but when I turned up you were suddenly very eager to go out with the girls. When I tried to talk to you you called me a pussy and then fucked off only to return this morning to almost suffocate me in a hug and kissing me as if there’s no tomorrow. I have no idea what to make of this. Are you just toying with me? Are you taking the piss? Are you punishing me? What? I can't handle this!”

Timmy is pushing his fist into Armie's chest by the end of his little speech, raising his voice.

Armie doesn't answer, he just stares at Timmy with an intense expression on his face, almost pained.

“I'm sorry, but it's not me who's sending mixed signals.” He eventually says. “It was you who brought Esther and Victoire. It's quite clear what you meant by that. I'm actually not an idiot despite looking like a dumb blond. So don't tell me you are interested. I don't need some young chicken to show me up, playing hard to get for the sake of attention. It’s hard enough for me the way it is.”

“What are you talking about?” Timmy has no idea what Armie's insinuating.

“Fuck, Tim, you tease and tease and tease but then you keep me at arm's length to let me starve. I don't get the hang of that game. It's just really difficult for me, you know?”

“I'm not teasing you. I'm... I don't know. I just want you to take me.” He blushes but it's the truth.

“Then why did you bring the girls?”

“I didn't bring them, they met me in the Piazza and just dragged along. What was I supposed to say? 'No, you can't come over to Armie's 'cause we are going to fuck.'”

“Oh, come on...”

“No, that's the fucking truth. I tried to talk to you but you just...,” Timmy stares down at his bruised arm, touches it, takes a deep breath.
“Tim, it's okay, I know I'm a pathetic old fuck to you and I can’t expect anything… I only hurt you…”

“You have no idea! No idea!” Timmy yells, attacking Armie until he straddles him. He's naked and quite aware of that fact. “Yes, I was scared shitless. I still am. But I want you. I want you! So. Here it is, my truth. How about you?” His half-hard cock lies on Armie's belly as he spreads his legs, baring himself, grinding his ass against Armie’s decidedly interested dick.

Armie grabs both his shoulders, holding him upright but not pushing him off of him. “Tim... Tim! Just look at us.” His voice is serious. Timmy doesn't want to listen to him when he sounds like this.

“No. I... no!”

“Tim. You have bruises all over your body and I did that to you. You cut yourself... you attacked me. And then I knocked you out. We are really not what the other needs.”

“No! No. That wasn't... you don't understand...,” His voice breaks and he turns his face away, afraid what Armie might see in his eyes.

“And your video?”

Timmy freezes.

“I hope you enjoyed yourself.” Armie tries for lighthearted but sounds both offended and deflated. He gently lifts Timmy off his lap and scoots up to lean his back against the headboard.

“I'm so sorry. That was-,” Timmy kneels in the middle of the bed, not bothering to pull the sheet up to cover himself. Let Armie see. His cock. His wounds.

“... just what you wanted?”

“...fucking stupid. I really don't remember much of it.”

“Pity. You both looked pretty enthusiastic.”

“I looked pretty spaced out.”

“Did you... take something?”


There's a pained silence between them until Armie asks: “You **guess**?”

Timmy sighs. “Listen, I’m missing huge chunks of last night. I don't remember much after you left.” He confesses, toying with the sheet, staring at the cuts on his leg. At least they have stopped bleeding.

“That guy...” Armie starts.

“I don't even know his name.”

Armie swallows, looking a little sick.

"I was... kinda worried after I saw that video this morning. Sorry, I mean, it's none of my business-" Timmy snorts a frustrated laugh.
"-but I thought I should check on you?"

"Check on me? Why?" Timmy's in attack mode now. He hates being pitied and patronized. He's a grown man. If Armie doesn't want him, this, with him, why doesn't he leave him alone to enjoy himself the way he chooses? And if he does want him, why isn't he angry or jealous? Why does he sound so awfully sorry and compassionate?

"Because there are certain... dangers when you engage in casual anonymous... encounters."

"Encounters? Where are you from, the 1950s? He sucked my cock. No harm done." But something is creeping up on Timmy as he hurls his words at Armie; the unease he'd felt earlier intensifies. He touches the back of his head again and something flashes before his eyes, just a hunch, a hazy notion of something rough beneath his knees and his head hitting something hard...

"How can you be so sure?"

Why can't he let this go? "Your obsession with my sex life seems kinda unhealthy, man, especially as you don't want to play any part in it." Timmy says with a cynical glare, lashing out in hope to scare Armie off.

"Well, as you did send me the video you obviously wanted me to know... Shit! You are so fucking young, Tim. There are all kinds of sick fuckers out there"

"Well, you should know." Suddenly, Timmy has a bad taste in his mouth and he raises a hand to his lips. Armie must have seen that something's wrong because he scoots forward a little and asks: "Just tell me... did you...? Oh shit... Did he... you know, force you? To do... something?"

Timmy closes his eyes. Armie sounds so worried. The emotion in his voice triggers something. Why does he care so much? Like Timmy means something special to him? And if that's the case, why doesn't he just grab Timmy and take what he has offered? He must know that Timmy would let him. He imagines his face pressed against Armie's hard cock, opening his mouth to take him as deep as possible...

He suddenly remembers his aching throat, the sore corners of his mouth, that taste...

There's a hand in his hair, pushing him down onto his knees. He can't breathe. There's the strong, sour scent of musk. He's gagging, drooling and then there's salty cum flooding his mouth...

He jumps to his feet, almost toppling over as he gets caught in the sheet but somehow manages to stagger into the bathroom just in time to be sick over the toilet.

^^^^^^

Armie comes after Tim, holding him around the middle and pushing his hair out of his face as he throws up. He's just bringing up bile but he nonetheless twists and spasms in Armie's grip, his body shaking as he struggles to expel every last bit of stomach content. Armie knows only too well how this feels and strokes Tim's cramping back, murmuring soothingly into his hair and against his clammy skin.

"Hey, it's okay. Okay. Relax. Don’t fight it. It’s okay."

“Oh god...” Tim huffs between retches. “Oh god.”

It takes almost ten minutes for Tim to eventually slump down, resting his forehead on his folded arms on the toilet seat. All the time, Armie forces his thoughts not to wander off to imagine the potential
horrors Tim might have experienced last night. That won’t help Tim through this. Yet that's easier said than done.

When it's eventually over, Armie gets up and wets a flannel for Tim to wipe his face.

Then he takes a deep breath. They have to talk about this, now. “Did he hurt you?” Armie asks, crouching down again. “Like, did he …?” He makes a gesture with his hand, unable to say the word.

It's a small relieve when Tim says: “I don't think so.” His voice is raw. “It doesn't... feel like it. I think I would feel it? Only my mouth, my throat... hurt.”

Armie has to close his eyes for a moment. “So just oral?” He asks.

Tim shrugs, then nods almost imperceptible.

“Did you consent?” Armie hates this but he has to know, for reasons he's not prepared to face.

It takes a moment. Tim touches the back of his head, touches his throat. In the end, he just shrugs again, avoiding Armie's gaze.

“What does that mean?” Armie asks softly. “Tim, please, you can talk to me.”

“I don’t know. I guess I did?” It comes out like a question and now it's Armie who has to suppress the urge to bend over the toilet bowl. Well, he'd been there earlier, thank god, or otherwise he might have joined Tim.

He swallows hard before asking: “You don't remember?”

“No.” Tim whispers, casting his eyes down at the floor, his sickly greenish-white face blushing. Armie wants to touch him, to hold him but somehow shies away from it. Tim seems too frightfully vulnerable right now to dare to get close to him.

Better get back to establish some facts. “Did he use a condom?”

Tim once again presses his hand against his mouth and pales even more, visibly fighting the impulse to throw up again, swallowing convulsively. Then he shakes his head.

"Shit!” Armie's going to kill that fucker should he ever meet him. He takes a deep breath, balling his fists until he sees Tim flinch. Calm down! The last thing he wants is to frighten Tim more.

“Okay. The risk is really low but we could still go to ER and get you some PEP.”

Tim looks up, confused. “What?”

“Post-exposure prophylaxis.” Armie explains as if using multisyllabic medical terms is second nature to him. “An emergency measure so you don't catch HIV. Though it's rarely transmitted via oral sex.”

Tim stares at him. “Why do you know this?”

Great! That's how you shoot yourself in the foot, Hammer! “Why do you think?”

Tim gapes. “Shit. No.”

“No to the hospital?”

Tim shakes his head but quickly seems to regret the movement. “Don't do this. Don’t deflect. You
know this because you...?"

“Let’s say I’ve been there.” Armie holds his gaze. Quid pro quo. Tim at least deserves some honesty.

“Shit. But Liz...?”

“That’s absolutely none of your business.” Armie shoots back. He really doesn't want Liz brought into this, not here and not now. "This is not about me right now, Tim."

Tim blushes, wiping the back of his hand over his mouth. Eventually he says: "I don't think I want to go to hospital. I'm not sure my insurance covers something like this."

"This is not about money, Tim. I can pay."

But Tim just sighs. "If Luca or anyone from the production company hears about any of this..." Despite his age, the boy thinks practical, Armie has to give him that.

"There's nothing to be ashamed off." But who is he kidding? Half his life is spent feeling guilty and ashamed. He understands Tim way better than he can admit.

"I might be considered a risk, for future ventures..."

Armie just nods. That's the way it is in their line of work.

They sit there for a little while longer, both staring off into their own personal darkness. There's nothing Armie could say to make it any easier for Tim so he stays silent and at least gives him that and saves Tim from more hollow platitudes.

"I'd like to brush my teeth.” Tim announces eventually.

Back to reality it is, Armie thinks, resurfacing. “Course. Can you get up? Will you let me tend to your cuts?” He's relieved when Tim nods.

Ten minutes later, Tim's thigh is disinfected and bandaged, as is Armie's upper arm. Armie's hand did brush Tim's cock in the process and he had to try really hard to suppress the urge to prolong the contact, reminding himself what Tim had been through last night.

But if Armie is quite honest with himself thinking about forcing his own cock down Tim's throat doesn’t appall him the way it should. Because more than he’s sorry or angry he's equally jealous and turned on by the idea.

God, he’s one of the sick perverts he's warned Tim about. The boy needs a friend now, and all he can think off is grabbing his curls and gagging him with his cock until Tim drools and splutters as he comes down his throat, covering the traces another man has left on his boy with his own scent and mark of ownership.

Tim had allowed a stranger to do that to him. But not Armie. He forces himself to concentrate on the slashes on Tim's leg to shove these thoughts back into the putrid swamp they emerged from. He can’t betray Tim’s trust now.

But then, him betraying Tim's trust is a pattern, isn’t it, Armie muses as he works in silence? He'd been a traitor last night. Because if he hadn't abandoned Tim, nothing of this would have happened. Now he has to live with it.

Stocking up on his guilt. He's sure he'll pay for it somehow. The question is not so much if but how.
To take his mind off these gloomy fantasies he offers to make some breakfast. They both can do with coffee and a bite to eat.
Friends

Chapter Summary

They are trying to be just friends... nothing more. Good friends. That should work. Right?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tim’s kitchenette seems deprived of any normal food. All Armie can find is an open packet of Cantucci and cans of Coke in the fridge. This will have to do then. He carries it all over to the bedroom where Tim is once again in bed, but now clad in the clothes Armie had retrieved for him earlier.

It has a calming effect on both of them.

Tim tries to refuse the cookies but Armie pushes them at him, not taking no for an answer before opening a can for each of them. When Tim nibbles at a biscuit he allows himself to relax a little.

“Those are stale.” Tim complains.

“Well, maybe you should do some shopping then.”

“I’ll get crumbs all over the mattress.”

“As if you’re the poster boy for pristine living conditions.” Armie can't suppress a grin as he makes a gesture that encompasses the clothes on the floor, the books and magazines piling up on almost every horizontal surface, interspersed with empty cans and only almost empty mugs, some already growing some kind of orange fungus. “Shit, I think I saw something move just over there in that corner.”

He points and Tim turns in horror, squealing. “Really?”

Armie has to laugh. “No.” He shakes his head before taking a sip.

“I hate roaches. We had them in the apartment in the Bronx I shared with Giullian.” Tim visibly shudders. “I think there were also rats.”

“Nice.”

“We can’t all own beach villas in L.A.”

“It’s not a villa. It’s a house. A small house by comparison.”

“Not compared to my apartment.”

“Oh, so you're the real deal, yeah, the poor starving artist.” Armie’s surprised to hear the edge in his voice. They're just bickering like mates do, for god's sake, trying to find their footing again. No reason to get all worked up.

“That’s not what I’m saying but I definitely don’t stem from a family of billionaires.” Tim won't let it
“That’s not my fault.” Why does he feel the need to defend himself? “You can’t choose your family.”

“Well, I bet you wouldn’t change anything even if you could. Why should you?” Tim stares at him from under his lashes, taking a sip of Coke, licking his lips. That kid is sharp. Is he trying to lure Armie out of his shell?

“What are we really talking about here?” Two can play that game.

“You tell me.”

Armie looks at Tim, taking in his pale, thin face, huge eyes with dark circles underneath, wild curls, slim, trembling fingers wrapped around the can of Coke and is once again shocked by his fragility.

They have to stop this right now. Someone has to put a foot down and apparently that’s him. Who’d thought...

“Look at us. Don’t you see? We push and push each other and this is where it ends. I’m hurting you and you are hurting yourself. We can’t go on like this.”

Tim is not thrown by his statement.

“You can’t make me stop.” He says, voice eerily calm.

Armie swallows. “I can and I will if you continue to… do what you do.”

“How?” Tim sneers.

“I’ll talk to Luca.”

“Then I’ll talk to your wife.”

Armie has trouble suppressing the need to smack him again. “You wouldn’t.”

“Try me.”

They glare at each other until Armie breaks eye contact, taking a deep breath.

“Tim, this has gone too far. I know I provoked you, that it’s my fault, but I fear I’ll hurt you and I can’t… I already did hurt you. I almost knocked you out just an hour ago and...” ‘I feared I’d killed you and I couldn’t live with that’ Armie thinks but can’t bring himself to say it. Instead he tells Tim: “You shouldn’t believe in me, you know. Let’s just get this movie over. That’s why we’re here.”

Something shifts in Tim’s face, his whole posture softening. “Tell me you don’t want me and I promise to back off.”

And Armie tries, god, he does, but he can’t bring himself to speak those words. Instead he says: “You know that would be a lie. We shouldn’t lie to each other. But I’m really not what you need right now. You’ve seen some of my… issues. I’m in no position to offer you anything. You deserve better.”

Tim snorts a laugh, looking finally away. After a moment he says. “You know, I stopped doing this for a couple years. I thought I had a grip on my life, that I’d outgrown this shit...” His smirk turns a little sad. “I think we’re both so fucked up that maybe we’re the only people around who really
understand."

He turns back to Armie, eyes wide open, his gaze serious. Armie feels flayed, dissected by Tim's stare. How does this kid do this? Because he might be right. This might be their chance...

He can't deal with it.

Armie leans off the bed and grabs his shorts.

"Are you leaving?" Tim asks, and the panic in his voice frightens Armie because some time he'll have to leave. They both know it.

"No." Armie shakes his head. "Mind if I skin up a spliff?"

^^^^^

They are lying on his bed, passing the reefer between them, fingers touching. Timmy dares to stroke the ridge of Armie's huge foot with his toes and is flooded with bright happiness when Armie just smiles and doesn’t pull away.

"Can I ask you something?" Timmy feels a little better now. Might be the weed, might be the food, might be Armie’s presence…

"Sure." Armie nods.

"I heard a few rumors." Timmy takes a deep drag before ploughing on. "About you and other men?"

Armie closes his eyes. "Your friend Will, I suppose."

Timmy hums.

"What are they saying? About me and… men?"

"There’s been talk way since J Edgar…"

Armie laughs. "Because I snogged Leo? Good god, that dude’s an awful kisser."

"I don’t think it’s because of Leo, actually. Will has heard other things…"

"Listen, just because I play gay from time to time doesn’t mean… it doesn’t…"

"I’m not saying anything. Is it true, though?" Timmy doesn't dare to look at Armie. He just waits.

Armie is silent for a long time, just smoking, staring at Timmy’s ceiling.

"Yes."

"Okay." Timmy is surprised but then not really. Should he ask how, when, with whom?

Before he can Armie asks: "What about you?"

Timmy thinks it’s only fair.

"I really don’t know, man. I mean… yeah, I thought I wanted to… with you."

"I’m humbled." Armie turns on his side, staring at him, putting the joint back between Timmy’s lips, holding it there for him to inhale. Timmy closes his eyes and starts to drift.
"You are so beautiful, you know that, right?" Armie's words pierce his reverie and he can't suppress a giggling fit.

"Are you mad?" He huffs out, coiling his body into a tight ball. "I'm too skinny, I don't even have an ass, my hair is crazy and my face is just too long, I'm twenty and I can't grow a beard... Do you know, one casting director called me horse-faced. Another told me I had to bulge up twenty pounds but even that wouldn't help much to get me into teen rom-coms. I'm not" - he makes air quotes with his fingers - "marketable for US mainstream media'. There are no roles for someone like me. I tried but all the movies flopped. No one wants to see me. I can only play the kid or the teenage boyfriend but I'm getting too old for that now, and there's just nothing...,” he trails off, picking at a loose threat on his sleeve.

"Tim, the world is just waiting for you.” Armie sounds so honest and soft that Timmy almost believes him.

"Ha, I've heard that before, after some major movies and then – nothing! No one is waiting for me.” He reaches out for the reefer again.

"You don't have to tell me.” Armie sighs.

His tone shatters Timmy. He truly looks up to Armie, who has worked with almost everyone in the industry by the age of 29. “Man, Armie, I loved Social Network. Lone Ranger. Man from U.N.C.L.E! Nocturnal Animals…” He knows he's starting to wax but it's true.

"I was barely in that one."

"But you were great!"

"What's it worth if no-one sees me?"

Timmy sits up. The room spins a little but that's fine.

"Listen, let's put all our shit behind us. Let's make this movie something special. Really special. Let's show them what you are capable off…” Armie starts laughing but Timmy commands the seriousness of the spaced out. "We have nothing to lose. No one knows me. You've done mostly small movies recently. Let's just go for it, really go for it. It trust you. I know we can make something beautiful here. A true piece of art.”

The funny thing is that he believes what he's saying. Even Armie smiles at him, warmth in his eyes.

"You are just high.” But his tone has changed. There’s enthusiasm in it, some verve.

“So what?” Timmy asks. “Do you trust me, Armie?”

“You threatened to call my wife and tell her I wanted to fuck you.” But there's no malice in his voice, just resigned acceptance.

“Do you trust me I won’t?”

Armie gets up on his elbows and stares him square in the face for almost a minute. Timmy doesn’t move.


'We know things about each other that could destroy our whole lives if others find out', Timmy
thinks. Sounds like a great basis to forge that special bond needed for this project.

“Truce?” He asks, extending his hand to Armie.

Armie shakes it. “Truce.”

“Great. Let’s go out and grab some dinner. Smoking pot always make me ravenous.”

Armie’s still laughing as they both walk down the stairs of his building, Armie now wearing one of Timmy’s track suit bottoms and hoodies. He left his bloody clothes at Timmy’s place. Good, Timmy thinks. He can wear them to bed tonight.

Their new-found equilibrium doesn’t mean that Timmy’s not pursuing his very own agenda here. They still have almost two months to go. That’s a long time to seduce someone, Timmy thinks as they round the corner of the Piazza, their shoulders brushing.

Neither of them pulls back.

The next days are filled with preparations for the shooting to start. There are lighting tests, camera tests and sound tests at the Villa where they try blocking some of the early scenes. In between Tim continues his music and Italian lessons but they also hit the gym together, Armie giving him some tips and assistance.

They still meet for morning coffee every day before biking over to the Villa Albergoni in Moscazzano. In the afternoons, they rehearse, reading their scenes either in Tim's apartment or in Armie's before going out to dinner to Luca or one of the many excellent small restaurants in Crema.

They are almost inseparable.

On Wednesday afternoon, when they return from gym on their bikes, the sky is suddenly darkening. The weather has been changeable most days until now with sudden heavy rainstorms so they know what to expect.

As the first thick raindrops start to fall they are lucky to stop by a lovely old church that turns out to be Santa Maria della Croce and decide to wait inside until the weather clears.

Armie usually doesn't like churches. He's spent too much time in them during his youth. His friends were riding their bikes, surfing, partying when he had to attend Sunday school or endless religious services led by preachers promising fire and damnation to anyone inclined like him, their spit flying as they shouted and screamed perdition from the pulpit in the name of the Lord.

But those churches where nothing like the Renaissance basilica he finds himself in now. The vivid paintings and colorful frescoes are surrounded by marble and gold while the smell of incense hangs heavy in the cool air. Candles are burning in one of the side chapels. There's no one about but them.

“Wow.” Tim exclaims, taking off his cap as he wanders around in awe, gazing at the paintings, the altar, the stairs down to the crypt. He comes to stand in front of a very realistic statue of the crucified Jesus, and the white marble of the skinny figure lying there, decorated with bright red blood, reminds Armie of Tim in his arms on Sunday, unconscious and bleeding.

“Man, this is kinda rad. I mean, ugh... look at that.” Tim sounds morbidly fascinated by the display.

“You religious?” Armie asks.
Tim shrugs. “Mum tried to take me to the synagogue a few times but it didn't click with me. Dad's agnostic but when I stayed in France in the summer there was always a wedding or christening and we went. Catholic, obviously. I even took the Eucharist a few times.” Tim grins. “Tasted awful. You?”

Armie hears a voice in his head saying “But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

‘Fuck you!’ he thinks and shakes his head. “Nah, man. I think it sucks.”

“Shhh!” Tim whispers, putting a finger to his lips but grinning. “You know he can hear you.” And he points towards the brightly painted ceiling.

Armie flips the finger in the same direction.

“You'll go to hell for that.” Tim really looks a little worried now and it's endearing.

“Well, surely not for blasphemy alone.” A strange silence settles between them as both avert their gaze. Tim keeps wandering around while Armie sits in one of the benches, taking out his phone. On a whim, he snaps a pic of Tim looking at the main altar – all gold and lapis lazuli – and posts it on his Instagram. He knows his mother follows him there and will know he's visited a Catholic church, a faith she despises maybe even more than Jewishness. He captures the pic 'Adventures with @Tchalamet' and smiles at the hidden meaning only obvious to him and Tim.

As they peak outside a few minutes later, the rain has stopped. The ground is wet and the air is fresh if a little chilly. They bike on and stop-over at Tim's apartment for a beer and to charge their phones, lounging on his old couch, Tim with his legs pulled up in one corner while Armie spreads his long limbs all over the cushions, his knee almost touching Tim's toes.

Later, they go over to Luca and Ferdinando for dinner. Michael and Amira are there as well, as are Sayombhu and Walter. Tim calls them a posse and Armie laughs while Luca rolls his eyes and puts on some Hans Eissler songs.

Armie has to admit he likes it. It's a bit like back in LA where he has his harem of friends, Liz, Hops. He doesn't cope well alone. It gives him time and space to think about things and he doesn't like that.

With Tim it's a little different though. Being with him is both easy but also challenging. Armie can almost hear him think. His face is so open he can see all the emotions crossing it. Is that intentional, he wonders?

Tim knows things about Armie neither his best friends nor family know. That should frighten Armie but it somehow doesn't. Because it means that they don't have to talk when he vanishes after the opulent dinners Luca serves. Or when he falls silent during conversations. Or when he looks at Tim for too long to just be friendly, casual.

And they don't have to talk about the tension between them that's undeniable, or what it means; if they are attracted to each other and in what way precisely...

Because there are still lingering glances. And expressive silences.

It's the hardest when they are reading their lines, trying to get in the mood, develop a feeling for their characters, how they interact and how their relationship changes over the course of the movie. They are doing research if they don't understand a reference, try out different things and discuss their approaches, but when Tim looks at him, biting his lip, smiling one second sweet and shy and the next bold and fierce it throws Armie. He both admires and fears what Tim is able to do with Elio.
It changes the way he goes about his own acting. For the first time in his working life Armie is honest with a colleague. There's no competition, just mutual acceptance. When Tim asks him something, he doesn't deflect or hide. He answers as truthfully as he can. It's terrifying but also freeing. They both know the worst about each other, there's no need to pretend anymore. It's kinda organic, especially with someone as unbiased and open as Tim.

They try to work out a back story for Oliver because Armie isn't sure what to make of him. There's so little he can go on. Talking it over with Tim helps him to focus, to sort things out. He shares his thoughts with Tim and they discuss his ideas like equals. It's inspiring. The process unlocks something inside him, a sincerity that makes everything they do more authentic.

Luca is very pleased with them.

Of course, they talk about the sex scenes.

“Does it bother you?” Tim asks him.

“No. Why?”

“Just... don't know.”

“You?”

Tim grins, stretching. “No.”

“For god's sake, Tim...”

Armie tickles him until he squeals, gulping in air as he desperately tries to wriggle free.

They have become friends. Yes, that's what they are, good friends. Nothing more.

And if the sliver of skin Tim exposes when he stretches out on Armie's bed, holding his script in his right hand, squinting up at the pages and scrunching his freckled nose, makes Armie's mouth go dry than that's just because he's more and more becoming Oliver every day.

Right?

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, I'm going away for the weekend, celebrating with Missmuffin221 so the next chapter won't be up till Sunday night. But in it they'll finally get it on, promised.
Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait, I've been away over the weekend. Over the next weeks I can promise a regular updating schedule.
Thank you all so much for your patience and sticking with this story, I hope the wait was worth it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So, the peach scene?” Armie asks on Friday afternoon. “Have you tried it?”

Tim doesn't blush but smiles and shrugs his Gallic shrug. “Not yet. Luca's not sure if he'll keep the scene. If it can be done.”

They both stare at each other then burst out laughing.

“You think Luca did...?”

“How would I know, man?”

“We should ask him. I think it's possible.”

“Not for you.” Tim grins. “You'll need a melon.”

“God, grow up.” Armie swats him with a pillow. “I think he should keep the scene. The aftermath is beautiful.”

They are just in the middle of going over their lines in that scene, talking about what it means for Elio to be discovered by Oliver like this (“shame followed by acceptance”) and what it means for Oliver to eat the peach (“becoming one with Elio”) when the doorbell rings.

“What the fuck...?” Armie doesn't expect anyone and his Italian is nonexistent. “Could you?”

Tim gets up. “I get it.”

There's some talking after he'd opened the door and Armie hears him laugh.

“Si. Molte grazie. Ciao.”

When Tim walks back into the bedroom he's holding a small parcel.

“Wow, I knew you were rolling in it, Armand. Tiffany & Co.? New cuff-links? Or did you buy
something for me?” Tim coyly bats his eyelids and presses the parcel to his chest.

Armie can feel his face heat despite it's obvious that Tim is only joking.

“Fuck off.” He gets up and snatches the parcel from Tim's hands. He had almost forgotten he'd ordered it. “Some of us have to keep up appearance.”

The look Tim shoots him is full of suspicion. “Sure.”

“What?” Oh, that boy is just too clever.

“Nothing.” Tim bounces on the balls of his bare feet, biting his lip and Armie has to turn away and puts the parcel on his night stand.

They try to get back into the scene but the spell is broken.

“God, I could murder for a steak.” Armie groans. Food always helps. In a way.

“Let me just take a shower, then we can go out to get a bite. I'm all sweaty.” Tim touches the hem of his shirt, wrinkling his freckled nose.

Images flash in Armie's brain: Tim's glistening, lean torso, licking the salt off his knobbly spine just with the tip of his tongue, and he has to sit down on the bed and cross his legs.

“You can shower here. I can borrow you a fresh t-shirt.” He offers. He still has Tim's pants as well though they are in no state to be worn. Armie knows that he’s walking on thin ice but fuck it, there's Tim’s bracelet sitting next to Armie's bed, burning a hole in the carefully mended illusion that what's between them is just friendship, and he suddenly can't be arsed not to indulge just a little.

Tim could say no, of course. It's up to him. Maybe he even knows what Armie is thinking. Does he mind? The decision is with him now.

“Cool.” Tim says guileless and sheds his t-shirt on his way over into Armie's bathroom. The bite mark on his neck is gone, Armie can't help noticing.

“Towel's on the shelf to the left.”

“Oh, so you didn't prepare for me like last time?” Tim smirks around the wooden door-frame but is quick to duck his head as a book comes flying his way. “Ouch, that could have hurt. Wow, you're reading Stendhal!”

“Just be glad it was the paperback.” Armie laughs, falling back onto the mattress, closing his eyes. When he hears the shower running he shoves one hand into his shorts, stroking himself fast and hard while imagining Tim naked and wet, spreading his legs and bracing himself against the tiles. Two fingers rub over his hole, slick with conditioner – are those Armie’s or Tim's? It's not really important for a quick wank, Armie decides – and when they push inside Tim makes the most delicious, purring noise...

“Mmmm, I like that...”

Armie's so gone it takes a second for him to realize that the mattress dips.

When he does, his eyes fly open with a shocked moan. He wants to sit up or roll over but all his blood is pooling in his groin, making his movements slow and uncoordinated.

And then slim cool fingers push into his shorts as well, covering his hand wrapped around his
leaking cock, and as embarrassing as it is that's enough to send him over the edge.

“Now we are even.” Tim smiles down at him, eyes bright, lips wet and slightly parted. He’s naked, hair still dripping and how the fuck did he shower that quickly?

Armie's too mortified to give a comeback..

All he can do is trying to get his breathing under control as what just happened sinks in. He stares as Tim removes his right hand from his shorts, holding his cum-covered fingers in front of his face.

“Becoming one, you said earlier? Let's see... I want to find out how you taste.”

Armie doesn't stop him as Tim slowly sucks one of his fingers into his mouth.

He watches as Tim swallows.

“Mmmm, way better than the other guy.” Tim's eyes are black and unfathomable, gazing directly into Armie's.

“Don't...”

Tim tilts his head and is about to lick his hand again, his tongue already darting out when Armie's clean hand grabs his right wrist to still him.

“Don't do this. You have no idea what it does to me.”

“Oh Armie, I think I have a pretty good idea what it does to you. I think you are enjoying yourself right now very much.”

The little tease is outright asking for it.

Armie removes his hand from his still semi-hard cock and rolls onto his side, touching Tim's chin, throat and collar bone with his gooey fingers, covering his skin in glistening cum, marking him with his release. Tim pushes into the touch but keeps still otherwise, closing his eyes and throwing his head back to expose more skin. He's trembling and so hard that his cock curves up against his little belly.

“God, Tim...” Armie can smell him and almost licks him but he holds back. “I'm so sorry, I thought we could be friends...”

Tim's hips twitch as a clear drop of precome wells up from his slit. “I don't care how you call it but right now I'm just in need of your hand or mouth.” He whispers, the epitome of want, naked, willing, in Armie's bed, outright begging for it.

He had tried. God help him, he truly had. What's the point in being good when it only leads to misery?

When Armie sits up Tim slides down, resting back on his elbows, one knee bend, the fingertips of his sticky right hand brushing lightly, invitingly over his lower abdomen. The sight almost takes Armie's breath away and suddenly he knows what he wants.

He grabs the parcel and rips it open. It holds the classic green box. On an inlay of black velvet rests the bracelet. Armie takes it and snaps it around Tim's right wrist.

“Wow, so it really was for me? I was just kidding...”

“Shut up and touch yourself.” Armie tells him, his voice firm. “Earn it.”
Timmy swallows as Armie fastens the bracelet around his wrist, both their hands still sticky with Armie's cum. He feels claimed. It's a surprisingly good feeling.

Armie's command goes straight to his groin, making his hard cock twitch and weep. Pleasuring himself while Armie watches is the hottest thing Timmy has ever done with anyone in bed.

He starts slow, using his gooey right hand, Armie's release working as lubricant on his sensitive skin. The bracelet gleams in the late afternoon sun shining through the window, the dark beads changing color in its warm rays as Timmy moves lasciviously.

When his eyes flutter shut Armie touches his cheek: “Look at me.”

Armie sits next to him, his blue eyes raking over Timmy's body. It feels like a caress. Timmy's mouth falls open as he tries to breath but his chest is already tightening. He feels heat coil in his guts, between his legs and bucks up into his hand, his fist suddenly flying on his cock.

God, this feels so good.

“You only come when I say it or we won't do this again.” Armie tells him, his voice firm and deeper than Timmy has ever heard him, pinching the base of his cock until Timmy whines in desperation.

“Please, Armie, please…”

“Are we clear?”

“Yes.” Timmy huffs out and the grip on his cock is gone.

“Go on.”

Timmy takes it even slower now, not wanting to disappoint Armie, palming his shaft, softly rubbing his thumb over the wetness at its head, massaging the spot right below the crown while his eyes are glued to Armie's face.

He watches enrapt, eyes dark-blue, mouth pressed tightly shut. Timmy gives him a good show, using his other hand to fondle his balls, rolling them until it almost hurts, then moving them further back.

“No.” Armie says. “Just your cock. I don't want you to be sore.”

’Why’? Timmy thinks before the full impact of Armie's words hit him. ‘Oh!’

He can feel his shaft pulse in his palm.

“Armie, please... I need to...”

Armie moves quickly, retrieving something from under his pillow. It's Timmy's soiled underwear from their first rehearsal. He'd kept it all those days while they were lounging on his bed, learning lines. Geez, what a twisted motherfucker.

He's about to comment on it but is shut up when the slightly stiff fabric is stuffed into this mouth.

“You talk too much.” Armie whispers next to Timmy's ear, his breath warm and damp, and that's all it needs, combined with his own taste flooding his mouth, for Timmy to come so hard he almost blacks out, spilling over his hand, coating the bracelet in thick white stripes.
“Ugh, hmmm! Ugh... Gnahr.” He moans into the makeshift gag - meaning 'Shit, fuck! Shit... sorry' - begging all the way through his orgasm but his pleas are muffled into helpless grunts by the wet cotton of his filthy boxers.

When it's over, he just lies there, shrouded in shame and post-orgasmic fog, eyes closed, waiting for Armie's verdict, telling him he's ruined it and that he should leave now, kicking him out like the pathetic horny bitch he is.

Instead, Armie gently pulls his boxer-shorts from his mouth, and only now does Timmy realize that he couldn't breathe properly before. He gulps in air and his head clears a bit.

“Tim, hey, Tim, look at me.” Armie's voice is soft.

Timmy just shakes his head, eyes still squeezed shut.

“Sorry, I'm so useless, I'm not worth it...,” he mumbles, weakly shaking his right arm so the bracelet on his wrist rattles.

“Shhh,” Armie touches his eyelids, drags the pad of a finger over his left eyebrow, down his cheek before he traces the outline of Timmy's quivering lower lip. “I know it's hard the first time. You'll learn.”

Timmy feels so relieved the he angles his body into the direction of Armie's voice, coiling himself up in a fetal position.

“So we'll do this again?” He asks, hazily blinking up at Armie.

“You coming like this was the hottest thing I ever saw.” Armie tells him, raking a hand through Timmy's curls. He presses into the touch as if starved. “There'll be consequences, of course, but we'll see if you can behave better next time.”

Timmy frowns, his brain still not fully back online again. “What do you mean by consequences? Are you going to put me over your knee?” He can't suppress a naughty grin.

Armie's hand in his hair tightens and pulls. Timmy yelps, more in surprise than pain, but Armie doesn't let go. “Ouch, that hurts.”

Armie pulls again and Timmy can feel the corners of his eyes watering. “Don't be so cocky, boy. You want this? With me? You better learn some respect.” Armie releases his curls and grabs Timmy's right lower arm instead. “You see this? When you're wearing this, you are mine. Do you want that?”

Timmy stares. He's not entirely sure what he agrees to when he nods but if it'll result in more orgasms with Armie then he's in.

“Are you sure?” As if Armie is sensing his cluelessness.

God, this could get embarrassing. Timmy just nods again.

“Say it.”

“I am yours.” Timmy breathes.

“Good.” Armie's voice is rough. He doesn't break eye-contact when he presses Timmy's right palm to his mouth and kisses it before licking its center still covered in both their half-dried cum.
“I'm going to clean up. I'm afraid there will be no more showering for you tonight, though.”

“What? But...”

“You'll go have dinner with me like the dirty boy you are. Afterwards, we'll see how you can make your initial failure up to me.”

As he watches Armie walk over into the bathroom it dawns on Timmy that what he's agreed to might be a little more intense than he anticipated. Well, the weekend just got way more interesting.

Chapter End Notes

You can talk to me on tumblr if you want...
Timmy learns what Armie means when he talks about consequences...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tim hadn't even been allowed to wash his hands before they went out to dinner. Armie had enjoyed watching him lick and suck his fingers clean as best he could before leaving his apartment. As for the rest, just knowing that Tim's neck, chest, belly and groin are still covered in their mixed release makes Armie almost forget his hunger for food as there's a different appetite waking in him.

But feeding it will have to wait. For now, Armie enjoys Tim sitting opposite him at the small restaurant table, squirming a little from time to time.

“Everything okay?” Armie asks, smirking.

Tim glares at him over his menu. “Just a little itchy.”

Armie will wipe that petulant expression from his face, later. At the moment, he just leans over and breathes Tim in. “Well, you smell lovely.”

Tim swallows and turns to the drinks card.

When the waiter comes to take their orders Tim is about to open his mouth but Armie talks over him. “He'll have pasta primavera and an aqua sin gas, steak with fries and a Peroni for me. Grazie.”

Tim gapes. “What? I'm getting noodles and a water? I'm not twelve anymore!”

“Believe me, you'll need the sustenance.”

Tim huffs, leaning back in his chair, rolling his eyes.

“Listen, Tim. You can get up and leave anytime you want.” Armie's voice is low and serious. “I'm not forcing anything on you. But half an hour ago you agreed to this. I know what I'm doing here. I know what you need. I doubt you do. So, how about you relax, let me lead and we explore this together?”

Tim stays silent for a minute, not meeting Armie's eyes. “Yeah,” he says eventually. “You're right, I have no idea what I'm doing here.” In that moment, Armie fears Tim might truly get up and walk away. His face displays a series of adverse emotions: insecurity, embarrassment, sceptis, even a flicker of fear. But he stays. “You talking about punishment and... shit. I... I'm not saying that doesn't turn me on but... I don't know, man, I don't think I'm into whipping and crawling around and calling you Sir and... such stuff.” Tim's face has turned crimson.

Armie almost laughs but holds back. “I never said I'd punish you.”

“But...”
“Consequences. Not punishment. That's a difference. And I'm not into any sort of roleplay. That doesn't do it for me. It's not about shoving a ball-gag in your mouth and beating you with my belt or whatever else you might imagine from your rather limited experience in this field.”

Tim still seems suspicious.

“So, what are you into?”

“You'll find out soon enough.”

“Can't you tell me?” Tim asks, playing with the beads of his bracelet.

“Where would be the fun in that?” Armie smiles.

Tim is about to say something but their food arrives.

“Eat.” Armie says and digs in. Tim hesitates but then takes up fork and spoon and attacks his pasta. He stays silent and casts his eyes down on the plate during the rest of the dinner and Armie's smile broadens as he feels some of Tim's resolve slipping. He knew it! Submission comes natural to Tim.

Oh, the things he'll show him. Finally, Armie has found someone to indulge his dark desires with who might be as much into submission as Armie's into dominance. Bonus, it's someone he likes. Extra-bonus, it's someone beautiful.

Good thing that they are free the whole weekend. So much time to play.

He subtly adjusts himself in his shorts. Tim doesn't notice as he silently eats, head bend, the bracelet gleaming on his right wrist in the light of the candle in the middle of their table.

They'll skip dessert, Armie decides.

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Later, back at Armie's apartment, Tim is writhing once again in the sheets. Armie's been keeping him on edge for some time now and Tim's body is covered in sweat. His arms and hands are tied in front of his chest with black rope in a not too complicated version of a Jiai-Shibari while his long pale legs are each bound with their ankles to one of the bedposts, spreading them wide, giving Armie easy access to his cock and ass as he kneels between Tim's thighs.

Armie didn't gag Tim but had ordered him not to make a sound and so far he's complied though it can't be easy for him as Armie is continuously rubbing two lubed fingers over his tight hole while fisting his cock with his other hand in slow strokes from root to tip.

Instead of making noise, Tim is tossing his head from left to right and back, biting his lips, his whole body vibrating with need, abdominal muscles clenching beneath the web of intertwined ropes and knots. He pants in rhythm with Armie's strokes but hasn't uttered one word yet. His eyes are open, staring at the ceiling, dazed and glazed over.

His hole is by now loose enough for Armie to push at least one finger in but he has told Tim that this won't happen tonight. Maybe tomorrow, if he's good and does what Armie tells him.

For now, Armie just wants to watch him fall apart.

Every time he feels Tim getting close, he removes the hand from his cock, watching the hard, glistening, deep red shaft twitch and pulse until Tim has calmed down enough for Armie to have a
go again.

One time, it's Armie's touch to the three fresh scars at the junction of Tim's leg and groin that brings him back from the edge.

“Don't come. Show me that you can do it.” Armie mumbles over and over, watching Tim fight his urge while continuing to rub his fluttering hole, all the while palming his erection.

It's beautiful. It's mesmerizing. It's so gorgeous that Armie already came over Tim's face twice without as much as a hand on himself. Tim had to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut so Armie could coat his flushed, sweaty features with his cum, watching it drip down Tim's cheek, pooling in one eye socket until he wiped it away with his thumb after Tim's eye had started to water, glueing his black lashes together, painting his pink lips with thick white stripes.

By now Armie has reached the stage of sated arousal that allows him to do this for hours, just watching Tim strain in his bounds, trying to be good, totally at his mercy.

That's what he gets off on, the voluntary submission of someone without threats or force, doing it because they want it, want to please him, want to yield and obey as much as he wants to be in charge and take – take apart.

He'll watch Tim fall but he'll also catch him.

“You are doing so, so good Tim. Just a little while longer. Can you hear me?”

Tim nods slowly before throwing his head back into the pillows, exposing his sweat-damp throat. The hollow at its base is damp, his pulse hammering visibly. Armie licks it, tasting the salt and dried cum on Tim's skin before he squeezes more lube onto both his hands. No use in rubbing Tim raw just yet.

Tim's slit is angry red already and weeping and his balls are tight against his perineum. The base of Armie's palm brushes them ever so lightly as he plays with Tim's hole, sending a shudders of pleasure through his wiry body. His flushed chest is rising and falling rapidly in its black rope cage, dark valleys between his protruding rips corresponding with his bounds.

“I want to hear you now. Talk to me.” Armie can't believe that his own cock is hard again. He'd really like to know if Tim's voice is as wrecked as his body.

Tim nods frantically but he seems lost for words.

Armie pinches the inside of his thigh just below the healed cuts to help him focus: “Come back to me.” He says. "Tell me how this feels.”

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Timmy is drifting, floating, his whole body attuned to Armie's wicked touches.

“Please...,” he whimpers, almost too out of it to form coherent words. “Please...”

“Please what?” Armie pinches him again and Timmy yelps.

“Oh god, please, this is so good. I need to come.”

“No, no, no. Not like this. You know I want you to last a little longer.”

Timmy licks his lips, tasting Armie's come.
“Please, just finish me. I need it so bad.”

“Tell me what you want me to do?”

“Fuck me. Put your fingers inside me. Just... anything. God!” Timmy’s back arches off the mattress as Armie flicks a fingertip against his hole.

But instead of entering him Armie just continues to tease him, massaging his hole, lightly stroking his hard cock, fondling his balls. Timmy is almost weeping with need.

“Tell me how this is for you.”

“I feel... god, I'm so horny, please, please, I'll do anything, just let me come.”

“You'll do anything anyway. I have you tied up and at my mercy. I can do anything I want to you. You can't stop me.”

Timmy feels himself twitch at Armie's words and gasps, sucking in air as he desperately tries not to come.

“If you could only see you now.” Armie is stroking his flanks, the inside of his thighs. It's too much and not enough. Timmy can't stop it, starts to sob. He's so aroused his vision blurs. The skin on his face itches under the layers of Armie's cum. God, he must look like a slut.

The idea just turns him on more. Suddenly, he can feel his whole body tense as his orgasm threatens to crash over him. “No, please, Armie, please, I'm coming, no!”

When Armie pinches down at the base of his cock this time it helps to hold it in but it also makes Timmy cry openly with frustration.

“What do you need?” Armie brushes his cum-stiff curls from his forehead to look at him but Timmy knows that beneath his tenderness hides something darker.

“Hurt me.” Timmy begs and he means it. He remembers the knife in his hand and the sting of the cuts Armie had been caressing earlier. He's drowning in his need to feel but does not want to come because Armie has told him not to and he wants to be good, to prove to Armie that he's worth his attention, trust, and maybe, just maybe his affection. So he opts for the one alternative that will allow him to feel but will at the same time suppress his urge to end his sweet agony by rushing things to completion.

Armie cages him, bowing down, his mouth almost touching Timmy's lips. “You sure?” He asks, looking actually proud of him. That's all Timmy needs to endure this torture for as long as Armie decides he needs it.

“Yes, god, please, do with me what you want....” Timmy sighs, giving himself over to Armie, who knows what he can take and needs and who will provide for him.

Next thing he knows, he feels a sharp bite at the sensitive inside of his left thigh, just above his knee. And another. And another. He raises his head so he can watch Armie apply cloth pins to his spread legs, first the left inner thigh, then the right. The initial pain dulls after a moment only to increase steadily as minutes pass while Armie works on his skin.

When he's finished he sits back on his heels and just watches Timmy's body twitch and squirm.

The movements only add to Timmy's agony. His moans morph into gasps and little shrieks as Armie
brushes his hands over the rows of cloth pins again and again, sending spikes of hot white pain through Timmy's body.

It's exquisite.

Until Armie puts three cloth pins to the soft, wrinkled skin of his tight, hard balls. That's when Timmy screams.

Armie grabs his curls, pulling firmly until Timmy's cries are reduced to just gasps. “I'm going to fuck your mouth now.” He announces, scooting up Timmy's body and Timmy willingly opens to take him in. Armie's taste fills his mouth and he relaxes his throat to allow Armie to push in deep. A large hand wraps around his throat, restricting his breathing, and Timmy welcomes the touch because of course it's Armie's right to decide how much air he's allowed to get.

He's surrendering, giving Armie absolute control over his body because he wants to, because Armie can handle him and knows how Timmy can reach previously unknown heights of bliss. In return, he wants to make Armie proud. The least he can do is to endure the pain that mixes with the joy of sucking Armie off.

As Armie pushes into his mouth while choking him and touching the cloth pins biting his skin the difference between pain and pleasure starts to blur until Timmy can't tell where the first ends and the latter begins.

Armie swells against his tongue, sliding down his throat that he's holding on to - can he feel his cock move beneath Timmy's skin? - until he suddenly stills before his seed floods Timmy's mouth. Tasting him, swallowing his cum, Timmy's hips buck but the pain in his legs helps him to suppress his orgasm, making his stomach muscles cramp but he succeeds to hold it in.

His head swims. Spit mixed with come runs down his chin. He's a mess but the way Armie gazes at him makes him feel held, kept, secure.

Especially as Armie slides from his mouth and kisses him and kisses him, whispering words against his lips that Timmy can't understand but just the sound of his warm deep voice grounds him.

The pain that shoots through his body when Armie slowly removes one cloth pin after another is almost too much. Timmy's screams and sobs echo in the room but Armie doesn't shush him.

When the last cloth pin is gone, Timmy is still painfully hard and throbbing. He's flying high on pain, something he didn't think was possible.

He dimly registers that Armie unties his ankles but instead of finishing him either by hand or mouth or at least some fingers up his ass he rolls Timmy onto his side and starts to weave an intrinsic net of rope around his legs.

“This is called Ashi Shibari,” Armie explains but Timmy can't follow his words because he's too gone on pain and desperation. He's sure that just one light touch to his cock will send him over the edge and he's somewhat incoherently begging Armie to make him come but Armie firmly tells him No.

Timmy starts sobbing again until Armie takes a somewhat thinner cord to tie it around Timmy's balls and cock. Neither groaning, begging nor pleading helps. Armie doesn't back down. Timmy ends up with a tightly bound dick and separated balls, making it unable for him to come.

He can't help but weep. Armie hugs him from behind, holding him while he openly cries and splutters until his throat hurts and his body gives in to its exhaustion.
“You can do this, Tim, I know it's hard but you can do this. Not just for me. You have to learn that certain actions call for strict consequences. I promise, when I'll fuck you tomorrow I'll make you come so hard that you'll see it was worth the wait.”

It takes a few more minutes until Timmy accepts his fate and eventually calms down a little. Only then does Armie get up and makes him drink some water, holding the bottle to his lips before once again getting into bed behind him, embracing him until he drifts off into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

These are the Shibari rope patterns Armie uses on Timmy:

- Upper body
- Legs
Give and Take

Chapter Summary

Okay, they finally do it.

God, Armie simply loves Tim like this. He's been so good last night, trying so very hard to keep his
orgasm at bay, fighting the urge to come until he'd been reduced to a begging, sobbing mess. It had
been breathtakingly beautiful.

Holding him through the night had been a privilege. Armie lay pressed tight against the ropes rigging
Tim's body, wanting them to leave marks not only on Tim's skin but on his own as well, morphing
them into one entity. Ying and Yan, sun and moon, one giving, one receiving, yet both united in the
mutual circle of want only the other could assuage.

In the early hours, Armie finally has mercy with Tim, gently loosening the thin ribbon around his
cock and balls. Tim groans as he slowly comes awake, still drifting and somewhat drained from their
punishing session a few hours before.

"I'm going to fuck you now," Armie breathes into his ear and Tim's cock - hard and leaking since
last evening – twitches in reply. It seems to hurt, though, 'cause Tim hisses sharply at Armie's light
touch but answers "Please" nonetheless.

Armie feels Tim's muscles strain as he tries to wiggle closer. But it's in vain, tied up as he is,
thoroughly immobilized. Armie's hands stroke and caress the ropes binding him, enjoying how his
touch makes Tim shiver all over.

He leaves Tim lying on his side as he sits up to get the lube, then bends his knees to push his legs up
until Tim's thighs touch his chest to get better access to finger him open. Tim makes the most
beautiful noises, needy pleas interspersed with wanton sighs, when Armie pushes first one and then
two fingers deep inside him.

He moves until they glide easily in and out, staring down at his fingers breaching Tim's tight hole,
vanishing inside his lean, bound body. His rim is already swollen and reddening despite Armie has
barely started with him. To tease Tim even more, he crooks his fingers every few thrusts, finding
Tim's sweet spot almost instantly.

Tim yelps, his whole body tensing from head to toe. Armie can feel him clench to press back against
the fingers rubbing that sensitive bundle of nerves inside him, trying to draw out the pleasure. Tim
can't move much in the position Armie has placed him in but he tries as best he can to buck and
gyrates his hips to get what he needs. He's gorgeous in his desperation.

"Tell me how much you want me." Armie whispers, stilling his fingers but keeping them just inside.

"God, Armie, just fuck me already." Tim moans.

"No, you have to do better than that, Tim."

"Armie, please, I'm so hard it hurts. Just give it to me."
"Why should I, hm? What can you offer me that others couldn't?"

"You'll be my first." Tim's voice is rough with arousal. "I'll be so tight. It'll feel so good for you."

"Don't you mind the pain?" Armie asks, tenderly brushing his nose up the side of Tim's neck where he smells of sweat and sex and sleep.

"No." Tim shakes his tousled curls. "I want it. So much. I want it with you. Just take me."

When Armie adds a third finger Tim shudders, breathing fast and hard through his nose.

"Try to relax. I know it's a lot. You can do this."

Tim nods, his eyes fluttering shut.

"Does it feel good?"

"Hmmm, yes. So good. Please..."

Armie takes his time, adding more lube to ease the way, watching a flush creep down Tim's nape and upper back until it reaches his protruding shoulder blades. By now, his bound limbs tremble slightly and his eyes literally roll back in his head when Armie starts to lick the side of his neck up to his earlobe. No biting today, though. They'll start filming on Monday and Tim will be half-naked most of the time. He can't sport hickey's.

"Armie, god, please... I'm ready." Armie eventually removes his fingers. Tim whines in protest but falls silent when huge hands grab the underside of his thighs, pushing them up even more, folding the boy almost in half. Armie feels the knots in the ropes around Tim's legs and rubs them against Tim's delicate white skin. He can't leave too prominent rope marks but this is nothing that some Arnica lotion won't be able to fix.

He just loves to feel the contrast between the slightly rough hemp and Tim's silky skin.

"You sure?" He asks.

Tim moans something incoherent in response that sounds like enthusiastic consent.

"Okay." Armie leans over towards the night stand and takes a condom from the drawer. His slippery fingers almost fail to tear open the blister pack so in the end he uses his teeth before quickly rolling the condom on.

Tim is already slick and wet but it's his first time so Armie goes gentle. He lubes himself up some more before lining up, pressing his fat cockhead against Tim's still tight asshole.

"Can you feel me?"

Tim just nods, shaking in his arms.

"You want this?"

"Yes." Tim sighs.

"Ask for it. Nicely."

"Armie, please take me, fuck me, wreck me, split me in half, ruin me...," Tim is babbling, not caring if he sounds silly or cheesy, his coiled body melting into Armie's chest.
But then he falls silent as Armie pushes in. He goes slow but firm, sliding all the way in despite Tim clenching and gasping after the first shock of the unfamiliar intrusion has sunk in. Armie only stops when he's buried to the hilt, stilling to take in the sensation of Tim's tight heat surrounding him.

It's all he's ever wanted, and better. Rentboys don't like to be tied up and it doesn't give anything to Armie if his partner isn't into it. He needs his true sighs of pleasure as he gives in to his helplessness, going pliant in his bonds. But he also likes them to fight their restraints a little until they adjust and accept them. With paid hookers it's always too much or not enough. Either they get scared or fake being over-enthusiastic, if they allow bondage at all.

But this, Tim... he's just perfect. Tight, obedient, equally turned on and a little bit afraid.

Armie presses a kiss to the top of Tim's spine, nuzzling into the soft hairs of his nape. If he's ever wanted for time to stop, it's in this moment. There's no before or after; he just wants to live in this moment forever.

Armie is so big that it feels as if Timmy's ripped apart. He doesn't stop, not even as Timmy whines and whimpers.

It hurts like hell.

Timmy can feel tears well up in his eyes again, but this time it's not from desperate arousal but because of the burning stretch Armie’s cock is causing. He's about to beg Armie to stop but then he stills.

"That's all of it." Armie whispers in his ear and Timmy is filled with a strange pride. He made it. He took it all.

Now Armie’s buried balls deep inside him and Timmy can feel him twitch and swell. Because of him. Because he's so tight. Because he wants Timmy so much. Because Armie's his first. And that’s a sacrifice only Timmy can offer him.

Timmy knows he’ll never forget this moment for as long as he lives. Armie is now imprinted on his soul. He’s become a part of Timmy’s history, his life.

The thought carries him, makes him accept the pain and transform it into something exhilarating.

He'd always wanted to know how it would feel. Now he knows. It's not entirely pleasant but the fact that he can't do anything about it but take it turns him on way more than it probably should.

He gave up control of his body and placed his enjoyment in Armie's capable hands. It's somewhat relaxing, knowing that he doesn't have to do anything but receive.

After a long moment Armie asks: "You okay?"

"Me okay." His voice sounds strange to his own ears.

"You feel so fucking good."

A grin spreads on Timmy's face. He experimentally clenches his sphincter and Armie wraps his arms tight around him in response and kisses his neck and shoulders, sighing.

When Timmy does it again Armie moans.
"God, I knew you were a tease."

"Please move. Fuck me." Timmy whispers, not sure if he'll be able to take what he's asking for but willing to try. No risk, no fun.

It burns. It feels so awkward, like being stuffed, and somehow wrong. His body starts to revolt, fighting the unfamiliar intrusion. Yet he has no means to stop Armie. He's helpless. So he bites his lips until he can't anymore because he fears there might be an embarrassing accident.

"Argh... please... No!" Timmy groans and Armie stills.

"Just breathe."

He does. His cock has gone limp, trapped between his bound legs and his equally bound torso. He's unable to touch himself with his hands still tied up. They prickle by now but he still can move his fingers so he doesn't worry.

Armie seems to sense what he needs, however, and pushes one hand between his legs and belly, starting to stroke him. It really helps Timmy to relax, and to his own surprise he doesn't only get hard again but in reaction to his cock swelling with Armie's touch his asshole seems to adjust to Armie's massive cock as well.

"Yeah, that's it, Tim. Don’t fight it. You know you want it. I’ll make sure you’ll like it. Trust me, babe."

Timmy rests the back of his head against Armie’s shoulder, baring his throat as he nods quietly, a signal for Armie to continue. Armie’s free hand comes up and wraps around his sweaty neck, pressing down ever so lightly.

God, yes, this feels fucking amazing.

“Do it.” Timmy bites out, and Armie’s fingers tighten, his palm pressing against Timmy’s Adam’s apple. Timmy’s head starts to swim. This is it. He feels claimed, held, overpowered – safe. He can give in now. The lack of oxygen makes his brain fuzzy and all his muscles go slack, loosening some unconscious mental block that held him back, preventing him from enjoying the act.

He makes a small needy sound – that’s all he’s capable of – and Armie starts to thrusts into him again, simultaneously fisting his cock. It feels so good that Timmy’s soon on the verge of passing out.

The squelching sound of wet flesh slapping against wet flesh fills the room, interspersed with Timmy’s throaty gasps and Armie’s low grunts as he bottoms out only to forcefully slam back inside Timmy’s willing body again.

Eventually, Armie’s grip loosens just a fraction and Timmy pants: "Oh god, let me come, please..." His cock in Armie’s fist is almost too sensitive, due to all of last night’s teasing, and even the copious amount of precome he feels he’s leaking doesn’t prevent his shaft from feeling raw and chafed by now.

He doesn’t know if Armie goes lenient because it's his first time or because he's also close but whatever, he really doesn’t care when Armie just growls "Fuck, yes" and that's all Timmy needs to shoot his load. His thigh and abdominal muscles clench and he has trouble sucking in air, chanting “Yes” and “Oh god!” and “ArmieArmieArmie”. All the while, Armie fucks him so hard that he fears he might be split in half, his huge hand never leaving Timmy’s throat and Timmy sees stars....
Timmy’s rhythmical spasms seem to do the trick for Armie as well. Just when Timmy is riding out the last shockwaves of his own orgasm does Armie still, tightening his fingers around Timmy’s throat in earnest, completely cutting off his air supply, and just before Timmy’s vision goes dark he feels Armie pulse into the condom.

He can’t have been out for more than a few seconds. Armie’s still inside him when he comes round again, panting against his shoulder. ‘So that’s that.’ Is the only thought he’s capable off in this moment. He wants them to stay like this forever, connected in the most intimate way two men can be joined together. This somehow has transcended the purely physical act. They complete each other in their needs and wants. Timmy's still too woozy to fully grasp what just happened but it's something enormous, that much he's sure. He won't never be the same.

But then Armie pulls out quickly, fumbling behind Timmy as he probably removes the condom and the spell is broken, bringing him back to the slightly unappealing reality of having just had anal sex. He doesn’t dare to imagine how filthy he must look: soiled sheets, come drying on his chest, thighs sticky with lube and hopefully nothing else; something wet is trickling from Timmy's hole and that feels truly weird as fuck.

He closes his eyes again as he tries to ignore his body's reaction to having just taken a massive cock up his arse. Because if he's honest with himself, Timmy is sorry that they had to use one. He really wants to experience Armie coming inside him without a layer between them. The idea of Armie playing with his come leaking from Timmy's hole makes his spent cock twitch again. God, what has he become?

Next thing he knows, Armie quickly unties him, first his upper body, then his legs, massaging his limbs before kissing and touching the rope marks all over his skin.

"You look so beautiful. God, fuck, Tim, you're so gorgeous. Unbelievable. So lovely. Thank you for this. You're amazing."

Tim bathes in his adoration, stretching, nestling his body against Armie's broad frame until he gets up and gets a wet flannel and some lotion to rub into his skin.

"I'm going to fuck you again later, okay?"

Timmy just nods. Of course. Anything Armie wants he’ll give to him.

He'll just close his eyes for a moment and rest, relishing feeling sated and completely satisfied.
The Day After

Chapter Summary

Armie and Timmy on the day after: Timmy doesn't know what's the proper attitude after getting fucked by your co-star; Armie tries to come to terms with what happened.
They both reach a decision in the end...

When he wakes up he has no idea what time it is. It even takes Timmy a minute to realize that he's in Armie's bed. Alone. He rolls over but the mattress is cold. Only their mixed scents linger and Timmy presses his face into the sheets, smelling the unmistakable aroma of sex.

After another minute of drifting he blinks and slowly sits up, looking at his arms and legs where shallow, fading welts are still visible. Timmy touches them, grazing his fingertips over the bumps and dents. With a small grin he stretches like a lazy cat, elongating his back muscles...

Ouch!

He can still feel Armie. Timmy closes his eyes and remembers Armie moving inside him.

Despite the soreness between his cheeks, he sighs, still smiling.

Until his body reminds him of more base needs. He hurries over into the bathroom to empty himself into the toilet, groaning a little at the pain.

Afterwards, he decides he really needs to take a shower. He's covered in a sticky mixture of sweat, cum, lube and probably some other bodily fluids, accumulating since last afternoon. He doesn't even dare to look in the mirror before stepping under the spray. In spite of his usual habit to shower quickly – brought on by growing up in an apartment with four people and only one bathroom – today, he lingers, taking his time, waiting for the hot water to expire before toweling off.

When he eventually leaves the bathroom, he smells something delicious and decides to explore before dressing. As he pads over into the lounge-cum-kitchen, he finds Armie just in his boxer briefs and a faded red t-shirt in front of the cooker, stirring something in a pan.

Timmy can't cook for shit. Since living on his own, when home in New York he survives on pizza he gets from a diner round the corner of the apartment he shares back in the Bronx with two friends from LaGuardia. The cheapest Margarita is available there for just $ 3,00 which ever so often helps Timmy through the dire times between jobs. If he manages prudently, it lasts him for up to three days.

He'd never thought Armie would cook, given his love/hate relationship with food. But there he is, cracking eggs into a pan. Next to it gurgles an Italian espresso maker.

Timmy's mouth waters. He's not sure it's because of the prospect of food or the sight of Armie's muscular buttocks covered only in a thin layer of skin-tight cotton. Could be both.

Timmy stands in the doorway, still naked but for Armie's bracelet and is suddenly overcome with a wave of shyness. Is this too much? Is it appropriate to sneak up on Armie, starkers. Was it just supposed to be a one-night-stand and Timmy has overstayed his welcome? Was he still supposed to
be here? Or should he have taken his discrete leave by now? Is that the reason Armie got up without waking him, to give Timmy the opportunity to see himself out without making a fuzz? How is the proper etiquette after getting fucked by your male co-star?

"Hey, morning." Timmy says, sounding a bit awkward, scratching his damp curls while trying on a tentative smile. Armie turns and smiles back at him.

"Morning? It's three in the afternoon."

"Shit, really?"

Armie's smile widens, his eyes raking over Timmy's body, obviously delighted at the lack of clothing. "You were almost catatonic. I thought you needed the rest." Something serious flickers over Armie's face. He turns the gas off before looking back at Timmy. "How are you?"

Timmy's just relieved that Armie seems not bugged by his presence. "I'm good." He answers before gesturing at the pan and coffee. "You made breakfast." He can't bring himself to add 'for me'.

"As I heard the shower I thought you might need some food. It's just eggs and coffee, nothing fancy."

"That's sweet." Timmy knows he beams entirely too much at the simple kindness but he is truly touched. He's not used to his dates providing breakfast. Nor has he ever offered, he has to admit somewhat ashamed, on the rare occasions that his partners stayed the night.

"I'll get dressed."

"Uhm, I thought we could have this in bed, you know." Again there's just a hint of something in Armie's eyes. "So, no need to bother."

Timmy swallows. Is this a come hither? God, he has to get the hang of this – quickly.

"Okay." Timmy tries for nonchalance, turns and walks back into the bedroom, fully aware that Armie is staring at his naked ass. His small happy smile becomes a somewhat confident grin.

He leaves it to Armie to bring the food over. He's not his slave after all.

Armie did doze off as well after taking care of Tim, but woke only about an hour later. He looked his fill at the sleeping body in his arms, his pale limbs encircled with still reddish marks, his hair a mess, his skin covered in their mixed release. He looked and smelled like pure sex.

Armie's not used to share his bed with his lovers. It's a bit overwhelming, having Tim still here, after what they did. Armie's both elated and terrified hat he stayed; that he has the privilege to hold someone so delicate and fragile in a totally unguarded moment. Armie never wants to let go of Tim. Yet he knows he has to put some distance between them; otherwise this might get dangerously serious.

Armie had known that what they did last night would cross a line. Yet he still hopes he can control what he has started with Tim. But he has to admit that this boy harbors true temptation for him. He's the kind of boy Armie can fall for. Hard.

And that is not an option.
He's careful not to disturb Tim when he gets up. He tells himself that he needs water, a coffee, a smoke. What he truly needs is some space.

Armie looks in on Tim from time to time as dawn become day but the boy is dead to the world. After what he's been through, Armie decides to let him sleep. He knows he's buying himself some time with that as well.

Tim's done amazing last night. Watching him finally shatter had been a sight to behold. Something in Armie had shattered as well and he's not sure he'll ever be the same man than he was before.

In the hours he spends drinking coffee, smoking and staring out the window he realizes that he might be a little bit in love. Fuck!

Last night, he's felt a connection that he had never before experienced with another human being. He'd instinctively known what Tim needed, how far he could take him, how to make him fly.

He'd been Tim's first.

God, the sheer enormousness of that fact scares Armie shitless. The responsibility hits him suddenly and sits heavy on his shoulders, wearing him down.

Yet he knows it won't stop him from taking Tim again and again and again.

He'd meant it when he'd told Tim that he deserves better. Armie knows he has nothing to offer but problems and complications. He's sure he'll ruin Tim. But he can't stop himself. This is what he's always dreamed about. He needs to savor it until the bitter end.

He's sure he'll suffer like a dog when it's over. But he's lived so long with a guilty conscience that it doesn't matter anymore. He also knows he should stop this for Tim's sake but he's not a selfless saint. And hadn't Tim started this, despite having seen Armie at his lowest? It was Tim who'd climbed on top of him during rehearsal. It was Tim who stuck his hand into his shorts and brought him off. What's Armie supposed to do? No-one can expect him to say no to such propositions. He's only human after all.

Yet he already feels guilty when thinking of what he'll eventually has to do to Tim. The boy trusts him, that has become evident, not only but especially last night.

Armie knows that in the end he'll betray that trust. He always does. There's no future for them.

Despite how much he wants this – Tim – he's simply not compatible with his lifestyle, his image. Armie Hammer has built a brand of himself. He can't jeopardize it for a pretty boy. Even if that pretty boy might be the only chance he gets to experience a taste of what love and life could be like if one is true to oneself. Not now, as he starts to believe that this film might be the turn in his career he's been hoping for so long. To show it to every critic who'd written him off as Barbie's Ken. If he'd been taken serious in the industry, it could put an end to the pressure of looking like classic Hollywood beau incarnate. Just imagining not being judged by his appearance but his talent makes Armie feel lighter, better, freer.

But maybe he can have both, Tim and a career – in this precise order? Maybe they can at least somehow come to terms for the time they are in Italy, away from their usual lives, their families, friends? Just existing as lovers in their Italian bubble, removed from reality...

Free from his usual constraints, Armie dares to dream on that sunny morning: kissing someone he really wants; holding Tim's hand in his as they walk the cobbled streets of Crema in the dark; lying in bed with him, naked, laughing; talking all night about acting and films and why they do it - not
because of money or fame but because they can't do anything but if they want to just be and feel right. It's hard to explain to anyone who doesn't do it for a life as well...

He'll be damned if he lets this opportunity slip away. Not again. Everyone is entitled to a little happiness, even Armie Hammer. He might very well be forced to live off these few weeks with Tim for the rest of his life when he's back in LA with his wife and family. He can't miss out if he wants to stay sane. He promises himself that he will allow himself this one last digression and swears that when back home he'll be the husband Liz deserves.

To his own surprise, Armie realizes with a pang that he had neither thought of his mum nor Liz over the last twenty-four hours. Is that a good sign or a bad?

When he hears the shower running in the early afternoon he's shaken from his reverie and starts to prepare something to eat for Tim, discovering that he's ravenous as well. He'd totally forgotten to eat while thinking about what he and Tim would have to sort out to minimize the outfall of what has happened between them.

Because it's evident that they need to talk. He truly hopes they can negotiate some form of mutual agreement between two adults. Food might pave the way.

But when he sees Tim in all his naked glory, standing in the doorway to the lounge, wearing nothing but his bracelet, it shatters all of Armie's sensible plans and good intentions.

He wants this boy so bad it hurts.

They sit in bed together, wolfing down scrambled eggs, washing mouthfuls down with hot strong coffee. Seeing Tim swallow, his Adam's apple bopping, makes Armie half-hard already.

"Thank you." Tim says after a few minutes of silent eating, shyly wiping his chin with the back of his right hand, a somewhat childlike gesture that reminds Armie how young Tim is.

"It's just eggs."

"Not just for the food." Tim blushes but keeps staring at Armie, unwavering.

That's his cue.

"How are you?" Armie asks again, making a little gesture towards Tim's body.

"I told you I'm good." The boy smirks. "A bit sore."

"That was to be expected." Armie can't suppress a grin.

"We are not a lil bit vain, are we, Mr Hammer?"

"With a name like that you have to live up to expectations."

Tim rolls his eyes but giggles despite the awful pun. But Armie's not finished and even if it would be easy to let it go and slip back into their casual banter, he can't.

"What I meant is, are you okay with what we did last night?"

Tim seems to have trouble swallowing his coffee and coughs.

"Yeah, sure...," he says eventually but it sounds strained to Armie. His stomach drops. Shit! Had it been too much? It had been Tim's first time, after all.
Tim plays with the bracelet around his wrist and doesn't look at him.

"Listen, Tim, about last night..." Armie has no idea how to put his worries into words and falls silent. What can he tell Tim to make it better, or at least less bad?

Tim's fingers still and his face somewhat contorts, morphing into a stony mask. Does he want out of here? Is Armie too possessive? Is this too much, too soon? Maybe this is all too serious for Tim, who might just be looking for fun and games? He's so young, barely an adult. Who could blame him? Maybe he was just after some excitement, trying out some kinky stuff – and found out it's not for him... and now he's sick of Armie, of this, of them?

"It's okay. At least you made me breakfast before you'll remind me politely that you are married and..."

Armie feels like someone has punched him. "What?"

"I don't usually do this, one-night-stands, sleeping with colleagues. I have no idea what's appropriate in a situation like this but I get it, let me just finish my coffee and then I'm-"

"Shut up."

Tim's mouth snaps shut.

"What I was about to say was that I don't want to hurt you." Behind Tim's hardened eyes Armie senses a familiar forlornness that breaks all his defenses down. "I'm sure I'll regret this in the long run, Tim, but probably not as much as you-"

"That's none of your business." Tim interrupts him, his voice sharp. "I'm twenty, you know... fuck's sake, Armie, I know you are married. I met your wife, remember? I don't expect you to run away with me or some romantic shit."

Armie takes a deep breath He doesn't like Tim's cynical tone. "It's not just that."

"What then?" Tim sounds exasperated.

"We did some pretty heavy stuff last night. I know these things can be disturbing. Maybe you feel the need to talk about it... but I'm not out and I don't intend to... no one is about to know, you understand? Not Luca or anyone on set, not your family, not your friends."

Tim blinks a few times. "Yeah, okay, I figured."

"Do you really understand what that means? You can't talk about this to anyone. Not now, not ever, not even when..."

"When it's over?" Armie has to give Tim that he admires the way he steadily looks back at him as he says this. "I'm not an idiot, Armie. As I said, I don't expect anything."

"Why?" Armie can't help asking, more than a little out of his depth. Tim frowns and shrugs. "Why will you put up with all my shit? Being my dirty little secret, the bit on the side?"

Tim shrugs again. "It's not that there's a line or something...," he mumbles.

"What? Remember that guy who... okay, better not but when we were at that club there were loads of boys and girls ogling you. Have you seen the way Esther looks at you?"

Tim snorts. "Nah, man... don't give me shit."
Armie doesn't falter. "What I've seen so far from you, you are the most talented actor I've ever worked with – yes, even compared to Leo and Johnny! I've never worked with anyone as open, free, uninhibited like you. You'll be a huge star Tim, but more important, you'll be a great actor. I promise you, in about a year they will be all over you, you'll have to fight them off with both hands–"

Tim swats him with a pillow.

"I mean it."

"Fuck off."

"No, but seriously? Tell me, what do you expect of me, from this?"

Tim's face turns from goofy to earnest in the split of a second as he worries his lower lip between thumb and forefinger. Armie prepares himself for a long disappointing silence and another indifferent shrug but then Tim visibly pulls himself together and says: "I always wanted to know... and last night was... well, fucking spectacular, yet I'm not really sure this is something for me but for the time being... I mean, we could explore this, a little? Maybe? You obviously know what you do. Which is... good, in this case, important. And I... like you. But... it's not... I'm not... looking, you know, for... you know..."

Armie doesn't and it must show.

"I'm really not looking for... anyone. Or anything... serious. So, you... being unavailable is actually kinda perfect." Tim looks anywhere but at Armie after that confession.

"So, what you mean is that we could be... friends with benefits?" Armie carefully feels for an answer.

"Well, yeah, I guess?" Tim bites the knuckle of his thumb, trying to hide the small smile on his face.

"Sounds good to me." Armie smiles back. Maybe there's a god, after all.

Looking back, Armie will always remember Tim like this when he thinks about them in years to come: sitting in bed, naked but for a sheet draped around him, a dirty plate in his lap, looking up at him coyly through his lashes, his air-dried hair curling even more than usual, pink nipples peaked, red lips shiny wet, coming over both innocent and like a beguiling faun.

As much as this proposition had sounded sensible at the time, had he known what would come off it, Armie likes to think he'd have had the guts to say no. For both their sake.

But that would mean that he'd be a different man, a good man. Which he isn't. There's never been any hope for him. Not after he'd fucked Tim.

In his bleakest moments, he has to admit that he's felt doomed ever since.
Timmy had hoped that things wouldn't turn serious so quickly but he guesses that's what's to be expected when you hooked up with an older, married man.

Anyway, he made his way through The Conversation™ and now feels pretty smug about how he's reacted. Very mature, in a 'let's have some fun together for as long as it lasts, just chilling, brother' kinda way.

He’s glad that Armie had easily agreed to it. They're bros, no strings attached. True, Timmy has a crush but it’s not that they’re in love or some stupid shit. Timmy silently promises to himself that he won’t become a nuisance; he's not the one-night-stand that never went away. Not him.

Now, he has six long weeks left to see if he likes it, this, with a man. Sex. Fucking. And the kinky shit.

If not, he doesn't have to revisit the experience. Armie’s not the clingy type, that’s for sure. God, the man has a Hollywood career, a wife and child! He can't afford to devote extra time to an affair with a young actor he met on an obscure Italian movie.

Yep, this will work. They're both adults. They know what they are getting themselves into. If he gets over-romantic, Timmy just has to look at Armie’s ring finger where he has his and his wife’s initials tattooed, the letters A and E intertwining, overlapping.

Timmy has sucked that finger and watched it wrapped around his cock but that doesn’t change the fact that Armie is taken. But Timmy can deal with that. He’s not the maudlin type, he prides himself on his casualness instead.

Why would he fall in love with Armie Hammer?

They really should start preparing their roles, learn their lines for the first upcoming scenes on Monday for example, but somehow Timmy's much more enthusiastic to explore their newly reached agreement and let Armie take advantage of him. And so he spends his afternoon naked with his hands tied behind his back, kneeling in the middle of Armie’s bedroom, servicing him with his mouth as he eagerly sucks him off.

Armie makes him gag on his cock until spit is dripping from Timmy’s chin, his big hands buried in Timmy’s curls to hold him in place. He alternates between brutally fucking Timmy’s mouth and gently brushing the wet head of his cock over Timmy’s swollen lips, coating them in an obscene sheen of glistening precome.

“You love this, don’t you, choking on my fat cock?” Armie asks as he’s buried balls deep into Timmy’s mouth and Timmy can only hum in agreement as his eyes water while he fights his gag
reflex. When Armie pulls eventually out, Timmy almost topples over, coughing up thick mucus. It lands partly on the floor and partly on his own throbbing erection and that’s nearly enough to make him come.

When Armie gives Timmy a break to get his breath back, Armie swipes his thumb through the mixture of precome and drool gathering on Timmy’s chin before smearing it all over Timmy’s cheekbones, eyelids, the ridge of his nose and Timmy arches into the touch, desperate for tenderness.

He’s so hard his untouched cock is positively leaking.

“God, look at you, what a mess you’ve made. You’re dripping all over the floor.” Armie chuckles darkly. “I should make you lick that clean.”

“Yes, Armie. Sorry, Armie.” Timmy lowers his gaze and stares as another bead of clear fluid trickles from his slit.

“Did I say you could talk? I think I have to stuff your gob again.”

Armie rams his cock back into Timmy’s mouth, hitting his soft palate again and again until Timmy’s sure he’ll throw up around Armie’s dick any minute now. All he can do is try to relax his throat and concentrate on breathing through his nose. All the while, Armie holds Timmy upright by the curls on the top of his head and it hurts but Timmy can’t protest as he takes Armie as deep as he can.

“Look at me.” Armie yanks hard and Timmy raises his head a little, staring right into Armie’s deep blue eyes. He must look destroyed and filthy with his drooling mouth stretched around the root of Armie’s cock, his balls slapping against Timmy’s wet chin, but Armie seems to like what he sees because Timmy feels him swell and pulse on his tongue.

“That’s it, Tim. Take it.”

And Timmy does, trying to swallow Armie even deeper, hollowing his cheeks as he sucks, needing to taste Armie again.

But he’s not rewarded with the juice he so desperately craves. Instead, Armie pulls out at the last minute and comes all over his chest, painting his heaving ribs and peaked nipples with thick white stripes.

Armie looks at him afterwards with such warmth and admiration that Timmy would gladly endure it all over again. “You’re a wonder.” Armie tells him as he falls to his knees himself, pressing Timmy’s sweaty back against his naked, furry chest, trapping Timmy’s bound arms between them, caressing his knobby shoulders, softly kissing Timmy’s nape.

Timmy feels both exhausted and hyper at the same time and is a bit disappointed when Armie unties him, forcing him to surface from the realm of submission he’d been steadily sinking into.

Yet Armie keeps him on edge as Timmy is once again neither allowed to come or at least to wash before heading out for dinner. He’s sure anyone can see the massive boner he’s still sporting despite his effort to will it away as well as smell the scent of sex reeking from his body. The humiliation makes him blush and stay quiet. This time, Armie ordering for him gives him a sense of belonging. It’s a promise of what will follow back at Armie’s apartment: Armie taking care of Timmy’s needs in his strict yet loving way, putting him gently but firmly in his place.

"You said you'd fuck me again," Timmy dares to remind Armie after he's finished his pasta in silence.
“And I will.” Armie tells him before ordering a Tiramisu that he slowly feeds to Timmy, making him lick the spoon clean after every bite. Timmy twirls his tongue and sucks the cream from Armie’s fingers, not caring that the other guests stare at them.

When they eventually return to Armie’s apartment, Timmy’s so hard he can’t see straight.

Instead of tying him up again, however, Armie makes Timmy ride him, holding onto his slim hips as he coaxes one orgasm and then another from his lithe body until he’s a sore, sweaty mess. Armie’s cock spears him and he thinks he feels him in his throat as Armie hits his prostate again and again, not letting go even as Timmy whines and begs from over-stimulation.

“Shut up or I’ll gag you again. You want that?” Timmy remembers drooling and being unable to breathe and shudders, not sure if it’s with fear or desire, but he tries to stay quiet afterwards.

He’s only allowed to slump down onto Armie’s chest to recover after Armie came deep inside him, literally lifting him up before slamming him down again on his cock like a rag doll made for fucking for the last few minutes.

Now he’s lying in his own cooling release that he shot all over Armie’s stomach and ribs and doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to move again. His thighs burn from the exercise, as does his arsehole. He’s not used to either this frequency of intercourse nor to taking such a massive cock on the regular.

“Tell me how you feel?” Armie whispers into his curls, holding Timmy in his long, muscular arms.

“Dirty. Taken. Tired. Happy.” Timmy mumbles into the wiry hair on Armie’s broad chest.

“And down there?” Armie’s still inside him and thrusts, making Timmy hiss in pain.

“Sore. You’re so fucking huge.”

Armie chuckles. “I thought you liked that.”

“I do.” Timmy’s eyes start to fall shut. “But it’s a lot to accommodate.”

“Then we’ll have to work on your tolerance level. I think I have the right toys for you to train your pretty little hole.”

Timmy shivers a little at this prospect, imagining shoving huge plastic penises up his arse. “I’m not sure I like that. I’ll have to buy some Resinol or whatever is the Italian equivalent to keep up.”

Armie kisses the top of his head. “I can take a look if you want. To see if everything’s alright.”

“You’re a pervert.” Timmy moves a little and sighs as Armie slides from his body with an embarrassingly wet sound.

“I though you liked that as well.”

Timmy grins, leans up on his elbows and kisses Armie softly on the mouth before tracing his lower lip with the tip of his tongue. “What kind of toys were you talking about?” He whispers, feeling Armie smile.

“Later.”

Timmy bites down on Armie’s plush lower lip and sucks once before he starts to clamber off his lap. He wants to clean up, to shower... but Armie grabs his hips and doesn't let him go.
"What's this?" Armie asks, sounding irritated. “Where do you think you're going?"

"I need a wash."

"Me too." Armie nods at his filthy torso before staring back up again at Timmy.

Timmy just frowns.

"I won't tell you twice." Armie very lightly swats Timmy's ass before grabbing the curls at the back of his head, pushing him face down into the gooey mess coating his skin.

Timmy's only allowed to eventually leave for the bathroom after he's licked all of his cum from Armie's chest and belly.

They don't sleep in on Sunday. Instead, Armie decides for them to leave their sex-soaked bed and go for a run. Tim complains that he's tired and still sore but Armie convinces him that he wants to stay in shape with all those nude scenes coming up.

It's early and the streets of Crema are almost deserted, except for a few old women dressed in black heading for mass. Soon, they leave the city behind and run cross country for almost an hour. When they arrive back at Armie's apartment, they are both sweaty and out of breath.

Armie doesn't give Tim time to shower or change. They get bottles of water from the fridge and just when they have quenched their thirst he grabs Tim by his soaked t-shirt, pulls him close and kisses him, first his mouth and then his throat, licking his salty skin until Tim giggles helplessly.

“God, I want you all the time, Tim. This is just insane.” Armie sighs against Tim's collarbone.

“You are insatiable.” Tim scrunches his nose and wraps his arms loosely around Armie’s waist as he continues to nip and suck on every inch of exposed skin. Tim tries to pull away when Armie pushes his left arm over his head to press his nose into Tim's armpit but he tightens his grip to Tim's t-shirt until he stops squirming and lets Armie roam his body freely.

“Let me smell you.” Armie's free hand drops to Tim's ass, cupping him, before moving to his groin. He's still soft but stiffening under Armie's touch.

“You think you can manage another go?” Armie asks, pressing his already hard cock against the soft flash of Tim’s belly before gently sucking Tim's earlobe into his mouth, his tongue tenderly flicking the small lump before biting down.

Tim hesitates. Armie can read the conflicting emotions crossing his face: lust, uncertainty, doubt, uneasiness, embarrassment...

“Yeah... sure.” He says eventually, sounding not too excited by the prospect.

Armie nevertheless takes his hand, entwines their fingers and pulls him over into the bedroom.

He doesn't fuck Tim this time, though. He just pushes his track suit bottoms – they fit way too loosely anyway as they belong to Armie, Tim actually had to tie the waistband and roll up the trouser legs – down to Tim's knees and smears lube all over the insides of his thighs and his perineum before pushing into the tight space.

“Keep your legs together. Cross your ankles.”
Armie throws one arm around Tim's waist and starts to stroke him in rhythm with his thrusts. Soon, Tim moans, bucking his hips but not chasing his own satisfaction as he presses his thighs firmly together. He seems content with just teetering on the edge, making sure to pleasure Armie. He's a fast study.

God, this feels good. Armie watches Tim’s little white arse bounce against his abdomen and makes a mental note to pay these two small smooth mounts special attention in the future: he’ll bite them, spank them and finally kiss them. Tim would feel him for days every time he'll sat down.

Imagining Tim bend over the kitchen counter or coffee table, his pale buttocks hot and red from Armie's ministrations, combined with the slick tightness between his lean, almost hairless legs is enough to let Armie loose his rhythm as he starts to fuck into the narrow wet space in earnest. He buries his nose in Tim's still sweat-damp curls when he comes, grunting “Now, Tim!”

Obediently, Tim sighs softly as he shoots his load all over Armie's fingers and the sheets. They’ll really have to change those, soon.

But then they just doze until midday when they finally roll out of bed to take a much needed shower. Inside the too small cubicle, they kiss and kiss under the hot spray, washing each other everywhere, bumping elbows and knees into the tiles and not caring as soap-slick fingers probe hidden places. Yet they are both too strung out to attempt to get off again in earnest.

Afterwards, Armie makes eggs again. They need protein.

In the afternoon, they eventually feed each other their lines for tomorrow's shoot, Oliver's arrival, their first interactions. It's both a little strange but also exhilarating that they will finally, finally after all this time start to shoot their movie – their epic love story.

Armie wonders how it will feel to meet Elio for the first time. Tomorrow, it counts. There's no turning back now. They have to play falling in love. Can they do this convincingly as Elio and Oliver? And what will it mean for Tim and Armie? Can they behave like strangers after shagging the whole weekend? After dancing around each other for weeks? Their courtship has been nothing short of Elio's and Oliver's orbiting around each other. How can they tone it down again when they had each other in almost every way possible during the last 48 hours?

They have promised each other to give everything, to pour heart and soul into this movie. It's important for both of them. For Tim, it can be the launch pad to stardom. For Armie, it could revive his own suffering career. He might finally achieve some recognition with this role and prove to his critics that there's more to him than eye candy.

The last few weeks with Tim have somehow convinced Armie that he might not be the fraud he always thought he was. That making Call Me By Your Name with Tim and Luca and Michael could be the rites of passage he needs to master to become the artist he always wanted to be.

They both can't risk this project to fail. Therefore, Armie needs a plan.

Timmy lies cuddled against Armie on Sunday evening, content, almost sedated, nestled into the crook of Armies neck, breathing him in. He feels fucked out and happy.

“Listen, I've been thinking...” Armie begins suddenly and Timmy thinks this doesn't sound too promising.

“What?” He asks. “About those toys you mentioned?”
“About filming starting tomorrow...”

“Yes?”

“You know, Elio and Oliver will meet for the first time tomorrow and slowly start getting to know each other. But we fucked the whole weekend.”

“Don’t tell me you're sorry.” Timmy huffs out, kissing the junction between Armie’s neck and shoulder.

“Of course I'm not sorry.” Armie playfully swats Timmy over the head. “But I think we should take steps as to not come over too intimate during the first week. Elio and Oliver are strangers, after all.”

Timmy sits up and looks at Armie. “What do you have in mind?” He asks suspiciously.

“Well, I think we shouldn't do anything during that first week.”

“And by anything you mean... anything?” Timmy's not sure he got Armie here.

“No fucking, no making out, no snogging, no sleeping in the same bed, no touching...I think you shouldn't even be allowed to touch yourself.”

“What?” Timmy squeals.

“Well, Elio is all horny, pent up sexual frustration. I think you should experience that to bring it to life.”

“I'm all for going a bit method, Armie, but that sounds like torture.” Timmy can't believe he's heard right. What the actual fuck?! Or precisely not.

“You think so?” Armie asks, and now there's playful mirth in his eyes.

Timmy nods.

“Well, too bad. ‘Cause I've decided that's what’s going to happen.” Armie leans back into the cushions and looks very pleased with himself.

Timmy swallows. “You serious?”

“Yep.”

“I won't be allowed to get off the whole week?”

“Yep.”

“How about you?”

“I'm afraid this applies only to you, babe. Oliver... well, we don't know enough about him, do we? It's all Elio's perspective, who's sure he's shagging the whole village.”

“You can't do that, you bastard!”

“Oh, but I can.” Armie smirks at him.

“But... but how will you enforce this rule? How can you make sure I comply?”

“Well, if you give me any reason to doubt you, I'll just make it another week.”
Timmy stares at him for ten seconds straight. “You're a sadist.”

“No, I'm really not.” Armie takes his chin between thumb and forefinger. “Don't you think for one minute that I won't be affected by this as well. Don't you think I won't miss you, your body, your touch, your taste... But as you said, let's try to make this movie something special. And let’s try to make what we have something special as well.”

Timmy stares into his blue eyes and can't help himself, he nods. “Okay. Whatever you say.” He breathes.

“That's my boy.” Armie kisses him, languid and deep and Timmy melts and knows that he'll do anything, anything Armie wants.

He'll be a good boy. For Armie.

Chapter End Notes

I can't believe we lived to see the day they start shooting this fucking movie! Yay!
Thank you all for staying with this story, for commenting, subscribing and kudoing!
Your ongoing support gives me life <3!
Starting Over

Chapter Summary

The first week of filming is not only an artistic challenge for them both...

Chapter Notes

This got longer than expected and therefore took a little time, sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When filming eventually starts on Monday, everything is cool. They all fall in sync, not only Armie and Timmy but Amira and Michael and Esther and Vanda and Antonio and all the crew. They are a family, thick as thieves, setting out to do honor to Andre's novel and James's script.

The first scene they shoot is Oliver’s arrival and it feels so natural to populate that beautiful villa with these characters that Timmy has somehow the feeling they’ve all been living here for quite some time. Not just Elio and his parents but he himself, Michael and Amira, visited by Esther, cared for by Vanda.

And now Armie has arrived as well.

He carries their first scenes with an ease and determination that shouldn’t surprise Timmy - but it does. They have spent time together. They rehearsed. They fucked. But they didn’t really work together up until now. It’s a revelation to finally see what acting truly means to Armie.

Knowing Armie as intimate as he does by now; witnessing him becoming Oliver, not with grand gestures but with small cues and subtle changes of posture and speech, is a masterclass in acting that ups Timmy’s game as well.

They find a rhythm, a routine, keeping their distance while glances linger. During breaks, they chat, they smile but they don’t touch. Beneath their cordiality develops frustrated annoyance – at least on Timmy’s part. He can't fathom what's going on inside Armie; because by now he knows how perfect a facade the man is able to present to the world. With acting and a character performance thrown into the mix of self-deceit and public persona, Timmy feels Armie slipping away.

It scares him and sets him reeling. But it also challenges him to not allow this to happen.

He throws himself into his own performance, melting with Elio. By Tuesday afternoon he's internalized that diffuse longing for something Oliver might give him. Armie’s hand on his shoulder during filming in Crema just before he says ‘Later’ and riding off feels like an electric shock to Timmy. True, he might have provoked that - as falling into Oliver wasn’t scripted in this shot - but it still surprises him what Armie’s touch can do to him even after just a couple of days not experiencing it. The dark look Timmy shoot shim as he goes off on his bike is heartfelt in that moment.

Abstaining from touching himself has been surprisingly easy so far but avoiding being too close to
Armie proves to be the greater challenge – especially when they shoot scenes just involving the two of them with no other actors to distract him.

Armie and Timmy don't meet alone over the whole week. They might go to Luca in the evening but don't leave together. When they go out for dinner, they make sure Amira or Esther or Michael are with them.

At first, Timmy is surprised by himself that he keeps to his vow of chastity. During the days it's actually not that hard. Filming is exhausting despite the short Italian hours. He has to concentrate on his lines, the different languages, Luca's directions, how he moves, the blocking, the lighting, the location. They are always surrounded by a throng of people: make-up artists, costume assistants, floor runners, boom operators... There's simply no free time, not a moment of peace and quiet to dwell too much on Armie and how much he misses him until he's finally alone in his apartment late at night - and then Timmy just falls into bed, too tired to even try to masturbate.

True, when they sit together at Luca's dining table and Armie looks all happy, tipsy and sweaty, his hair tousled and his shirt open like Oliver's (it might actually be Oliver's), it is tempting to reach over, or to brush his leg against his under the table, or ask him for a cigarette and lure him outside... but Timmy forces himself to resist.

Though when he feels Armie staring at him from the corner of his eye, heated and possessive, it makes him smile and horny. It's good to know that Armie is affected by their little game as well. Absence makes the hear grow fonder, they say. Well, it's not necessary Timmy's heart that grows in these moments but he thinks it counts as well – in their circumstances.

The first real challenge is filming the volleyball scene where an almost naked Oliver approaches an equally naked Elio for the first time. Armie's touch burns on Timmy's skin. They rehearse it a few times but Luca isn't happy.

"One take you shy away too much as if he really repels you. The other it is as if you want nothing more than Oliver to get his hands on you. No, no, no Timothée. Find something in between. Remember your first rehearsal? How Armie flinched but then came back? Try that."

Armie and Timmy exchange a glance then, Armie's obscured by his shades but Timmy sees his peaked nipples and knows.

He remembers that day. Especially what happened after Luca had left them. Good.

The next take is perfect. Yet Armie's touch does something to Timmy. He's glad that he ends the scene with running away because that's what he actually needs, a few moments to himself. Those shorts are just too revealing.

That evening, Armie excuses himself very early from Luca’s dining table. He’s been looking even more intense at Timmy during the course of dinner and Timmy wants and hates him in this moment with a passion that surprises him. He’s sure the motherfucker goes straight back to his apartment to have a slow, long wank… Ha! He decides then and there to really provoke him when he gets the chance. Give him a good show and see how he takes that.

But right now it feels so unfair that thick black anger settles in Timmy's stomach. Suddenly, his appetite is gone. He skips Ferdinando’s delicious Tiramisu – just the memories of the last time he had this dessert making him impatient, twisting his stomach in knots – and decides to stick to the red wine instead.

By ten he’s positively drunk and Luca tells him to go to bed. He needs him well rested, not hung
over the next day.

Back in his apartment Timmy is really tempted to risk betraying his promise. How’s Armie supposed to know? By the quantity of semen Timmy will be able to shoot when they meet on Friday night? Will Armie measure it? Knowing the kinky fucker he might actually do just that… imagining what Armie might also do with a jug full of Timmy’s come doesn’t help him keep his vow.

He’s suddenly glad he’s sloshed. He doesn’t even make it into bed but ends up on his couch. He has to put a food down onto the cool floor while lying there to stop the room from spinning. The light nausea he feels is another welcome downer.

And yet, he’s about to push his hand into his pants when his phone pings.

From ArmieHammer @TChalamet: ‘You’ve no idea how much I miss you. Can’t wait till Friday.’

Timmy grins and decides to feed Armie his own medicine. He unbuttons his jeans and pushes the open fly low enough for his white boxer-briefs to show, then takes off his t-shirt to expose his chest and flat belly. He twists his nipples until they are hard before taking a picture of himself, biting his lip, eyes cast down.

With a fiendish grin he sends it to Armie and waits.

He must have fallen asleep because he jerks awake when his phone chimes again. It’s a little after midnight and he can already feel a headache coming on. His mouth is dry and tastes bitter. His neck and back hurts like shit as well.

From ArmieHammer @TChalamet: ‘Tease. I hope you behaved.’

While he still holds his phone, there’s another text coming: ‘For your sake.’

The dark promise in these few words on his screen make Timmy go hard in an instant. Ha, that backfired spectacularly. He should have known.

Eventually, he has to take a cold shower in the middle of the night to suppress the urge to touch himself. It also helps with his hang-over but he has a hard time to go back to sleep afterwards.

Luca shakes his head in disapproval when he turns up on set next day. To Timmy’s mean delight Armie doesn’t look much better.

Timmy’s schadenfreude is enhanced because they are going to shoot the scene in Professor Perlman’s study today when Oliver explains the etymology of apricot. Timmy will just have to sit around, sip juice and watch while Armie has to reel off lines and lines of rather tricky text interspersed with difficult foreign words.

Timmy lounges in his chair and makes the most of swallowing the thick apricot juice, spreading his legs just a little while trying to look all coy and innocent.

Armie starts to sweat a little despite the still fresh morning.

Yet when it counts, Armie is there, present and the scene is done in no time. They just do two takes for the reverse shots and are finished for an early lunch.

Despite their rather heated text messages from last night, there’s suddenly a cold distance radiating from Armie. Timmy senses it and tries to put it down to his professionalism but doesn’t quite succeed.
Armie leaves right after he’s finished eating as he’s not called for this afternoon. First, they set up inside the house to film the short scene where Elio shaves. It’s followed by the dinner scene where Elio is disappointed that Oliver doesn’t show up. It’s not a big challenge to portray that feeling convincingly.

They all meet at Luca’s afterwards but Armie’s a no-show. Timmy’s about to text him but his pride gains the upper hand. He’s not Elio, lovesick and longing, unable to think about anyone but Oliver. So he throws himself into a conversation with Amira, who introduces him to the actors and actresses who played their dinner guests. Film and reality melt together even more when Luca asks Timmy to play piano and they all go upstairs to his teacher’s flat, taking a few bottles with them.

It’s a great evening and everyone is enjoying themselves... and yet, there's something missing.

Back at his apartment late at night, Timmy decides to call Will. He needs to hear a familiar voice.

“Hey, man, where are you?”

“London. Hey, T, great to hear from you. How’s it going?”

“First week’s almost finished. London. Cool.”

“Don't do that. Don't sidestep. How's your movie going?”

“Good. Really good. It's... yeah, it's really good.”

“Tim?”

“What?”

“Really good?”

“Yeah...”

“Come on. Give me something to work with here.”

“I can't.” Timmy sighs.

Will is silent on the other end.

“Sorry, I shouldn't keep you. It's late in your place as well...” Timmy stutters.

“Are you okay?”

Timmy bites his lips. Is he? What would Will say if he told him that Armie choked him, gagged him, fucked him, came all over his face more than once – and that Timmy didn't just let him but got off on it? That he had been tied up during his first time with a man. Is that an okay thing to do, to like? He doesn't know.

But he made a commitment to Armie not to talk about it. So he doesn't.

“Yes, I am okay. It's all... pretty overwhelming. I'm new to all of this. But it feels... right.”

“We are still talking about your movie, are we?” There's a smile in Wills voice.

“Of course.” Timmy grins as well. Will just knows him too well.
“Okay. Good. Just checking. You know you can talk to me, right?”

“Thanks, brother. Good night.”

“Sleep tight, Tim.”

And he does.

By the end of the week, Timmy is nervously anticipating the first mildly intimate scenes with Armie/Oliver. On Friday, they film Oliver walking in on Elio's masturbating. He's both glad and terrified that the script calls for him to touch himself. After a week of forced abstinence it feels so good to be allowed to. On the other hand, Armie did forbid him to do precisely that. What is he supposed to do?

He seeks Armie's eyes before the scene, tries to silently communicate his questions, his doubts, his anguish. But Armie's going over his lines with Luca and isn't available.

So Timmy goes for it.

He pushes his hand down his boxer-shorts and feels himself immediately stiffening.

Shit!

But also, whoa!

It feels so fucking good to rub his dick. Not even that fucking fly can distract him from the arousal that floods his sex-deprived body. Luca had cleared the set so it's just Sayombhu and a sound engineer present to witness what's happening.

Until Armie bursts in and Timmy quickly pulls back his hand. But it's too late. He's hard and it shows, his erection slapping back against his stomach, surely visible in his thin cotton boxers.

He waits for Luca to call cut but nothing happens. Sayombhu kneels next to the bed with the camera on his shoulder, giving him a prime view of Timmy's unprofessional mishap, but he just keeps pointing the camera in Timmy's direction. So he continues with the scene.

Of course, Armie sees. There's a mischievous glint in his eye. Yet he still extends his hand to grab Elio's. Timmy knows that precome is sticking to his fingers and that Armie must feel it. Their eyes lock and Armie's gaze wanders down between his legs. He doesn't react but Timmy's still mortified.

Fuck!

When he throws himself back onto the mattress after Armie left, the frustration and shame are real.

What carries him through it is the knowledge that his week of abstinence will come to an end tonight. He can't wait. The idea makes it difficult for him to eventually will his erection away so he can get dressed and leave the set.

Armie almost flees Luca's dinner table the day they filmed the volleyball scene. The previous days have been trying enough but repeatedly touching an almost naked, glistening Tim has been too much. Only by sheer willpower and thinking about his great-grandma's leg ulcer has Armie been able to prevent his short shorts from tenting in that scene. Tim's skin was warm and soft and he smelled of sun, lotion and fresh sweat...
God, this is torture!

Why did he come up with this fucking stupid idea in the first place? A week of chastity is a week in hell... But if he wants to maintain Tim's respect he can't back down now.

He wonders how Tim manages? In the volleyball scene, he seemed tense and at least as affected as Armie, so he's pretty sure Tim is keeping his promise. Armie can't suppress a smile thinking about Friday. Tim will probably be blue-balled by then. Will he come in his pants again just from kissing and a little fondling?

At least Armie's not vowed to abstain himself. He's wanked furiously every night since Sunday but today that's simply not enough and he knows it.

His solution lies in Milan.

This time, he bikes to the station and takes the train. It just takes about 45 minutes to Milano Centrale. There he gets a cab to Piazza Trento.

He lights a cigarette before cruising under the trees, peering into the darkness in search of the boy he met last time. He's aware that curious eyes follow him but he puts on his poker-face and tries to ignore them. Yet it makes him suddenly feel self-conscious.

God, this is so pathetic! He fights the urge to run. Tim is right there, in Crema, very possibly waiting for him. His reaction to Armie's touch today proved that he's at least as desperate as Armie himself. So why has he come here to hire a substitute if he can have the real thing? Out of habit? To make a point?

Does he maybe prefer paying for sex, buying fake intimacy, in favor of risking having to succumb to true affection? Or even more than affection?

Is this trip a form of penance, him cauterizing his longing for Tim by cheapening what they have, betraying his trust? A typical Armie reaction, warding off something true and pure as it comes within reach by rushing headlong into disaster?

Wow, he's truly over-dramatic tonight. Keeping his distance to Tim doesn't seem to cool his emotions. In fact, the enforced celibacy has the opposite effect.

He needs to get a grip before this gets out of hand. A nice rough fuck should do it. Tim mustn't know, though, that he's cheating on him.

Wait, cheating?

What is he even thinking about? He and Tim are just bros having a bit of fun. They made no promises to each other. He's not cheating on Tim right now, he's just... exchanging one vice for another.

If he's cheating on someone it's his wife. But he really doesn't want to think about her right now.

If what Armie does hurts Tim, well, it's his own fault, isn't it? He's been teasing Armie all week, prancing about on set almost naked. The looks he's shot Armie! Full of heated desire, yet he fully well knows that he won't get anything. God, that boy is truly the devil. Legs for miles, skin like alabaster, naughty freckles spreading on his beautiful face as he's lounging in the sun in those sinfully small bathing shorts and nothing else...

For example, Tim sucking on that apricot and licking Nutella from his fingers when they filmed
Oliver's first breakfast scene had Armie seek the privacy of the dusty attic and chain-smoke three cigarettes in a row. The script supervisor had to come fetch him, irritation in her eyes.

Fuck! Those memories make him search for the boy he had last time he came here in earnest. He needs him to take the edge off.

Hell, he misses Tim so much right now it's ridiculous. He'll just see him tomorrow. But he feels itchy and a little reckless so he decides to tell him, throw him a bone and see if he bites. As his eyes search his shady surroundings for Tim's lookalike Armie writes a short text. It doesn't make this moment less sordid – on the contrary, but Armie's never shied away from cutting off his nose to spite his face. His track record in this field is legendary.

If he contacts Tim now, it's not as if he's doing what he's doing behind his back. A short message from Tim might also make fucking his doppelganger all the more real.
So he sends Tim a text, telling him how much he misses him. It's the truth, after all.

When he receives back a picture of a half-naked Tim his breath hitches.

Oh, yes, babe. It's somehow as if Tim gives him his blessing. Yet a small voice in Armie's head tells him 'Look, that's what you're missing out on, you idiot'.

He's still staring at his phone when someone steps out of the shadows.

"Ciao, Americano." It's the boy he met last time. He's still wearing the same hoodie and track pants and up close he doesn't resemble Tim a bit. Okay, he's thin and dark-haired, but his skin isn't flawless like Tim's, his teeth are a bit crooked, the nose is smaller as are the lips. His eyes are the wrong color as well.

He holds a cigarette and gestures for Armie to light it for him. Armie does, cupping his hands around the flame. The boy looks up at him as he takes a drag. God, how old is he? Is he even legal? He looks so fucking young...

But then he tilts his head, grins and beckons for Armie to follow him.

He remembers the way as they round the corner and step into the derelict building.

The boy once again turns and braces himself against the wall, handing Armie the lube. But Armie shakes his head and gestures for the boy to get on his knees. He's suddenly not in the mood for fucking.

As it turns out, even a blow job doesn't turn him on, not really. The boy has to work hard so Armie can get it up. He's not that skilled, it's too much teeth and not enough suction and the condom isn't helping either. Only when Armie closes his eyes and pushes his hand into the slightly greasy curls is he able to surrender to the sensation and believe in the illusion for long enough to shoot his load into the condom.

The boy demands another one hundred Euros and Armie pays without hesitation. He just wants to leave this building, that boy and the whole squalid business behind.

He's relieved when he sits in the back of a cab a few minutes later and just gives the driver his address in Crema. Instead of sated satisfaction there's a cold emptiness spreading through his body.

This has been a mistake, he realizes. Now he's worse than before.

Back in his apartment, he showers scalding hot for solid fifteen minutes and still feels soiled, as if the
scent of the gaunt boy and their dilapidated lovenest has seeped in through his epidermis, taking root beneath his skin, in his bones, infiltrating his DNA.

As he lies naked on his bed, it dawns on him that he might be truly fucked. He's suddenly angry at Tim. That boy has no right to walk into his life and ruin what little distraction he has left. And yet it seems that sex not involving Tim now seems shallow to Armie, not even worth the try.

He gets his phone and stares at Tim's pic again, his hand cupping his rapidly hardening cock.

If Armie would care about money he might regard the expenses of the evening a waste. This grainy image of a part of Tim's body does more to him than that hooker sucking him off as if his cock was a lollipop.

He furiously tugs on his shaft and imagining punishing Tim for just being the fucking tease and tempting beauty he is by fucking his mouth until he gags does it for him quickly. Yet even after his second orgasm of the night the fuming irritation possessing him doesn't cool off.

So he texts Tim again, this time threatening the little slut not to dare to forget his promise.

God, he can't wait till Friday... The things he'll do to Tim.

Armie doesn't sleep much that night, only falling into a light slumber at dawn. When he arrives on set, he keeps his shades on for as long as possible. Luca shoots him a disapproving look but doesn't say anything.

Tim is just again hanging around, lanky and lascivious, but at least he's wearing a shirt today. Armie ignores him as best he can.

It helps him to go over the scene with Michael. He's so professional and has thought about every sentence, making notes and decorating his script with stress marks. Armie settles into Oliver's persona way more easy than he'd anticipated as they connect, bouncing each other off in a way that makes difficult scenes like this a pure delight, and the shot is done in two takes.

Afterwards, he sees Tim walk over to him but he can't face him. He looks so open, happy, young and fresh and suddenly Armie feels old, dirty and jaded. He fears just talking to Tim could contaminate his innocence and beauty. He also fears that Tim might read his guilt all over his face and in his body language. Gladly, Luca calls an early lunch.

Armie eats. Because he doesn't have to talk with a full mouth. Tim is joking with the crew, totally at ease but looks over to him now and then, an unmistakable heat in his gaze that makes Armie blush and pray for the ground to swallow him whole.

He'll ruin this precious, talented boy. God, he has to leave him alone.

As he's not called for the rest of the day Armie just gets his bike and leaves. He's not going straight back to Crema, though, but rides the Italian country lanes until his legs burn. When he eventually arrives at his apartment he's sweaty, tired and feels sick. Good.

Lunch has consisted of pasta, bread, salad, cheese, some meats, fish, potatoes. And he had eaten it all just to avoid to make conversation.

Now he has to pay for his cowardice and indulgence.

He doesn't even need some artificial help this time to make himself throw up. All he needs is remembering last night, a young kid on his knees in front of him, sucking him off for money, the
next hit. That's all he needs for it to happen, just a little reminder that he's a disgusting piece of shit. A true disappointment. A waste of space. A monster.

He vomits until he just brings up bile and spit.

Contrary to his usual routine, it doesn't make him feel better or more in control though. Afterwards, he's so exhausted he just crawls into bed and finally sleeps for twelve hours straight.

The next day they film the scene where Oliver walks in on Elio masturbating. Armie tries not to think about it. He shuts down completely, avoiding Tim like the plague until he can't any longer. He senses that Tim wants to talk, wants to go over it before, but Armie can't.

He feels too riled up by the whole prospect. Tim, touching himself in front of him while others watch... after a week of abstaining.

He tries hard to ignore what's going on in Tim's pants but he's only human after all so he has at least to take one look.

Maybe his attitude was just right because Luca praises their raw honesty afterwards.

But Armie needs a moment. He still feels Tim's sticky wetness on his fingers and wants nothing more than to put them in his mouth and suck them, tasting Tim. He needs some privacy. So it's the attic once more. He gets to like this place.

Before lighting up another cigarette, Armie licks his fingers. Tim's there, exploding on his tongue... he wants him so much in this moment that it almost makes him cry.

He knows he's not worthy, and yet, he won't stop pursuing this beautiful boy.

Tonight. And tomorrow. And for as long as possible.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, they made it through the first week... who'd thought!?
As a sneak peek into the next chapter: Timmy's in for somethig new on the weekend.
Something New

Chapter Summary

Armie convinces Tim that it's exciting to try something new, pushing his boundaries.

When Armie returns from the attic, Tim is already gone so he takes a car with Luca back to Crema.

“That first week went good, don't you think?” Armie nods but he's not fully present. His thoughts wander back to Tim on the bed in that house with his hands down his boxers.

“Timothée is remarkable. I'm so in love with him!” Luca continues and Armie is aware that his director looks at him from the corner of his eyes.

“Yeah, for such a young actor he's truly special.” Armie agrees. Listening to Luca talking so openly about his love for Tim makes him feel uneasy for more than one reason.

Back at his apartment, Armie can't sit still. He lights another cigarette but stubs it out almost immediately. He shouldn't smoke too much.

Next, he flops down on the couch and switches on the TV but can't decide on anything to watch. He feels too restless and can't concentrate. His thoughts go round in circles, always returning to Tim.

He just needs a good hard fuck.

But Armie's excitement is mixed with low-key fear. What if Tim senses that something is off? What if he asks how Armie coped? Armie feels so fucking weak and embarrassed as he remembers both his drive to Milan and his purging a day later...

He's supposed to play the dominant part here – he can't show frailty. That's not what Tim needs from him. It's bad enough that he knows. Armie will work him extra hard to make him forget. He'll ruin him tonight until he's a sobbing, begging mess.

Tim arrives at Armie's apartment at a little after eight. He's obviously freshly showered, his hair still damp, wearing a striped longsleeve and those sinfully tight black jeans.

Armie's bracelet is back around his wrist; it had to go during filming.

The moment he's walked through the door Armie has him against the wall, pressing his hands up above his head, kissing him so fierce he might leave bruises.

“God, I missed you.”

“This was your idea...” Tim reminds him before he's shut up with another kiss.

"Today was almost too much." Armie mumbles against Tim's lips and Tim can only moan around his tongue in reply.

"Just fuck me."

They don't even make it into the lounge. Armie slides his hand into Tim's jeans and strokes his cock
hard and fast until he's gasping. Tim throws his head back against the wall, bucking up into Armie's touch.

"Please..." He whimpers.

"You made me crazy the whole week. Your looks, running around in nothing but those little shorts. Fuck, Tim, you have no idea..."

"I think I have." Tim smirks. "Can't you feel it?"

Armie grins down at his shaft in his fist and squeezes once before turning him around, shoving him face forward against the wall and pulling his jeans and boxers down over his ass to mid-thigh. Tim turns his face to the side and Armie uses the opportunity to push two fingers into his mouth for Tim to suck. When they are glistening wet, he rubs them against Tim's hole.

"This might hurt." He tells Tim.

"Okay, come on." Tim can't spread his legs properly which makes him even tighter when Armie pushes both fingers in at the same time. Tim clenches and shudders but soon relaxes, taking it with small huffs indicating both pleasure and pain. Armie doesn't give him much time to adjust, however.

"I need you, now."

"Same."

Armie has a condom in the pocket of his jeans. He tears the package open before unzipping his own trousers, getting his hard cock out and rolling the condom on, pushing in slow yet deliberate.

When Tim screams Armie presses his huge hand over his mouth. He truly doesn't want the neighbors to call the police.

Tim braces himself on his folded arms against the wall as Armie starts to brutally fuck him, panting against Armie’s palm, a vein at his temple swelling and pulsing. His face goes red both with silent screams and the lack of oxygen. Armie knows by now that this is something Tim gets definitely off on.

It doesn't take long before he shatters, shooting his load all over the wall. Armie follows suit, coming deep inside Tim.

“Jesus Christ. Are you all right?” Armie asks as he pulls out. He quickly ties the condom off and sinks onto his knees to pull Tim’s cheeks apart. The boy above him outright shrieks while still panting, trying to get his breath back.

“What… fuck, Armie… what are you…?” Tim buries his flushed face in the crook of his elbow.

“Just checking on you.” Armie tells him, his voice thick with lust although he just came moments ago. Staring at Tim’s red, swollen hole makes something coil tight in his belly. It’s beautiful, sensitive, tender and delicate like the whole boy – and his to wreck.

Armie’s both glad and just a little disappointed that Tim isn’t bleeding. The thought of red blood running down his white inner thighs awakes a primal desire in him, yet he also remembers vividly the last time this happened and is a little shocked at himself.

Perhaps Tim would like it if Armie cut him?
To push those disturbing thoughts aside, Armie imagines his come leaking out of Tim’s hole as his thumbs spread him just a little wider.

“God, you have no idea what you do to me.”

Tim sighs above him. "Tell me." He whispers into his folded arms.

“Right now, for example, I'm fantasizing about watching my cum dripping from your ass.”

“God, yes, I wanna feel your come inside me.” Tim cants his narrow hips. “You could, you know that?”

Armie grins but instead of an answer he gently presses the tip of his tongue inside Tim’s sore rim.

Tim jumps, his whole body going rigid at the unfamiliar touch. “What… No!” He squeals and tries to squirm away but Armie’s hands cover both his buttocks, pinning him in place. There's no escaping Armie's onslaught. He laps again at Tim’s hole, trying to push his tongue in as deep as possible before gently sucking at Tim's sensitive entrance.

He can hear Tim moan softly.

“Yeah, I knew you’d like that.” Armie breathes against Tim’s wet sphincter when he eventually pulls back, still spreading him open, exposing him. When he looks up what he can see of Tim’s face is blushing a deep beetroot. “What?”

“This is… oh god, Armie… you can’t put your tongue there…,” Tim mumbles, his voice thick with shame.

“Can’t I? Just imagine me sucking my own cum from your hole before spitting it back into your open mouth…”

Tim groans and his hole twitches.

“Don’t tell me that doesn’t turn you on.”

Tim shakes his head.

“Then I’m afraid we’ll have to overcome your sensibilities, my delicate wilting flower.” Armie gets up, pulls first his and then Tim’s pants up in one go – almost trapping Tim’s still or again half-hard cock in the fly – before taking him by the wrist, his hand wrapped around his bracelet, and pulls him into the sitting room.

“Undress and get on your knees in front of the couch.”

^^^^^^

Timmy's been kneeling naked on the cold floor of Armie's lounge for almost a quarter of an hour while listening to the shower running in the bathroom until Armie emerges again, his tanned skin flushed rosy from the hot water.

He's naked as well and Timmy stares up at him from under his lashes, not sure if he's allowed but still wanting to look his fill. His cock is half-hard and it's sheer size almost scares Timmy. That has been inside him. All of it. It's intimidating.

Armie's like the statue of a Greek god moving about and Timmy doesn't know where to look when he clambers onto the couch, kneeling with his back turned towards him on the cushions of the seat,
legs spread while bracing his elbows on the back-rest.

Timmy averts his gaze as to not stare at Armie's most private parts but Armie seems to be beyond such considerations of modesty as he arches his back and slides his knees even wider apart, exposing himself, giving Timmy a prime view of his cleft and pucker.

Oh god! Timmy blushes and feels deeply uncomfortable but simultaneously saliva gathers in his mouth and his cock starts to stiffen. He can see the soft blond hairs lining Armie's crease, fanning out like a smooth fur over his buttocks and down his thighs.

Timmy knows he shouldn't find this hot but he does. The intense feeling of shame adds another layer to his arousal. What is happening with him?

It's a shock when Armie pushes his ass into the close proximity of Timmy's face. He smells of soap and something poignant underneath.

“Lick!”

Timmy coughs. He can't... this is... no way he'll do this! No. Fucking. Way.

“I Said. Lick!”

“You sure?” He whispers, trying to bide his time. Perhaps he can talk himself out of this? He simply can't lick Armie's asshole. God, the humiliation! This is so dirty. But Timmy’s cock twitches at these thoughts. He starts to question all the things he thought he knew about himself and his sexuality. Can this really be a turn on for him?

“What's the problem?” Armie has turned around above him. He doesn't sound impatient, though, only kind and encouraging. “I washed.” His gentle tone is a stark contrast to his very obvious arousal.

“Man, you want me to stick my tongue where...”

“Yeah?”

Does he really want Timmy to say it? Do people actually do this sort of thing?

“Ugh, man, that's just gross.”

“What?”

“You know... what... I mean...,” Timmy stammers.

Armie stares down at him for ten seconds straight. “So, you are going to tell me that I can finger, caress, lick and fuck your asshole but you somehow won't do the same things for me?”

Timmy’s face heats even more. He hadn’t thought that possible and wonders where all the blood filling his dick right now is coming from. “Hey, that’s not fair!” He protests. “It's not... god, Armie, you really want me to put my mouth to your ass?”

“You liked it very much when I did it to you.”

That’s true. Still... doesn't mean that this is not the most embarrassing and filthy thing Timmy’s ever been asked to do – and he’s an actor.

“That doesn't mean you can make me... do... this.”
“I don’t make you do anything. But I thought you’d like to try it. Explore new things. I thought that’s what this is about for you. And you are clearly interested.” Armie stares pointedly down at Timmy’s erection and Timmy suddenly hates his treacherous body with a fierce intensity that sadly does nothing to diminish his arousal.

Timmy swallows and raises his eyes again, forcing himself to look. Armie’s cleft is slightly darker than his buttocks. The golden hairs lining the crevice thicken towards his huge hard cock. His sphincter is surprisingly pink, clenching in anticipation of Timmy’s lips, the touch of his tongue. It looks very clean and rather vulnerable, tender even, but still...

“Oh god.” Timmy sighs. He’s sure he’s red like a fucking lobster by now.

“Did you ever lick a woman’s cunt? You know where you put your tongue there, right?”

Yeah, he did perform cunnilingus on girls. But... that is different. It’s what considerate lovers do. It’s nothing compared to what he’s about to do here. Wait? Is he really going to do this?

Because Armie’s right, he wanted to try new things. And this is definitely new. And didn’t his mum and his drama teacher tell him to at least try everything once? Timmy’s sure they hadn’t been talking about eating ass but the morale of the story is the same: You don’t know if you like a thing or not if you haven’t given it a go.

Didn’t it feel amazing when Armie had done it to him earlier? To quote the book they are filming: “Whoever said the soul and the body met in the pineal gland was a fool. It's the asshole, stupid.”

So, maybe Armie and Andre have a point here? He won’t know if he doesn't have a crack at it.

Timmy closes his eyes, gathers spit in his mouth, suppresses his inhibitions and hesitantly leans forward until his nose bumps against Armie’s tailbone. He hears him sigh above him, feels him move a little. Is Armie trembling?

When Timmy darts out his tongue his breath fans over Armie’s most sensitive place, making him outright moan. And Timmy hasn’t even started yet.

He just tastes soap as his tongue touches the soft skin of Armie’s cleft. Timmy probes a little, dragging the tip of his tongue over the small valleys and hills between Armie’s cheeks. Still, just soap, maybe a hint of cock, sweat, musk…

It’s actually not as bad as Timmy had thought. A bit like a blow job, really.

Yet the sound Armie makes when Timmy has the audacity to lick him from balls to tailbone is nothing Timmy has ever elicited from him before. It’s a low, deep groan full of pleasure that makes Timmy’s cock pulse and leak in response.

He seems to do something right so next thing he tries is pressing his tongue flat against Armie’s anus, lapping a few times at the wrinkled skin before twirling the tip around and around his entrance. Armie squirms above him, trying to get even closer, and Timmy has to bring his hands up to each of Armie’s arse cheeks to prevent him from outright sitting on Timmy’s upturned face.

He starts to knead the smooth mounts of flesh and muscle in rhythm with his licks and that’s something Armie definitely likes as well, judging by the noises he makes, short, breathless gasps interspersed with louder moans.

“God, Tim, and you try to tell me you never did this before? Fuck, this feels so good, don’t stop. Don’t stop.”
Timmy has no intention to. Instead, he starts to massage Armie’s pucker with the tip of his tongue, spearing it before closing his lips around the ring of muscles. When he sucks firmly, Armie shouts his name.

He remembers tongue-fucking Lola back in the days. She’s taught him a few tricks he’s right now extremely grateful for. He stiffens his tongue again and presses, presses until he feels the muscle give just a little. His tongue touches tissue even softer than the shell of Armie’s ears, softer than his lips and with that the taste changes as well. Nothing vile, just a bit more salty, like fresh sweat or semen.

Armie tries to roll his hips but Timmy holds him, squeezing his buttocks as he pushes in just a little more before wiggling his tongue and Armie comes with another hoarse shout, untouched, shooting his seed all over the backrest of his couch.

Timmy pulls back because Armie’s riding out his orgasm threatens to break his nose. He sits back on his calves, watching Armie come apart above him. His cleft is slick with spit and his pucker is red and fluttering. But most of all it’s the noises he makes, moaning his name over and over, that have Timmy dare to get to his feet – pins and needles traveling up his legs but he doesn’t care – take his own throbbing erection in hand and come after just a few strokes right over the forbidden place he licked just a few moments ago.

The sight of his come dripping down Armie’s cleft awakes something carnal in him, a desire to take, to breach but he’s not sure that’s his place. Would Armie let him? They haven’t talked about these things and up until now he had assumed that... well, that he’d be the one who gets fucked. But now he wonders...

His thoughts grind to an abrupt halt when Armie turns around, grabs the back of his neck and pulls him into a kiss, deep and wet. Armie knows where Timmy’s mouth has been just moments ago and still he presses his own tongue insistently against Timmy’s, licking, sucking...

Suddenly, Timmy understands what it truly means when Oliver eats the peach. It means that when you are truly in love the other person can simply not disgust you. It means that you’d take happily everything your lover offers without hesitation, be it a come-filled peach or a mouth that has just eaten ass. There’s no shame, no revulsion when it comes to love...

Wait, why is he thinking about love?

He’s surely not in love with Armie Hammer! That would be ridiculous. He can’t be. He simply can’t.

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When Armie’s lying in bed with Tim later, both of them still naked, he runs the tip of his index finger over the beads of Tim's bracelet, savoring the thought that Tim is his for the whole weekend.

“So, it wasn’t that bad, I take it? At least you came all over my ass after sticking your tongue up it.” Armie’s grin only widens when Tim still blushes. God, that boy is just too gorgeous.

Despite the red flush creeping up his neck Tim shrugs almost nonchalantly. “You liked it. That turned me on.”

He’s strangely taciturn. Armie worries he might have pushed him too far.

“Listen, Tim, if you really don’t want to do things we need a safeword.” Tim just stares at him, unblinking. “A phrase that immediately stops all action, no matter what.” Armie explains.
Tim just shrugs again, his gaze getting foggy. Shit!

“Hey, Tim, you alright?”

It takes a moment until he answers “Yeah”. When Armie pulls him closer he doesn’t resist but also makes no move to return the embrace.

“You can talk to me when the stuff we do bothers you. I know it can be too much. I know I can be too much.”

“Who says that?” Tim mumbles.

My mum, who’d condemn me to hell if she could see me right now. My wife, who dislikes my sexual proclivities. Casting directors, who reject me because of my face… Rentboys who won’t indulge me even if I pay them. I am too silly, too kinky, too beautiful, too demanding…

Now it’s Armie’s turn to shrug. Tim raises his head to look at him.

“Oliver.” He says.

Armie raises his eyebrows. Is this a game?

“That’s my safeword.” Tim explains.

“Okay.” Armie seals it with a kiss to Tim’s cheek, just a gentle peck on his smooth skin.

They fall silent again. Armie caresses Tim’s upper arm, his shoulders, his back with his fingertips but there’s a rigidity to him that he’s never seen or felt before. It’s as if Tim is holding himself back. That’s so unlike him it makes Armie truly nervous.

The next thing he says throws him even more off kilter. “I think we should get tested.”

“What?” Is all Armie can ask. God, he sounds like a dumb-ass.

“Get tested. For HIV. Both of us.” Tim explains as if Armie was an imbecile.

“Why?” Panic wells up in him. Did Tim somehow find out?

The boy looks at him in an odd way. “So we can stop using condoms. You told me you want to fuck me without, remember?”

Of course Armie remembers… but…

“Incubation can be up to six weeks. You had unprotected sex within this time frame-”

“But you told me it was highly unlikely to contract HIV through oral sex.”

“-and so did I.”

Tim stares at him in shock.

Armie’s mouth is dry. “With Liz.” He clarifies.

“Oh. Okay. Sure. But she’s your wife…”

“Meaning?”
“Why would she be unfaithful to you?”

He’s so endearingly naive that it almost breaks Armie’s heart.

“Because I leave her all the time to work. Because I fuck men behind her back. Because she’s very attractive and might get tired of fighting off suitors.”

“Don’t you trust her?”

Armie seriously doesn’t know.

”Don't you have enough of risky encounters?” He asks to avoid answering.

"It's different with you." Tim whispers and something crosses his face, not sadness but a seriousness that frightens Armie a little.

"What makes you say that?"

“I don’t know. It’s just… how I feel. I can’t quite explain it.” His eyes are wide and very green, as if he’s truly seeing Armie with all his flaws and faults and still wants him. It’s rather unnerving in its open vulnerability and honesty.

“I’m not a very good man, Tim. I’m a cheater. I fake and pretend for a living.”

"So I'm just one of your flings?” Tim asks, still holding Armie’s gaze before a smile cracks up his grave expression.

Armie has to swallow. This was on the brink of going too far too soon. Instead of an answer he swats Tim's ass. "Let's go to sleep."
A Question of Trust

Chapter Summary

It's back to reality for Armie and Timmy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Armie wakes early the next morning he's alone in bed. As he rolls over, he discovers Tim's side cold and empty. With a jerk, he sits up, the momentary panic only dwindling when he hears him talking in the lounge.

“Yeah, sure... - Still. - Yes, absolutely worth a try. - Of course. - I know you do. - Brian, of course I'm grateful... - Yes. - No, it's not. - Yeah, if he wants me... - It's just, I don't know man... - Okay, yes, love you, man. See you soon.”

Worth a try? If he wants me? Love you... what's going on?

Armie puts on his pants before padding over into the lounge where he catches Tim throwing his phone onto the couch, a mixture of anger and frustration on his face.

“Good morning?”

“Fuck it!” Timmy yells, slumping down next to his phone. He'd put on his boxers and Armie's faded-red zip-hoodie that is clearly too large for him and hangs down to mid-thigh, the sleeves so long they cover his hands but which conveniently hung at the back of the bedroom door. He looks small and a little lost in it.

“Trouble?” Armie feels kind of insecure standing there almost naked in the gray morning light but in the face of Tim's obvious distress he decides to ignore his discomfort. Instead, he sits down next to Tim, nudging his side with an elbow. Tim just shrugs but doesn’t move away.

“Hey...,” Armie leans in and noses Tim's neck just below his jaw before he puts his left arm around those narrow shoulders, gathering him in a one-armed hug. Tim sighs and rakes both his hands through his tousled curls before he rests his temple against Armie's collarbone.

“Fuck it – fuck it – fuck it.” He mumbles, repeating it like a mantra while rhythmically banging his head lightly against Armie’s chest until Armie grabs both sides of his face to still him. Tim nuzzles against his shoulder with a final “Fuck it”, throwing one leg over Armie’s lap.

“Who was that?” The name Brian rings a bell but Armie can't place him. Tim's ex? He becomes suddenly aware that he doesn't know much about Tim, his friends, his past, doesn't even know if there is actually someone in Tim's life at the moment, back in New York. So much is unsaid between them.

Tim is still pouting, dangling his leg and scuffing his toes against the side of the couch. The clock on the wall shows Armie that it's not even six in the morning.

“Calling you at this time... it must have been important.”
Tim shrugs. “That was my agent. A few weeks ago I auditioned for an action comedy Edgar Wright wrote and will direct with Kevin Spacey. It sounded fun. Well, no, not really, but it sounded mainstream box office hit. A film people will actually see.”

“And?”

“Brian just informed me that the role went to Ansel Elgort. Ansel! Like… we went to LaGuardia together, he was a year above me and got all the good rolls even back then. Fuck it! He's going to have his breakthrough in a major movie while I'm stuck with a questionable, underfinanced Arthouse film in the butt of Italy. God, I hate him!” Tim starts to bang his head against Armie’s shoulder joint and Armie has to pull his hair to stop him, sinking his fingers into those luscious, short curls. “Actually, no, he's a great guy, a brother but still…,” Tim stammers, pressing into Armie’s touch but he’s nearly in tears. “I wanted this so much.” He whispers.

Armie is familiar with the bitter taste of disappointment but it hurts seeing Tim so forlorn and sad. Armie strokes his back and rocks him in his embrace, thinking of something to say to soften the blow. “Maybe it's for the better.”

“Just don't, Armie…,” Tim gives a cynical laugh that cuts a little too deep. “Don't give me this shit about artistic freedom and not selling out. I have to pay my rent. I have to eat.” He doesn't say ‘I don't have family money getting me through’ but Armie hears it all the same.

“I know.”

“Do you?” Tim spits. Armie doesn’t like him like this, jaded past his age, sounding like so many disillusioned young actors he’s met. It doesn't suit Tim.

“Listen, that was not what I meant. We all have to make a living. But…,” Armie feels queasy. Should he really talk to Tim about these things? What Pandora’s Box might he open? “I'm not telling you that Arthouse is superior to a good action movie. God, no! But… you have heard about Spacey?”

Tim looks up at him through wet lashes. “What do you mean?” He has to push the sleeves of Armie’s hoodie up to wipe his eyes with the back of his hand.

“Well, I was told that Kevin likes pretty boys. Like you. And drink. Especially a combination of both... and that he can get very hands on when he's sloshed.”

“Really?” Tim sounds disbelieving. “But isn't he married?”

Armie swallows and looks away. “What does that matter?”

Tim doesn't seem to have heard. “He's such a great actor. I admire him.”

“Well, great artists can be assholes all the same. I've heard a lot of talk over the years, on various sets, but no one dares to come forward. He's just too famous. I wouldn't work with him, though. It might sound pretentious but I can't agree with his… attitude.”

Tim is quiet for some time, plugging at his lower lip. “Well, I probably would allow him to feel me up a bit if it lands me a good role.”

“Don’t say that!” Armie’s voice is too loud in the silent room but hearing Tim say something like that makes him feel a little sick. “Just don’t…”

“I was joking, man.” Tim looks at him but there’s no humor in his eyes.
Armie’s not sure why Tim’s words rile him up so much. But imagining him like this – almost naked, sitting in the lap of some older guy – makes his stomach turn. Is that jealousy? It’s been so long since Armie had felt jealous that he might have forgotten how it manifests itself. Frustrated, angry, indifferent, yes, he knows how that feels – but jealous?

Or is it fear fueled by insecurity that eats away at his heart right now? He’s still not sure why Tim chose to agree to this with him… what is he getting from it?

Maybe he just needs breakfast.

“I don’t think this is funny.” Armie knows he sounds petulant and old but he can’t help it. He suddenly feels bone-deep tired as he starts to entangle himself from Tim. But the boy clings to him, pressing a soft kiss right beneath his ear, his tongue darting out to lick and play with Armie’s earlobe.

God, he’s a naughty little fucker…

“Sorry.” Tim sighs, hot breath against his skin. “I just want to act. I need to act.”

Armie pulls him fully in his lap, Tim’s bony knees either side of Armie’s hips. “And you will.” He reassures Tim before kissing him, long, wet and not chaste at all. “You will.”

He decides they need some coffee before this escalates further, so Armie lifts Tim and carries him over into the kitchenette, sitting him on the counter where he dissolves into silly little giggles.

Timmy sits on the counter while Armie makes espresso, watching him handle those delicate cups with his huge hands. He loves those hands. He wants them everywhere on his body. In his body. Now! He wants to feel cherished and wanted, not useless and discarded.

He wants to be seen.

He slides off the counter and wraps his arms around Armie’s waist from behind, pressing a kiss between his shoulder blades as his hands grab Armie through his pants.

“Fuck me.”

Armie smiles; Timmy can feel it.

“Let’s have coffee first, yeah? We barely slept.”

“Sure?” Timmy purrs and steps back as Armie turns around. He unzips the too large hoodie that smells of Armie and lets it slide from one shoulder, than the other. It falls and pools on the floor around his feet like a puddle of blood.

As Armie doesn’t tell him to stop, Timmy hooks both thumbs inside the waistband of his boxers and slowly shimmies out of them. His cock is still soft but fills as Armie looks at him with open hunger as if he’s something he wants to devour. “You could have me right here, over the counter...”

“Coffee.” Armie hands him a cup and saucer but his blue eyes have gone dark. He takes his own and walks over into the bedroom. Timmy sighs dramatically before downing the sweet hot liquid in one go and follows. He crawls onto the bed and places his head on Armie's thigh, his mouth just inches away from his groin.

“You wanna fuck my face?”
Armie leans back against the headboard, carding his fingers through Timmy's hair, almost petting him. “What is it with you this morning?”

Timmy shrugs and closes his eyes. “I don't know. I just don't want to think right now. About jobs and my career and fucking Ansel... Just make me forget. For a while.”

Armie's hand stills and Timmy fears he's said too much. But then Armie tells him in that deep voice that makes Timmy go hard almost instantly: “On your hands and knees, face towards the foot of the bed.”

Timmy can feel the mattress dip as Armie gets up to get his gear.

An hour later, Timmy's mind is wiped clean while Armie's thoroughly taking him apart. He's on his elbows and knees, his arse high up in the air while his wrists are tied together and bound to the bed frame. Armie's been working him constantly with a black dildo, about eight inches long and two inches wide, hitting his prostate over and over. Lube is running down the inside of his thighs, over his perineum and his tight balls and it makes him crazy but he can't do anything to relieve himself.

He'd have come by now at least twice but Armie had also put a cock ring on Timmy's dick, preventing him effectively from climaxing. Now his swollen, leaking cock curves up against his belly, red and wet, and Timmy would beg for release had Armie not put a ball gag in his mouth as well.

All he can do is pant and drool and grunt and concentrate on his breathing. Life can be so simple sometimes.

“You still want me to fuck you?” Armie asks and Timmy can only nod in desperation, biting down on the black rubber ball in his mouth as he tries and fails to swallow. He's lying in a puddle of his own saliva but is almost too far gone to notice. All that matters is the hard rubber toy inside him and the prospect of Armie's dick going there as well.

“Clench. Hold it in while I get ready.” The thrusting stills and Timmy's muscles tremble with the effort to keep the slick dildo inside himself and not let it slip out.

He dimly registers Armie moving behind him and grunts and huffs again, thrashing his legs. No! He wants to really feel him, to come inside him! It's primal and dangerous but he needs this. He wants to feel marked, owned, becoming truly one, just a vessel for whatever Armie gives him…

A huge hand comes round and touches his hot, wet cheek, oblivious to the mess he's made. “We talked about this, Tim. It's not an option.” Timmy tries to convey with his eyes that he doesn't care, but Armie just gently shakes his head, an unreadable expression on his face. Dread? Awe? Timmy doesn’t want to think about it right now so he closes his eyes and nods, spit bubbling between his lips stretched around the rubber ball.

When Armie removes the toy, Timmy feels empty for a second before he's filled again to the brim. He's been ready but the stretch still burns. Armie just stays still inside him until Timmy relaxes a bit, giving an almost imperceptible nod.

That's all it takes for Armie to grab Timmy's hips and slam into him again and again, so hard that Timmy could swear he sees stars. His prostate it so sensitive by now that the stimulation hurts. Yet the pain doesn’t prevent thick beads of translucent precome to drip from his cock, soiling the sheets even further. Timmy watches his body’s reaction in dazed amazement, fascinated by how easy it apparently is to debase him and how much he likes it, craves it even.
When Armie wraps a hand around Timmy's erection, it's almost too much. Timmy grunts into the gag, his skin too tender, too tight, yet he bucks into Armie’s touch like a horny bitch in heat. He feels himself coming but he can't ejaculate due to the tight rubber ring around the root of his cock and it makes him kick his legs and throw his head from left to right in absolute, all-consuming, burning ecstasy.

The feeling is indescribable. His mind goes blank. His abdominal muscles cramp. His hole contracts. Spasms run through his body and he cants his hips, sliding his knees wider apart, struggling not to pass out.

“Yeah, that's it, Tim. Let go.”

Timmy comes again.

Another wave hits him, crashes over him and he balls his hands into fists, helplessly suffering sweet agony as he whimpers into his gag.

His body's a live wire, tingling all over.

That’s when Armie pulls out. Timmy howls, sobbing by now from the base desire to be filled. But then he feels something how and wet hit his lower back, his exposed cleft, his quivering hole.

Yes! Armie knows what he needs and marks him the way he wants it, shooting his load right there where it belongs.

Timmy hopes he might gape just a little so that some come might drip inside him, impregnating him with Armie’s seed.

God, he’s such a slut for Armie…

He feels fingers touch him, rub him, but just not enough. He tries to press back but a swat on his ass stops his movements. He’s too weak to put up resistance, going pliant, just accepting being played with.

Next, Armie quickly removes the gag. Two fingers press inside his mouth and Timmy sucks despite his jaw hurting from the forced stretch it has been submitted to. Armie’s taste fills his mouth as Armie holds his tongue down until he gags.

When he slowly comes back online he has to admit that his orgasms have left him drained but also strangely empty. He does feel relaxed but the usual bliss is missing.

He's turned on his side and gently laid out on the mattress. Lubed fingers fumble at his groin and he makes undignified noises, still sucking on Armie’s fingers with returned vigor, his head lolling in the sheets. When the fucking ring is gone even more blood rushes into his hard cock and it only takes a soft touch, Armie thumb brushing over his glistening slit, for him to finally, finally shoot his load.

“Yeah, god, Tim, yes...,” Armie holds his bucking hips in a deathgrip. “Look at you.” Timmy can’t, he's too busy coming again as it feels like his balls are exploding.

When it's finally over, he’s dazed, sedated. Armie lies beside him for a long time just holding him, pressing light kisses to his shoulders. He's untied eventually, massaged, there's a wet flannel between his cheeks, at his groin, another for his face – but all of this only registers on the periphery of Timmy’s foggy mind.

“Better now?” Armie asks as he gathers Timmy up in his arms, pulling him away from the wet spots
he's made on the sheets.
Timmy can just nod.
“Does that make you happy?”
He just sighs, resting his head on Armie's chest.

Much later that day, Tim's in the bath, blasting one of his Hip Hop tunes and singing loudly along to it when Armie's phone rings. It's Liz.

“Hey, hello husband!” She coos. “Say hello to daddy, Hops.”

Armie grins while his daughter babbles and giggles, calling her his good girl and telling her how much he loves and misses her until Liz puts her down and takes over.

“Thanks for your present, by the way. It's beautiful.”

Armie takes a deep breath. He had almost forgotten and needs a moment to remember that he send Liz something from Tiffany's as well. “I thought it would suit you.”

“And it does. What's that noise? Is that Cardi B.?”

“Oh, that's just Tim.” He doesn't explain why he's at Armie's place and Liz doesn't ask.

“I wish we could facetime.” Armie knows this tone. His wife is up to something.

“Sorry, but we're in the middle of going over to Luca for rehearsal. Later, maybe.” Armie's still naked in bed with sex toys and bondage rope lying carelessly about. Even Liz would get suspicious.

“Tonight? Eight at your place?”

“Yeah, fine.”

“I've got something to tell you, husband. Just so you are prepared.”

Did she buy a new handbag, Armie wonders, biting his tongue and silently chiding himself for being such an asshole. The boy he fucks behind her back is just a few yards away in his bathroom. There's no need to hurt and humiliate his wife further.

It's surely something with the bakery, a new successful recipe perhaps, or an invite to something Liz deems important. Still, he asks: “Is everything alright?”

“Oh, yes!” She sounds happy. That's not how Liz usually sounds when she calls him on set. Should he start to worry?

But he knows her. If she wants to tell him face to face he doesn’t stand a chance to get anything out of her now. All he can do is promise to facetime at eight and hang up.

“Who was that?” Tim walks in from the bathroom, naked but for the bracelet around his wrist, all long limbs and wet curls and Armie suddenly couldn't care less about his wife and her little surprises.

“Liz.” Does he just imagine it or does Tim's face fall a little at the mention of her name? “We'll facetime tonight.”
Tim just nods but he suddenly looks small and lost again. The glow he’d been radiating is gone as if someone has switched off a light.

“Hey, come here.” Armie pats the mattress next to him. Tim pushes the soiled sheet aside before climbing back into bed.

“Your housekeeping is atrocious, Armand.” He grins.

“Now you sound exactly like her.”

Tim turns his head away. Armie touches his shoulder, gently rubbing his thumb against the bony joint. “Don’t be like that.” He mumbles, leaning in to smell Tim under the waft of soap.

“Like what?” Tim sounds defensive.

“Pouting. Hiding.”

Tim huffs a laugh. It doesn't sound as if he's having fun.

“I think I better go over to my place, change my clothes, eat a bite, check my mails. Give you some space. You and Liz.”

“I don't want space. I want you.” Armie kisses the skin he's just caressed.

Tim turns towards him then and takes his chin between thumb and forefinger, his green eyes boring into Armie's. “Do you, though?”

His intense gaze leaves Armie speechless. Yet he can’t look away.

He’s not sure what Tim sees in his face but he removes his hand and leans away. “I think I need some rest. Last week has been exhausting...”

“Tim, no.”

“I'll call you, okay? Tomorrow. Just... let me...,” he scoots back and starts to search for his discarded clothes. Armie watches him, suddenly tired, feeling hollow.

“I have to talk to my wife now and then.” He says eventually. It comes out almost pleading.

Tim smiles at him but it’s a stage smile, not reaching his eyes. “Sure.” He pulls his jeans on, followed by his striped longsleeve. With a quick peck on Armie's cheek he's gone.

Shit! What the fuck is wrong with that boy? Is he honestly jealous of Liz? They talked about that, for god's sake. They are not together or anything. They are just... friends with benefits.

Armie grabs his phone and tries to call Tim but the line is engaged. He doesn't want to leave a message. What is there to say?

Who is Tim talking to? That Will? His sister? Esther had mentioned her, they seem to know each other. Or maybe Tim's phoning Esther, arranging a date for tonight? Maybe he needs some pussy after all the dick he got?

Armie doesn't dwell on the thought that he doesn't like the idea of his boy fucking that girl. Instead, he gets dressed in his running gear and heads out to clear his head and run the frustration out of his system.
Tim and his moods will not ruin his weekend.

Chapter End Notes

I know that Baby Driver was shot in Spring 2016 prior to Call Me By Your Name but I took artistic liberty here.
“Armie, fuck, I told you I would ring you!” When Timmy opens the door to his apartment that evening around 8:30 Armie storms straight past him without as much as a greeting, heading directly for his fridge.

“What is it with you?” He asks, his face thunderous as he stares into the bright light of Timmy's still mostly empty fridge. “Don't you have something real to drink? Always just fucking Diet Coke...”

“Armie, I was about to go out. What are you doing here?” Timmy can’t hide his irritation. He finds this invasion borderline annoying.

“Are you meeting Esther? You wanna fuck her? I bet you wanna fuck her.” Armie slams the door of the fridge shut and turns to face Timmy, glaring at him but there's a devastation beneath his anger that ignites a pang of sympathy inside Timmy’s chest.

“What are you talking about? That's none of your business, by the way. It’s not that we are together or anything” He stems his fists into his sides and waits for Armie to explain what's going on.

“You took it off.” Armie nods at Timmy's wrist instead of an answer. It's true, he has removed the bracelet.

“So what?”

“Nothing.” Armie shrugs. His face is pensive; there are tight lines around his mouth and eyes, making him look way older than 29. He’s still breathing heavily. A dark cloud seems to hover over him, bathing him in an aura of helpless, bottomless fury and despair.

Timmy doesn't feel equipped to deal with whatever it is that has him in such a state right now.

He'd given Armie space and asked for some in return to get over the fact that despite the mind-blowing sex they are having his wife would always come first for Armie. He’d almost forgotten about Liz; her intruding on whatever it is he and Armie have going between them has upset Timmy more than he likes to admit.

But instead of space and room to breathe and adjust to the realization that he’s nothing more than Armie’s dirty little secret he gets a raging Armie back just a few hours later.
Why is it always Armie who calls the shots here? Why are Timmy’s wishes and needs always pushed aside or overruled? Armie evidently doesn’t take him seriously. He doesn’t truly respect Timmy.

Yet he’s instinctively aware that if he starts to address these issues now, the situation will quickly escalate into a yelling match. Timmy might be young but he knows that screaming at each other never makes anything any better.

Therefore, Timmy raises his hands, trying to placate Armie. “Whatever. I'm outta here. You wanna let off steam? Find some other sparring partner 'cause I'm off.” He grabs his keys from the table and walks over to the door.

Armie's huge hand crashes it shut, stopping Timmy in his tracks, blocking his escape. “Where do you think you’re going?”

Timmy forces himself to stay calm and not to step back. But if he's honest, Armie is starting to frighten him a little.

“Out.” He says and his voice is only slightly shaking.

“It is Esther, I bet. Oh, poor Tim, maybe her daddy gives you a part in his next film if you make his little girl really happy. You have a thing for daughters of famous parents, haven’t you? Sleeping your way up, one might think. But then you told me that you wouldn’t mind to exchange certain favors if it helps your career… Got me thinking…”

Timmy just shakes his head. This is ridiculous. “What right do you think you have, Armie? Don't talk to me like that.” It suddenly dawns on him. “It's Liz, isn't it? What did she say? Did she hear some rumors? Or is there someone else? You told me yourself you don't trust her. Is it Nikki? Oh my god, is Nikki fucking your wife? Oh Armie, cuckolded by your best friend.”

Armie balls his fist and looks like he's about to hit Timmy. For a split second he wishes he would. But instead Armie just slumps down onto the floor as if his strings have been cur, putting his head into his hands.

“She's pregnant.”

“What?” Time stops. All fight is suddenly knocked out of Timmy as he slowly sits down on the floor as well. He tries to continue breathing but somehow his body has other ideas. He has to pinch the back of his hand, hard, to finally be able to suck in a shallow breath. “That's wonderful news.” His voice is small. “Congrats, man.” He reaches over to awkwardly pat Armie’s knee.

Armie makes a sound behind his hands that sounds suspiciously like a sob. Timmy stares at him, his shoulders heaving, until he has to look away.

After a moment, Armie lowers his hands and crawls over to where Timmy is sitting, placing his head in Timmy's lap. “Sorry, I'm so sorry... please, I didn’t know… I’m sorry…,” he mumbles again and again until Timmy wants to put his hands over his ears. He feels numb, frozen inside. Liz is pregnant. Armie will have another baby. He can’t think past this monumental fact. It destroys the silly daydream he only now realizes he’s been feeding, trampling what little hope he might have had into the dusty Lombardian ground.

“Oliver.” He whispers.

Armie gazes up at him, his blue eyes red-rimmed, obviously not getting what Timmy means.
“I said ‘Oliver’. I'm safewording.” Timmy forces himself to look anywhere but Armie.

“But...,” Armie starts.

No! Timmy can’t listen to him anymore.

“Don’t!” He hisses, pushing Armie off his lap, scooting away backwards, stumbling to his feet. Armie is still squatting on his floor, a puddle of self-pity, broken and wallowing in misery, while Timmy stands and looks down on him. A new perspective. Usually, it’s the other way round.

“You said you would stop if I used my safeword. I beg you to stop. Now!” Timmy takes a deep breath. “What am I supposed to do? What do you want from me? Do you just wanna fuck me until you've forgotten all this shit in your life, all those lies you tell? I... I can’t deal with this, not now, not... we are making a movie here! Yeah, I'm sorry too, but... just sorry.”

With that, Timmy storms off, leaving Armie in his flat and to his own devices.

Armie's so drunk he has to grab the bar as not to fall onto the tiled floor when he orders another round. His Italian surely is improving because the barkeeper just nods at him, preparing another tray of Jagerbombs. Armie slides him his credit card – at least he hopes it's his credit card – to pay for the sixth or maybe even eighths round. But hey, he has something to celebrate, and those guys here in the little bar on the Piazza del Duomo at least are willing to drink to his, Elizabeth's and the baby's health – several times in fact over the last hour or so.

Not like that little pussy that fucked off when he’d needed him.

Armie hands the tray around the table where his new drinking buddies are seated and the refill is greeted with shouts of “Salute!” “Sul bambino!” when there's suddenly a hand on Armie's back, just as he's about to down the mixture of beer and Jägermeister.

As he turns around, the face he sees is not the man he expected. Instead, it's Ferdinando.

“Hey, Armie, I think you had enough, my friend.”

“I'm not your friend.” Armie tells him, not in a nasty way but still loud enough that his guests fall silent. “I decide when I have enough.” Ferdinando says something in Italian to the men gathered around the table and they slowly nod, down their drinks and leave, patting Armie on the back or hugging him as they say “Buena notte”.

“Fuck, I was having a party here!” Armie shouts, trying to shove Ferdinando away but almost crashing into the table instead. Jesus, he's wasted!

“Yes, congratulations, Timothèe told us. But now it's time to go home. We need you on Monday. Alive.”

“Tim told you... you and Luca? He went to Luca?” Armie is stumbling out of the bar, led by Ferdinando, hanging onto his arm so he won't stumble. He's grateful for the support as there are simply too many chairs and tables in his way and he has too many arms and legs to coordinate.

“Yes, Timothèe came by.” Ferdinando makes a somewhat telling pause as they reach the street. “We had invited him to dinner. But he was a bit too... upset to eat.”

“He was...? Upset?” Armie has to take deep breaths between words as to avoid throwing up. The
pavement of the cobbled street is swaying which Armie considers an unnecessary yet personal affront.

“Yes.” Ferdinando gives Armie a dark look. God, what had the boy told them? He’ll throttle him the next time they…

“Where… are we going?” He asks suddenly.

“I’m getting you home.”

And really, now Armie recognizes the house they are standing in front of. He finds his keys in his pocket but not the lock in the door. Ferdinando helps him and literally pulls him up the stairs.

On the last riser sits a familiar figure, hunched over, tapping at his phone, the pale blue light illuminating his sharp features, painting his lips violet and his eyes a shining cyan.

“Tim.” Armie gasps. He looks like an enchanted nymph.

“Thank god, Ferdinando. I can take it from here.” Tim puts his phone away and gets up. “Where did you find him?”

“American Bar. Careful, he’s totally drunk.” Armie is handed from Ferdinando to Tim and leans his head heavy on his shoulder, breathing him in.

“Tim.” He says again, trying to hug him but Tim somehow manages to sidestep, holding him upright around the shoulder while taking the key from Ferdinando, opening the apartment door.

He drags Armie inside and they almost trip over each other. When he hears the door close behind them Armie tries to press Tim against the wall, maybe to kiss him, maybe to stop him moving as the room is spinning, he's not sure, but Tim's here and he smells nice and why the fuck shouldn't they just kiss and fall into bed and fuck? He loves Tim. It’s only natural.

“I love you... I love you so much. Let’s fuck.” Did he say that out loud, he briefly wonders? Maybe… who cares. Tim should know.

Next thing Armie knows, he tries to walk over in the direction of his bedroom, or what he thinks is his bedroom, pulling Tim with him but tripping over the coffee table, landing face first onto the couch.

“Jesus, fuck, Armie!” Tim exclaims somewhere to his right. He lies half buried beneath Armie's body and that feels very good and very right so Armie grabs his waist and rolls over until he's fully covering Tim's lean body. His sharp hipbones dig into his thighs and Armie is reminded of a bag of coat hangers and he might have said something like this as well, he's not entirely sure and not in full possession of his mental powers – maybe it's Tim's proximity, maybe it's the drink? – and he's rapidly losing his train of thought where was this going...?

Ouch!

There's a sharp pain between his legs. Tim has kneed him in the groin. The bastard! Armie's trying to aim a punch but Tim's too fast and why is everything spinning again, god, this is awful…

As he slides off of Tim and onto the floor, cupping his crotch, and feels bile rise in his throat.

“Shit! I think I'm going...”
He can't finish as he throws up onto the floor and – truth be told – all over Tim's trousers and shoes.

“Fucking hell!” Tim shrieks but still grabs Armie by his shoulders to hold him upright so that he doesn't slump down into his own sick. Wouldn't be the first time, Armie thinks, but is still somewhat moved that Tim cares despite being himself covered in Armie's vomit.

Armie wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and gasps for breath while Tim tries not to step into the puddle of sick in front of him. There's some push and shove but eventually they both end up in the bathroom. Tim sheds his shoes, socks and trousers and Armie thinks the evening just took a turn for the better.

That is before another wave of nausea forces him to crouch over the toilet bowl. He thinks he spends way too much time in this position and then he thinks nothing at all anymore as his stomach cramps and he expels another load of sour alcohol.

“God, Armie, what did you have? No, don't tell me.” Tim hands him a flannel first and afterwards a glass of water that Armie downs and brings straight up again.

He thinks he started to cry somewhere through his ordeal. He might have pleaded with Tim to stay, to make it stop. He might have talked a bit about his mum, and Liz, and the new baby. He's not sure. In between, he brings up what little is left in his stomach until Tim decides he's had enough and hauls Armie into the bedroom.

Undressing is a bit tricky because Tim doesn't seem to like it when Armie tries to peel his t-shirt off of him and instead goes for Armie's shirt and jeans. Well, okay, that's fine with him as well. He tries to kiss Tim but the boy moves away and wrinkles his nose in disgust and isn't that funny, considering Armie's very sure he had his tongue up Tim's ass not so long ago. He very likely says something along that line and Tim just rolls his eyes and calls him impossible before putting him to bed.

As Armie's tugged in, Tim turns off the light but instead of getting into bed next to him he walks away.

“Tim? Tim! Where are you... you going?” Armie tries to sit up but the rooms starts to slide again so he lies back down.

“I'm right here.” Tim stands in the doorway, a black silhouette against the bright light from the lounge. “I'll stay on the couch. Just call when you need something.”

“I need you.” Armie groans.

The black figure shakes its head.

“Please....” Armie whispers

“Just sleep. We talk tomorrow.”

Talk? What's there to talk about? Armie doesn't want to talk. He can't quite remember what it is he wants but he's very sure that it's not talking.

But Tim just closes the door on him so that only a small sliver of light falls into the bedroom and Armie is reminded of his childhood home, not in the Cayman's but even earlier, in Dallas. It must be one of his earliest memories because he remembers wooden railings separating his field of vision… There are loud voices, something smashes and Armie remembers staring at the shimmer of light falling onto the carpet that's a town with streets and houses and the jolly wallpaper with clowns printed on it.
Armie hates clowns.

He can still hear someone cry and is not sure if that's only a memory or Tim or if it's maybe he himself and suddenly it's all too much and he simply passes out.

Chapter End Notes

I have no idea if Jagerbombs are a thing in Italy - but they are a safe way to get totally hammered, let me assure you. Beware!
Also, there really is an American Bar in Crema.
Better to Speak?

Chapter Summary

They try to talk.

Timmy awakes with a stiff neck and somewhat cold from a night on the couch spend half-naked just under a thin blanket. He's just wearing his t-shirt and boxers and remembers with a shudder the state of his trousers. He'd been too exhausted to put them in the wash last night after getting Armie into bed and mopping up his sick. By now they'll be reeking, soaked with old vomit. Nice.

It's still early, barely dawn, but he nonetheless gets up, takes a bottle of water from the fridge and quietly walks over into the bedroom where Armie is snoring. During the night he kicked off the blanket and curled around one of the pillows, pressed against his stomach and chest.

He looks so young.

True, his hair is a mess, there are shadows under his eyes and golden stubble is growing on his cheeks and down his throat but right now he seems way younger than 29; at peace. Or maybe not so much younger but open, vulnerable, unguarded?

As Timmy takes a deep breath he can't ignore that the room smells like a boozer, sour alcohol mixed with stale cigarette smoke and male sweat. Timmy walks over to the window, pulls the curtains back and opens it. Fresh air hits him and he just stands there, looking over the terracotta roofs of Crema. The view reminds him of a postcard.

'Cor Cordium', he thinks before turning around. He carefully covers Armie with the duvet before searching through the drawers in the bathroom. It takes him a while to find simple paracetamol among the assorted pills in Armie's possession. A few names he recognizes: Xanax, Ativan. He once got a prescription for the former but it didn't just numb his fears but all his feelings and he found that unacceptable as an actor. The thought brings back a line from a film he did last year and he smiles at the memory. Easier times.

When he gingerly picks up his filthy trousers to put them in the washing machine he almost throws up himself.

He returns with the painkillers to the bedroom and places them next to the water bottle on the nightstand. Armie's still fast asleep.

Next, Timmy wanders over into the kitchenette and opens the fridge. Eggs, chicken breast, salad. No bread, no cereals, not even milk. He sighs.

The Italian espresso maker frightens him so he decides against brewing coffee.

What is he supposed to do? He wants something to eat, preferable something sweet and cream-filled, a strong, sweet coffee, clean clothes. He wants to brush his teeth, shower. He wants to be as far away as possible from Armie and the talk they will have to have when he awakes.

Yet he stays put, playing with his phone, sending texts to his mum, his agent, Pauline. Nothing personal, just a 'Hello, I'm fine, what's up?'
“Hey...,” it's a deep groan that makes Timmy raise his head. Armie is leaning in the doorframe and looks like he really needs the support to keep upright. “Watcha...?” He makes a face.” God, something died in my mouth.” He coughs and stumbles into the bathroom. Timmy hears water running and more sighs of pain.

“I put paracetamol next to the bed.” He shouts.

“You're an angel, my savior. Oh god, my head... I'm dying.” Armie stumbles past him and falls back into bed. Timmy follows him into the bedroom. As there's nowhere to sit he lowers himself onto the very edge of the mattress near the foot.

“We need to talk.” Why does he suddenly feel like he's the grown-up here?

Armie just grunts, shakes his head and grunts some more. “Can't.” His head is buried in the pillows.

Sudden anger wells up in Timmy. “Fuck, I mopped up your sick last night and slept on your fucking couch, almost breaking my back while you were snoring in here, Rhodes drunk. Now take those fucking painkillers, put some clothes on and get your sorry ass outa here because We.Need.To.Talk.” Timmy hurls the bottle of pills at Armie, not caring for hitting him in the face with it, and storms out, banging the door shut in his wake.

He lights up one of Armie's cigarettes, not bothering to lean out of the window, and smokes it down to the filter. He's about to shake another one from the packet when the bedroom door opens. Armie still looks like shit but at least he's dressed in sweat pants and a hoodie.

Timmy puts the cigarettes down as Armie sits next to him. It's too close for his liking and he scoots back, pulling the blanket over his bare legs.

Armie frowns.

“Everything alright?” He asks, his voice still hoarse from sleep, drink, smoking too much and throwing up.

“No!” Timmy hisses back and Armie sighs.

“That your idea of having a talk?” He rakes his hand through his tousled blond hair and closes his bloodshot eyes for a moment. When he opens them again he turns and looks Timmy square in the face with resigned acceptance. “Okay, what did I do?”

Timmy can't believe it. “Don't you remember?”

Armie just shrugs and shakes his head, trying for a weary smile. Timmy doesn't think this is funny.

“The baby?”

It's fascinating to watch Armie's face fall and crumble. He looks like he's been hit by the metaphorical bus.

“Ah, I see, at least something's coming back...”

“Tim, I'm sorry, but I'm really not in the condition to discuss this with you right now.”

“You are not in the condition...! You are not...,” Tim realizes he's yelling but he can't stop himself. This is just too much. “Fuck you, Armie, just fuck you!” Tim throws the blanket away and jumps to his feet, giving the coffee table a good kicking. Cigarettes, the ashtray, his mobile phone shatter to
the floor but he doesn't care. “You were perfectly fine to come over to my place last night and break this news to me. You didn't give a fuck about my 'condition' then. And afterwards you went on a fucking bender with your new buddies or so Ferdinando told me, celebrating! While I was... never mind. Just never mind! You don't... anyway. Never!” The coffee table gets another kick for good measure. God, Timmy's so angry he really wants to smash something. He's aware he's not making much sense but he simply has to vent. “Just fuck off! Leave me the fuck alone!” He screams on the top of his lungs so it truly registers with Armie that he's livid.

“You know that this is my apartment, right?” Armie's so fucking calm, no emotion showing on his face while Timmy hurls abuse and accusations at him that it makes Timmy physically sick. He feels like his head might explode with white, hot anger any second now. He balls his hands into fists. He wants to shake up Armie's composure, physically hurt him, not just kick about inanimate objects.

There's a picture of Harper sitting on the sideboard, just within his reach.

He grabs it and turns it in his hand so that his daughter's laughing face is looking right at Armie

“Fuck you, Armie Hammer.” He hauls the wooden frame at Armie, hitting him square in the chest with it. “I don't want you anymore.” He huffs out and realizes that he's on the brink of tears. He doesn't care. The frame falls onto the floor, the glass shattering.

Armie doesn't get up to hug him, to comfort him. Armie doesn't say he's sorry. He just very carefully picks up his daughter's photograph and places it on the now empty coffee table. All he says is: “Okay.”

Timmy discovers the true meaning of feeling pole-axed. He starts to shiver all over. “Okay? That's all you have for me?”

Armie looks up at him from tired eyes. “What else is there to say? You don't want this anymore, you said so yourself. Just get dressed and leave. Don't be so dramatic.”

Timmy bites his lip and shakes his head. Cold black contempt replaces the white hot anger, settling in his chest, making a home in his heart. “I would love to.” He bites out. “But you vomited all over my pants last night. Don't you remember? You were so fucking sad, Armie, crawling around on all fours, almost falling into your own sick...”

Armie gets up while Timmy is still talking and walks back into the bedroom. He emerges only a moment later and throws a pair of sweat-pants at Timmy – the ones he wore for jogging last Sunday. Just a week ago.

“You said you love me.” Timmy grabs the fabric so tight his knuckles go white.

Armie's face stays blank. “I was drunk. I get sentimental.”

His indifference hurts even more than all his drunken confessions. “You are such a hypocrite, Armie Hammer.” Timmy whispers.

Armie just shrugs. “What do you want from me, Tim?”

“A reaction. A normal, human, emotional reaction to what's happening between us!”

“And what's that? I don't even know what we're fighting over. You're just screaming and not making sense. You want to leave but you're still here. Just... grow up, kiddo! That's what adults do. They have a bit of fun and when it's over, it's over. No need to raise a hue and cry.”
The blackness floods Timmy's body like lead. His arms and legs suddenly feel too heavy. He can't move. Until his legs give out and he crashes to the floor, only bracing his fall with his outstretched hands, still clasping the sweat-pants. His limbs tingle. He can't breathe.

“A bag...,” he presses out between clenched teeth before his vision blurs.

Suddenly his face is covered with something. He starts to panic but then his breathing slowly evens out. There's an arm around his back, holding him. It feels... good.

“Hey, Tim. Tim. You with me?”

Timmy coughs. His head swims.

“Can we maybe start over?” Armie asks and his soft lips graze Timmy's ear.

All Timmy can do is nod.

Armie can look back on many disastrous hung-over mornings but this one tops them all – even the one when he woke up in a Russian hospital with a splint supporting his broken wrist.

Liz had been furious back then – but she didn't break down hyperventilating like Tim did.

During their fight, all Armie is able to think is 'You knew it. You knew this would happen. Look at him. Just look at him and face what you did.'

When Tim throws the photo of Hops he keeps on the sideboard his heart skips a beat. The phantom pain spreading through his body from the place of impact is almost too much, freezing him, bringing back memories of past hurt.

The inevitability of him ruining everything overwhelms him with a force he's almost unable to control.

But he can't break down now. Men don't cry. Only a man-child like Tim can get away with it.

'Man up!' a familiar voice chides him in his head. 'You did that! Crying doesn't help. It's time you learn responsibility.'

Armie is borderline aware that he's zoning out but can't help it. The voice is just too loud. He answers Tim's raging on autopilot while his thougts travel back into the past...

He'd been thirteen. They'd just moved to LA. New school, no friends and he was the odd one out with his too long hair and strange taste in music. So he'd started to sell Playboy at his Christian school to get a bit more popular. The magazines had sold like hot cakes until a teacher had found out.

The dressing down from his mother that had followed had been epic. She'd called Armie into his father's study where she presented him with a stack of the magazines in question, showing them to his father page by page, reading the mildly lewd texts out loud. While Armie had to stand there and listen, blushing furiously, wishing for the earth to swallow him whole.

“Why, Armand?” Was all she'd asked afterwards.

He'd shrugged. “I have no friends. I thought they might like me.”

“We enrolled you at a Christian school and you think you'll find friends there by selling these satanic,
pornographic works?"

"If you only knew," he'd thought but had kept his mouth shut. He'd learned his lesson by then. His parents had no idea what had been going on.

"Don't you think you should be ashamed and ask for forgiveness?"

"Sorry." Armie had offered. He hadn't known what else they'd wanted to hear.

His father had sighed. "We decided to take back your privileges. No books but the bible. No TV. No cinema. No going out after school. You come straight back home. And you stay home during the weekend, except for church. You'll hand your mother your Discman."

"What?" Armie's already small world had just shrunken even further. They couldn't do that!

"You heard me. Now let's pray."

Armie had stood there, angry tears welling up in his eyes. In that moment, he'd hated his parents – and himself for hating them.

"Stop crying. Boys don't cry. It's your own fault. You will thank us. Later."

He never did. He just hardened his heart, built up higher walls and started to lead a double-life.

Later, his mother had told him to thank her for saving his soul when they had turned his room out and removed all books and CDs. For the rest of the school year, they'd read the bible together in the afternoons, and Armie had to ask daily if he'd been allowed to get his stuff back, followed by a detailed rendition why his things had been removed in the first place and why his vile behavior demanded these action for which he had to say he was grateful.

The bullying in school had continued. As he had no friends there was no one to hang out with anyway after school and on weekends. But it hadn't just ended with name-calling, blanking, stealing his pens and tearing up his homework.

It had gotten violent.

But when he'd come home with his blazer soiled and his shirt torn, a bloodied nose and bruises on his legs all his mother had done was admonish him for getting into fights.

"It's not my fault, they hate me!" He'd started to cry despite knowing that it was no use.

"No shouting, young man! I'm sure it's your own fault when you don't fit in. Stop crying. Let's pray for you."

And Armie had to sit next to her, listening as she had told her god all about his shortcomings as a son, brother, pupil and human being in general...

'It's your own fault... it's your own fault...' because he's bad and worthless and an utter disappointment...

He slowly comes back to the here and now and puts the broken frame of his daughter's pic on the small table Tim just kicked. He feels cold and numb all over, like he did back as a teenager when all he'd needed would have been a little support and understanding, a warm word, a hug… but all he had gotten had been rebuke after rebuke until he'd decided to shut down completely. Not to feel anything proved to be preferable to feel like shit all the time.
Tim is still furious but Armie can't process it. All Armie can do is give him some clothes to make him leave. His head hurts and his whole body aches. He's unable to face Tim, to deal with his emotions, his anger, his hatred, his frustration... because he knows he deserves it all. And there's nothing he can do, no condolence he can offer because it wouldn't make any difference... this could never work out, not with Armie so emotionally crippled he doesn't even feel happy in the face of having another child.

Tim just has to suck it up and accept the inevitable. Armie can't give him what he needs and deserves.

"You said you love me."

The words hurt more than Tim can imagine. Because why is the boy lying? Armie knows he can be an asshole but even he wouldn't do such a cruel thing to Tim as pretending to love him and blurt out a drunken confession. So, why does Tim debase himself this much and retort to such a blatant dirty lie? Why doesn't he get the fuck out of here like he said he wanted? Why does he have to twist the knife and go for emotional guilt-tripping, knowing that Armie can't remember and will probably believe him, feeling even worse?

Does he really want to hear Armie say it? Because with his slushy story Tim is outright forcing Armie to tell it to his beautiful face that this is utter bullshit. Armie might be fucked up but he'll be damned if he admits anything as enormous as being in love with Tim, even less if Tim tries to emotionally blackmail him.

For Tim's sake, Armie tries to soften the blow though, not outright denying it but finding an excuse that allows Tim to save his face. The boy is visibly upset. No need to humiliate him further by calling him out on his attempt at sly manipulation. What good can come of that?

Armie doesn't understand that Tim's still here. What does he want? Armie's at a loss here. What does it matter how he feels? It won't be enough. He won't be enough. Not for Tim.

Tim should just go - back to his apartment, his life, his freedom, his family, his friends.

But instead of leaving Armie to wallow in his misery and self-loathing the boy breaks down completely.

Fuck!

Armie gets a bag from the kitchen before Tim has asked for it, crouches down next to him and presses it over his mouth, holding Tim upright around his middle until he can feel his breathing slowing down.

He's so fragile in his arms, literally shaking. Armie can't let him go like this. Perhaps Tim's right and they really should talk some more.

They have to shoot this movie for five long weeks to come. Together. And what they did so far seems worth the effort.

“Can we maybe start over?” Armie asks, not hoping for a second chance with Tim or being forgiven. But he has to know what happened last night and try to set the record straight.

Going by Tim’s reaction and incoherent accusations he fucked up. Royally.

All he wants is a clean slate to be able to continue working on their film. He sees now that letting Tim into his world, sleeping with him, opening up has been a big mistake.
Yet somehow he can’t bring himself to wish he hadn’t.

Armie helps Tim back onto the sofa and gets him some water before asking: “Better now?”
“I'm really sorry, Tim. I must have behaved like a total dick last night. Can you please tell me what exactly I did? Because I truly can't remember much.” Armie is sitting next to Timmy on the couch, holding his head in his hand, looking miserable.

Timmy drinks some water then offers the bottle to Armie who takes it and eagerly downs half of it.

“You barged into my apartment last night and told me Liz was pregnant.” Timmy tries to suppress his feelings as best he can. Well, truth be told, he's still not sure how to feel about these news. Initially, he was just shocked and overwhelmed. But now guilt starts to well up inside him because he's so selfish – Armie 's having a baby, he should be happy for him. Only, Armie didn't seem very happy himself...

“Yes, I remember that... I think.” Armie sounds vaguely embarrassed.

Timmy balls his fists. “We had agreed that I would call you but you just... waltzed into my place and confronted me with these immense news. It was a bit much.” Timmy doesn't look at Armie but stares down at his bare feet.

“I'm sorry. I might have reacted a bit out of turn. Well, Liz... shit, I shouldn't put all of this on your shoulders. But the way you left yesterday afternoon... I'm so sorry, Tim, I don't want to hurt you but... fuck, you knew I'm married. I have to take her calls. It could be something with Hops.”

Timmy gives a small nod, bows down and gets the ashtray and Armie's cigarettes that have been lying on the floor. He lights one up and takes a deep drag.

“Yeah, sure. Sorry. But I just... maybe it was good to get that reminder. It's just... us and that movie... it feels... I don't know. I don't want to pester you, get clingy or anything. But I like to be with you.” Timmy takes another drag and follows the smoke with his eyes.

He hears Armie sigh but doesn't dare to look.

“And I like to be with you. But I can't ignore my other responsibilities.”

“Did you try for another baby?” Timmy knows the question is inquisitive as fuck but he has to know.

Armie huffs out a small, humorless laugh. “I didn't even really want Hops. Don't get me wrong, I
love my daughter but honestly, I never wanted children. My own father was never really present and my mother was... is... never mind. But after four years Liz put her foot down. She was over thirty by then and didn't want to wait any longer.”

Timmy knows he has to be careful with what he says. “She doesn't strike me as the particularly motherly type.”

“Oh, she's a dedicated mother. She wants the best for Hops.” There’s something in Armie's tone that makes Timmy wonder what Armie exactly means by this but it's none of his business how the Hammers raise their child. Children, soon.

“And now there's number two on its way...,” Timmy tries to sound cheerful.

Armie is quiet for a moment. “You know, I think it's good for Harper to have a sibling. I really do. But it's not... Liz and I didn't talk about this. I thought she was on the pill.” He shrugs, a little helpless gesture that makes Timmy's heart contract in sympathy.

“I'm a little brother. It's good to have a big sister.” He smiles when he thinks of Pauline and how she'd beaten up the nasty boy next door who'd always called him names in pre-school.

“Yeah, I think it's good for children not to just be surrounded by adults. Still... I'd wished Liz had talked to me about it before... but she said I was basically never there anyway...,” Armie sounds hurt.

“I think you are a great dad. From what I've seen.” Timmy smiles at him.

“Yeah, a great dad who cheats on his kid's mother.”

Timmy swallows. “With me, for example.”

“Shit... yeah, sorry... I'm still fucking hung-over. Don't take me serious.” Armie takes another sip from the water-bottle.

Timmy feels embarrassed, even more so by the too transparent subterfuge.

“Listen, with the new baby on the way we should probably stop this. It was nice but... I don't think I can deal with all of this.” Timmy makes a wide gesture, encompassing Armie, his apartment, Crema.

“What do you mean?”

What does he mean? He tries to explain: “The guilt. All the feelings. I don't want to steal you away from your family. Liz needs you. Hops needs you. I could forget about them for a while but now it's just... too much. Too real. There are people drawn into this who don't have a choice.” ‘I just can’t deal with my jealousy,’ Timmy thinks but he would rather swallow his tongue before admitting that out loud.

Armie is silent for a long time. Timmy has no idea what he's thinking. His face has gone utterly blank. Timmy hates him like this. It's like the Armie he knows is disappearing.

When he eventually speaks there's a raw honesty in his tone that Timmy has never heard before. “I've lived so long with guilt and shame and self-loathing that I became numb. Then I met you. Right now, you’re the only good thing in my life. Just because of the baby... nothing needs to change, you know?”

Timmy doesn’t want to hear things like that. Not when he’s ripping his own heart out here, trying to do the right thing. This is not helping. He shakes his head vigorously. “Don't say that, man. You've
got a lovely daughter. And soon another lovely kid who needs you. Besides, this was never going to last.”

Armie reaches for the cigarettes. “But I'm fucking scared. Doing this movie, with you, and then a new kid... god, I can't handle all of this. I need you!”

“You need to talk to your wife.” Timmy bites out.

“As if that would help!” Armie sounds so bitter it makes Timmy's stomach lurch. “'Hey, wife, I'm kinda into dudes, you know, like massive. You cool with that?”

“Maybe she is.”

“You don't know her.” Armie shakes his head and lights his cigarette. He coughs and stubs it out almost immediately, making a disgusted face. Timmy isn't sure it's just because of the acrid smoke.

“If she truly loves you she'll understand. She'll want the best for you.” ‘Like I do,’ he adds silently. ‘That’s why I’m letting you go.’ “You can figure it out, together.”

“God, you are such a romantic.” Armie looks at him and sighs. “Married life is nothing like that, you know. Most of the time we're just trying and failing to align our schedules, me filming and Liz working or attending some charity or PR event. We've lost touch years ago. We hardly see each other.”

“Well, you saw her long enough to make another baby.” Timmy knows he shouldn't have said it the moment the words leave his mouth. “Fuck, sorry.”

Armie's gaze suddenly becomes razor-sharp. He frowns. “Are you jealous? Why would you be jealous? You came up with this whole friends with benefits thing. You told me you weren’t looking for anything serious... Tim, what's going on here?”

Shit!

“I'm sorry, Armie, I think I should go. This leads nowhere. We are just hurting each other and I don't think either of us needs more of that.” He gets up and looks where he dropped the sweat-pants.

“You didn't answer my question.” Armie reaches for him but Timmy steps back.

Armie stares up at him, his head tilted to the side. There is something in his eyes that makes Timmy's skin tingle all over. He has to get out of here. As a last resort, he switches into attack mode.

“And you didn’t answer mine: Why did you say you loved me last night? And don't tell me it was because you were drunk. I bet you don't even remember it. Do you remember that you tried to fuck me even you were so wasted you couldn't stand on your own two feet? Come on, Armie, you are just an asshole, toying with me. And I'm...I can't... that's not..." Fuck, he's about to say too much, again. “I need to go.”

He pulls on the sweat-pants and grabs his phone while Armie watches, not trying to interrupt again. He blushed at Timmy's words but stays silent. Only when Timmy makes his way for the door does Armie seem to wake up from his stasis.

“Are you in love with me, Tim?” He asks.

Timmy spins round, suddenly livid again. Why is Armie hurting him like that? Why can't he stop playing with him and let him go? “No! Just shut the fuck up, will you? All you wanna do is fuck me.
Give me at least the courtesy to be honest with me. You can, you know, with me.” He's fuming. Now it might actually be him who'll vomit onto the floor if Armie says another word. He already feels bile rising in his throat.

Armie doesn't seem to listen. “Tim.” He whispers.

Timmy's sick of it. Where does this sudden hatred come from, he wonders? That's not who he is. Yet he can't help it. “You wouldn't know what love is if it kicked you in the face, Armie Hammer. Just spare me, okay? I'm not... I'm not drowning in my own self-pity.”

Armie's face hardens, his eyes going tight. “No, of course not. Tell me, why do you cut yourself like a pathetic teenage girl? Are you that desperate for attention?”

Timmy doesn't wait to answer. He slams the door shut behind himself as he outright flees from Armie's apartment.

God, how did they end up in this mess?

Back in his own apartment, he goes straight for the kitchen drawer.

Armie's words still echo on his head: pathetic… desperate for attention…

Yeah, he knows. HE KNOWS! No need to rub it in. He has everything: a loving family, parents still married, reasonably well-off, he and Pauline are thick as thieves, good friends, he went to a great school, got into Columbia, everyone says he’s got talent, he’s making movies… so why the fuck can’t he be happy?

He has no right, NO RIGHT to be this sad! No one ever abused him – neither physically nor sexually. He’s never lacked anything: not food, not money, not opportunity. His family has always supported him. There would be no drama if he decided he was into men, or bisexual. He can always talk to his friends, to Pauline…

Then why the fuck does he sit in this bathroom with a knife, slashing his skin open until it bleeds? Why does he crave the pain to drown out this bone-deep sorrow that never really goes away? Where does this hollow despair come from that threatens sometimes to swallow him whole? There’s no reason why he shouldn’t be content. Everyone else would be so grateful for what he has…

Yep, it must be that he’s an attention whore. He knows he’s loved, that there are many people who deeply care for him, but that’s just not enough for him it seems. And that makes him unworthy of this love, support and adoration. If these people knew who he really was – a wretched little poser with not enough talent or good looks to really make the cut – wouldn’t they be disappointed? Of course, they would.

They only like him because they think he’s special. But they’ll eventually find out. And then their contempt will be bottomless. They’ll accuse him of lying, shaming...

And that can’t be. Better make himself hurt than others. Timmy's punishing himself for being the mediocre liar he is so others don't have to. Better be a disappointment to himself than to his family and friends.

Because he actually stopped for years. He didn't do it since his graduation… or maybe there was one relapse when he was about to enter College… but he had a grip on it. This. He forces himself to think the word: self-harm. It hadn’t been that bad for a long time, not since he’d been maybe thirteen or fourteen when he did it almost every day.
It had actually been Pauline who introduced him to cutting. She’d told him of a class-mate who did it. She’d been shocked but Timmy had been morbidly fascinated.

He’d taken one of his dad’s razor blades that night and tried it. Just a thin cut high on the inside of his upper arm so that it would be covered by his t-shirt.

The first two or three seconds, nothing had happened when he’d slid the blade over his skin. He’d thought he’d missed and had been about to do it again when the first rivulet of blood had welled up. It had been more than he’d anticipated and he had to press a bunch of tissues against the cut to soak up all the blood. When his mother had seen them the next morning in his waste paper basket he’d told her he’d had a nosebleed. The cut had also been deeper than he’d thought and had burned – for days.

Just touching it had brought him a strange sense of pride.

This was his secret. It was a bad thing to do. And he did it anyway. He was able to endure the pain. It felt… good. It made him something truly special. This was something he really excelled at, enduring pain, even self-inflicting it. He could see the physical manifestations of his fears in the cuts and that somehow helped him to acknowledge them.

Yet he knew that no-one would understand. So he kept it to himself. This was his ritual and his alone. It grounded him, it transformed the anxiety and sadness into something that would eventually go away as the cuts healed: pain. And maybe, just maybe, as the ache decreased and his wounds became numb scars this could happen to the anxiety and sadness as well? He’d never know if he didn’t try again and again and again…

This time, he only stops when the pale yellow towel he sits on is drenched in blood and the upper insides of both his left and right thigh look like he put them through a meat grinder.

He’s not crying. He doesn’t even feel much pain anymore. He grins. He’s strong. He’s special. He’s not worthy of being loved or experiencing love but he’s able to endure this, to do it to himself even, destroy his body bit by bit and when they say love hurts – isn’t what he’s doing the next best thing? If there’s no love for him than at least there’s pain – the bright hot pain of cutting, preferable to the dark, cold fears that possess him: that others might see, might know, might find out the fraud he is…

Armie has seen. Armie knows. He’d still fucked him. Maybe that’s all the ‘love’ he’ll ever get, being someone’s fuckboy, so he really shouldn’t expect more and get used to it.

As he stumbles to his feet to get the antiseptic wipes the pain floods his body like a drug.

He suddenly wishes he had taken some of Armie's pills with him.

^^^^^^^^

Fuck!

What did just happen?

It must be the hang-over. Surely he's still drunk. His defenses are down. And Tim exploited the fact, finding his weakest spot, twisting the knife, playing jealous. Even shaming being in love. Why?

Armie's been truly shocked by Tim's sudden cruel lashing out after they had maybe their first honest talk since starting this. Is this the real Tim? Not the sensitive, intelligent, beautiful boy Armie thought he knew but this vicious, devious, false snake that had wormed his way into Armie's bed?
What is going on here? What game is Tim playing? Why did he break down only to push Armie away and remind him of his responsibilities, even calling their affair off... and then got jealous and started throwing insults?

Oh! But this is textbook, isn't it? He's been with Liz long enough to know these wicked games. Show vulnerability, then generously offer retreat only to make a romantic fool apologize and fight for you. If he does, pull back, play hard to get; it usually gets your prey - hook, line and sinker.

God, what an idiot Tim must think he is! He's been so blind!

Armie's absolutely sure that he's never told Tim that he loves him. That boy is just a cunning little shit. And his lies prove it. Armie now sees it. It wasn't desperation or true affection that made Tim lie – no, he was trying to manipulate Armie, forcing him to admit something he could use against him later.

Did he really think Armie would fall for this? If so, he's surely underestimating Armie. He's used to spotting gold diggers basically since the day he was born.

Now, with Tim, it might not be money. But connections. Armie is – despite all his flops – established in Hollywood, well connected... just what an up and coming theater kid from New York would need to get a foot in the door.

Was he going for emotional blackmail or just outright blackmail? Lure Armie in with his innocent looks, fragile smiles and the awful cutting, or would he in the end have resorted to threaten to expose Armie's sexual proclivities and ... lets call it bathroom habits?

Well, he did once already, didn't he? Didn't Tim threaten him to talk to Luca and Liz?

Had the sexy pic he'd send him while Armie was cruising in Milan been an invitation to send a dick pic in return? Would that have been the ultimate leverage? Armie's now glad that he went for a prostitute that night. Who knows if he hadn't played right in to Tim's hands otherwise.

God, he'd been so naive in his hormone-enduced state of horniness!

He laughs at himself when he remembers how he'd enjoyed being with Tim, taking him apart, believing they were truly engaging in something meaningful. That this was something special. That Tim liked what they did as much as Armie did.

It had all been an act. A lie.

Even his carefully displayed jealousy had just been a charade to draw Armie out. Tim had promised him what he craved – true intimacy – given him a glimpse of it, dangled it in front of his face just to withdraw it when he'd known Armie was hooked. He'd thought he could play him. It's suddenly so obvious.

But thank god Armie had been smart enough to spot where this was going before he made a big mistake.

As if he would tell Tim he was in love with him!? That's just... no.

Armie sits there for a long time, remembering all the things he and Tim shared, picking them apart.

Tim in his lap during their first rehearsal – a sham. Tim on the bed next to him, wet, grabbing his cock - a sham. Tim, tied up and wide-eyed – a sham. Tim on his knees – a sham. Tim – just a sham.
That little fucker will reap what he'd sowed.

Armie forces himself to get up from the couch to make some coffee. Then he calls his agent.

“Listen, you know I had my doubts about this project. How's the financing of this film? Is it secure? - Yeah, I thought so. - No, I'll talk to Luca. Yeah, and James and Howard, maybe. Thanks, man.”

Half an hour later he's on his way to Luca. His director looks actually rather surprised to get a visit from his leading man at ten on a Sunday morning.

“Armie, caro mio, what is it? How are you? Ferdinando told me you were partying hard last night. Congratulazioni, by the way. I heard there's another baby on the way.”

Armie hugs Luca back and allows himself to be ushered into the kitchen. There's breakfast laid out. Armie just accepts an espresso. Ferdinando gathers the Corriere della Sera and leaves them alone after giving Armie an unreadable nod.

“Is he still angry with me?”

“He had to search for you all about town. Timothèe was really anxious.”

“Was he?” He can't quite hide the bitterness in his voice.

Luca raises his eyebrows. “What's that supposed to mean? He was worried.”

“Yeah. Sure. Whatever.”

Luca gives him a strange look. “Armie, when he came here he was very confused. Upset. He told us you two had a fight. We decided you should talk it over here, with me, so Ferdinando went to fetch you but your weren't at Timothèe's and you weren't at you apartment so he searched for you all night while Timothèe waited at your flat should you return home. Ferdinando told me he found you quite drunk and brought you home where Timothèe took over. So, did you talk?”

Armie stares at Luca in disbelieve and shakes his head. “I'm not a little kid, you know. When I decide to go on a bender to celebrate on my weekend off that's none of your business.”

Luca sighs and Armie suddenly feels reprimanded like a little kid. “You know the movie stands and falls with your and Thimothèe's connection. And that connection seems to have been disturbed. Heavily. So I took action. To save my film. Our film.”

“What did Tim tell you?” Armie narrows his eyes as he tries to access how much Luca knows.

“Armie, he doesn't have to tell me anything. I'm not blind.”

Armie tries to school his face into a stony mask. “Meaning?”

“Meaning it's obvious that you like each other. But that's nobody's business but yours and Timothèe's. Just, remember this is no vacation. This is work. Our work.”

“Yeah, that's actually why I came. My agent tells me that the movie isn't fully financed yet.”

Luca looks him straight in the eye. “Meaning?” He echos Armie's words.

Okay, he wants to do it the hard way. “I am not a charity. I have a family to support. A growing family. I got an offer for a project. Weinstein Company, with Dev Patel. They want me as soon as possible.”
“So you want to quit here, is that it?” Luca asks mildly, sounding not in the least put out. It irritates Armie more than if he’d started yelling at him.

“Listen, Luca, I told you I was unsure about this movie from the start. It's just... so intimate. It requires a much better actor than me. And it's still early on, you can reshoot my few scenes easily. Only, that Weinstein movie sounds like a pretty good chance, it's the stuff I'm used to and people want to see me in. And for our movie here... there's not even a distributor yet and no money...” He trails off. He knows he's rambling. Luca just looks at him, friendly and kind, a small smile on his face.

“Was the fight that bad that you just want to run away? Is that how you do it?”

Armie feels totally disarmed. His mouth is dry. He's run out of words.

“You are my Oliver.” Luca continues. “Obviously, I can't keep you against your will. And it's true, I can't pay you right now. Nor Timothèe. But you are not here because of the money. You are here because this is something people are not used to see you in. You are here to act. I understand this is terrifying. But believe me, I saw you the first week, we all did, caro mio. You are Oliver.”

Armie looks away and shakes his head in helpless denial.

“I'm not asking you to tell me what happened between you and Timothèe. You are adults and can figure it out between you. I only think, as an actor, you need this film, to grow, to learn, to fight your fear. I don't know what's going on with Timothèe. Maybe you are adjusting and it was all a bit much. Give it time, a few days, see how filming works tomorrow. I don't believe you when you say you want to leave.”

Armie sighs. Shit, Luca knows him too well already. No, he doesn't want to leave. But. “We said horrible things to each other, Luca. I don't know how we can ever work together again.” He buries his head in his hands and is surprised when he feels Luca pull him in, hugging him.

“You know, during filming 'Fitzceraldo', director Werner Herzog threatened his leading man Klaus Kinski with a loaded shotgun. Yet they finished that film and made another one together afterwards. Great films. So, tell me, were weapons involved in your fight with Timothèe? No? Then I don't see why you two shouldn't be able to work together.”

Armie wants to say something but Luca just hugs him tighter. “No, don't argue with me. We are artists. Tempers are flying high. This is an intense experience. Go with it. Don't hold back. You are playing the golden boy but we both know that Oliver isn't like that. And you aren't like that either. There is darkness. Accept it. Use it. Now, go home, call your lovely wife, eat, drink, sleep. I see you tomorrow on set.”

Armie feels dizzy when he leaves. He wonders why it had been so easy for Luca to talk him round. He still has no idea how to face Tim tomorrow on set. But he calls his agent anyway and tells him that he won't be free for the Dev Patel movie till mid-June when they are supposed to wrap here.

His agent grumbles but promises to do his best.

So, as he's apparently stuck here for five more weeks, Armie decides to bike over to Via Vai to have an extensive lunch bordering on gluttony.

He brings it up later at night in his bathroom. But, fuck it, eating all this stuff has taken his mind off Tim for at least a few hours. That's worth a little retching.

Afterwards, he's so tired that he just falls asleep, all fear and hate drowned out by sheer exhaustion.
He dreams of Elio, though, stealing glances at Oliver, who is and isn't him. He can't decide if these looks are sly or soulful. But then Elio jumps into the pool and doesn't surface again and Armie dives and dives but can't find Tim, fighting for breath, his lungs burning - until he wakes, sweaty, panting, entangled in the sheets that still smell of Tim.

Despite all he knows now – he misses him so much it hurts.
Chapter Summary

...because if you shoot this kind of movie together and you have this attraction between you - you can't stay apart.

This chapter features the famous piano scene and it's infamous preparation as disclosed by Timothée in the DVD commentary.

Chapter Notes

Title's from a song by The Cure, released in the mid-eighties :)

One of the first things Timmy had learned when he'd enrolled at LaGuardia was that no matter what, the show must go on. It's the prime directive of their profession.

He's under contract here.

Yet all he wants to do is stay in bed forever when he wakes on Monday morning. The sun's too bright for his still somber mood, its rays catching in the beads of the bracelet Armie has given him that sits on his nightstand. It glows like a dark rainbow.

Timmy takes it and runs the cool, smooth beads through his fingers. It must have been fucking expensive. He should give it back.

He doesn't want to remember what the bracelet implied. Trust. A bond.

Love?

He can't think about this right now. It hurts. More than his cuts. The memory of these words falling from Armie's lips, spoken almost carelessly, just to get him into bed...

No!

He doesn't want to go back to that dark place. There's only sorrow and ache waiting for him. He did what he had to do to carve his stupid feelings out.

He's calm now. This is all behind him. He's over it. He paid his pound of flesh – and blood – and now he is absolved.

There are always sacrifices to be made. He should have known.

Thinking about Armie makes him nervous. For practical reasons. Should he apologize for what he said? He doesn't feel responsible for their fight but maybe it's expected off him? He's the younger. Armie has first billing. The hierarchy is clear.
Timmy wonders how it'll be on set. Will Armie try to go on as if nothing happened or will he totally blank Timmy? He tries to figure out a strategy as he rolls over... fuck, the cuts hurt!

He comes to the conclusion that he'll see what happens on set and to decide there and then as he eventually heaves himself out of bed, stumbling into the shower. It's a bit tricky afterwards to apply the new dressings to his lashes so they don't appear to bulk or show beneath the swim shorts he'll have to wear today but he eventually manages.

He makes a mental note to find a pharmacy to stock up on his supplies.

They'll be shooting at the Villa Albergoni again. As the weather seems to hold, Luca has decided to film as many outdoor scenes as possible over the next few days.

At first, it's mortifying, being near to Armie after what has happened between them. He's already on set when Timmy arrives, sitting at the dining table under the trees, smoking and marking his script.

He doesn't look up to greet Timmy, looking for all the world concentrating on his lines, deep in thought. But Timmy sees Armie's grip tighten on his pencil and knows his entrance registered.

Getting the message, he turns the other way to find their director or the AD. His fingers play with the bracelet he's stuffed into the pocket of his jeans.

All Timmy can do is try to be as professional as possible. He had to work with assholes before.

Only then, he hadn't slept with them.

When Luca gathers the crew around to explain the schedule and hand out the call sheets, Timmy keeps as far away from Armie as physically possible to still hear Luca's words. Their off-screen exchanges stay stiff and uncomfortable over the next hours until they both seem to decide to cut the crap altogether and completely cease to communicate outside shooting or preparation.

It doesn't ease the tension between them that Armie and Timmy have to spend all of Monday in or around the freezing water of the pool in the garden of the Villa, filming different scenes between Elio and Oliver.

Timmy's cuts hurt like hell. But at least he's allowed to change into the bathing trunks alone, without a costume assistant. No-one sees the slashes. And if he hisses when he dives into the pool it can be attributed to the icy water.

He immerses himself in Elio, who pines for Oliver. Oliver. NOT Armie.

“So you won't tell me?”

“So I won't tell you.”

Oliver is insecure, but out of shyness. He's kind and loving beneath his aloof exterior. And Armie? Timmy can't decide but somehow doubts it matters any longer.

For the film's sake Timmy has to swallow his pride. The cold water helps at least to cool his mood.

“So does he speak?” Armie asks.

“No, he fudges.” Timmy replies, and is glad he can hide behind his shades.

Elio and Oliver are at a stage in their relationship where they pretend to ignore each other and Elio at some point even hates the charming American, wishing him dead, so it's not an outright problem that
the sparks obviously don't fly between them like during the first week.

But Luca isn't happy.

“No. Were is your connection?” He asks both of them. Timmy stares into the distance just above Armie's right shoulder.

In the next take, he improvises, letting out some of his pent-up frustration in a cruel mocking of Oliver's American accent. Armie isn't amused but Luca likes it.

“Does this make any sense to you? It doesn't make any sense to me.”

Timmy just stares down at Armie and misses his cue, his mind completely blank.

“Sorry.” He mumbles.

Now Armie's sunglasses hide his eyes.

In the evening they all part and go their separate ways. Timmy's mentally exhausted but also kind of glad that he managed. One day at a time he tells himself. If he made it through today he'll very likely make it through tomorrow as well. Armie's already gone when he's gotten dressed.

He doesn't feel like company tonight. It had been hard enough to keep up his facade during the day. He lies in bed, naked, playing with the bracelet again, staring at its reflections his bedside lamp throws onto the walls and ceiling.

It's beautiful. Timmy wonders how much it might be worth. Why would Armie...?

NO! STOP!

His cuts hurt after being in the pool all day. The cool night air is soothing. He hopes they don't get infected. He has some antiseptic lotion but it's almost empty.

He wishes he had some weed. He knows Armie has. But that is not an option.

Falling asleep, he remembers he forgot about the pharmacy. Shit. But now it's too late and he's too tired. Tomorrow then.

On Tuesday, they are at least allowed to wear some clothes as they do various shots in the garden with Michael, Amira, Vanda and Antonio.

They still don't talk during breaks. Timmy stays mostly inside as not to burn while Armie lounges outside under the trees, smoking. Timmy's thankful for the space. Their interactions prior to each scene are curt. Luca explains the blocking, they try a few times, adjust a movement, a look, then shoot.

It feels a bit strange but works surprisingly well. Timmy's getting more and more used to the distance between them. They finish early.

Luca invites them all over but Armie excuses himself. He has to talk to his wife, he says. All nod and smile and pat his back. Except Timmy, who busies himself with putting Elio's guitar away.

Somehow, it gets late at Luca's. Timmy stays on when everyone else leaves, finishing his wine. Luca looks at him while Ferdinando puts some music on – slow, classical, Timmy doesn't know it but it's nice – but doesn't say anything.
They sit together for a long time in silence, the music filling the room. When Timmy wants to refill his glass, however, Luca takes the bottle from him.

“Go to bed, tesoro. Tomorrow I need you in your best form.”

Because on Wednesday they'll shoot the grand piano seduction scene.

Back at his apartment, Timmy touches the scab covering his wounds but is proud that he can abstain from adding more. If he wears boxer-shorts tomorrow, no one will see when he changes. Yet he's tense and doesn't sleep well, tossing and turning most of the night. He has a bad dream but when he wakes he can't remember. Just the uneasy feeling lingers.

Arriving on set, he goes straight for the piano to warm up. It doesn't go well. Armie looks in on him but Timmy pretends not to notice. But then he plays another wrong note and curses. He looks up but Armie's gone.

Timmy stares down at his hands. They are trembling.

When Luca tells him he wants to film the scene in one take Timmy gets even more terrified. He has to convincingly flirt with Armie despite feeling anything but. And play Bach while doing so. If he hits a wrong key they have to start all over again, prolonging this torture. He needs to concentrate.

But that's easier said than done. Armie's already in costume, an open shirt and those short yellow trunks. It's... distracting. Even or maybe because the brooding looks Armie shoots the crew. Not Timmy, though – he's strenuously avoiding eye-contact.

That will be a hard piece of flirting today.

Timmy isn't comfortable. He just wears his loose jeans shorts (over pale blue boxers) that threaten to fall from his hips anytime he moves. Luca wants him to come over beguiling but Timmy just feels very young, vulnerable and a little ridiculous.

He's not in the right head-space to shoot this scene but what can he do? He doesn't want to be a nuisance and ask for a respite.

As it turns out, they have to wait outside on the terrace while camera, lights and sound are setting up inside. It's only eleven in the morning but it's already hot, the sun burning bright for May. Make-up is hovering over Timmy, applying bronzer, dabbing his brow, fussing with his hair so it won't be too sweaty and curly and therefore not match the previous scene.

Timmy can feel Armie watching while he smokes nearby. He can smell the tobacco and it reminds him of things he wants to forget.

As Armie makes a move to lower himself into one of those wrought-iron chairs standing around a costume assistant comes running and lets out an impatient rant in Italian, gesticulating wildly, pointing at the ironing board set up in Mafalda's kitchen.

Armie seems to eventually get it. No sitting down, otherwise his clothes would crease. Timmy smirks. But what goes for Armie goes for Tim as well. The wrought-iron chairs would leave marks on his skin.

His smirk fades as they have to wait and wait outside in the blazing sun because something isn't working inside. Everyone is starting to get agitated. The commotion spreads Something about the wrong light bulbs or the electricity or whatever. Even Luca looses his temper and yells down his phone. Usually there are people with parasols about but today everyone seems to be busy
somewhere else, trying to sort the problem out. The whole atmosphere is not really what Timmy needs to quiet his rising anxiety, especially as Armie's so close.

They sweat in silence.

The floor tiles are heating up in the Italian mid-day sun and Timmy starts to hop from on foot to the other. Fuck, where are his espadrilles?

“Stop fidgeting!” The make-up lady tells him. “You only sweat more when you jump around like this.”

“But the tiles are burning! My feet... fuck!” He's stepped on something sharp and winces, now skipping up and down on only one foot, holding the other in his hands to examine the damage until he loses his balance and threatens to crash right onto the hard ground.

It seems to play out in slow-motion and he already sees himself lying in the dirt, bleeding, his knees and elbows scraped open and how could that be concealed?

...until suddenly, mid-fall, strong arms wrap around him. Familiar arms.

Oh shit.

“Hey, careful, buddy.” Armie's mouth is so close to Timmy's ear that he can feel his breath ghosting over his hot skin. He can smell a hint of coffee on it, cigarettes... Armie.

He tries to entangle himself but the make-up lady is crouching down in front of him.

“Let me see your foot.”

She takes it in her hands and Armie holds him in his arms, pulling Timmy's back against his chest. Like a trapped animal, he freezes.

“It's not bleeding.” The woman says, releasing Timmy's foot. When he sets it onto the ground he immediately hisses.

“Come on, you can stand on my feet.” Armie's voice sounds just friendly, a little amused even. There's not even a hint of innuendo in it.

Timmy is by now so nervous and flustered that he doesn't even question Armie's offer. He just scoots back a little more, turning his feet almost into first position as he tentatively places them on Armie's instep. Armie's feet are as huge as everything with this man – the whole situation is more than a little intimidating.

But Armie just holds him like this. Somehow, his arms have wrapped around Timmy's waist and are now crossed in front of his chest. Timmy feels Armie's chin rest on the crown of his hair.

“I sometimes do this with Hops.” He murmurs. Timmy can feel his chest rumble.

“I'm not your child.” He spits out but has to admit that he feels surprisingly safe.

“I'm fully aware of that.”

Timmy realizes a little too late that mentioning kids has probably not been his smartest move.

“Sorry...,” he says, just as Armie says: “Sorry.”
They both huff out an involuntary laugh.

“Don't smudge my bronzer.” He tells Armie.

“Wouldn't dream of it.”

Timmy smiles beside his still lingering annoyance.

“This is ridiculous.”

He can feel Armie swallow. “Imagine telling someone 'Oh, yeah, and the ground was so hot Armie let me stand on his feet.'”

“This was your idea.” Timmy squeals. “Could someone maybe find my espadrilles?” But the make-up lady has wandered off to share a smoke with the costume assistant beneath the peach trees.

“You'll be fine.” Armie says, squeezing him just a little tighter. “Just relax.”

And as there's nothing else to do, Timmy does.

They stay like this for some minutes, just breathing. Armie doesn't move, doesn't make a pass on him and their close proximity isn't as daunting as Timmy had thought it would be after he's over the initial shock of Armie touching him.

“You okay?” Armie asks eventually.

Timmy thinks for a beat. Surprisingly, he is. “Me okay.” He nods.

A moment later the terrace is buzzing with people. Everything is ready inside. There are just a few adjustments to be made to both their costumes and then they roll.

They only need one take.

It is perfect.

Luca hugs Timmy afterwards before walking over to Armie to embrace him as well. Armie still seems a little dazed as if he has trouble to let go of Oliver. He sits back down into his green armchair, staring at Timmy.

“You are amazing. Isn't he amazing, Luca?” It outright bursts out of him. Timmy's not sure he's heard right.

But then Luca turns and smiles at Timmy, so warm and affectionate that he has to sit down as well, crouching on the piano seat. His instructor Roberto would be furious if he could see Timmy's bend back.

“He is. I think even I just fell in love with him. How could Oliver possibly resist?” Luca waxes.

Armie doesn't avert his eyes when Luca says this but holds Timmy's gaze. He can feel himself blush furiously. An embarrassed giggle bubbles up inside him and he leans further forward, elbows on knees, his head hanging low to hide his burning face, just happy that it's all over.

Somehow, the tension has been eased a fraction. There might be a way back for them, as colleagues – and maybe even as friends.

On his way back to Crema Timmy feels the weight of Armie's bracelet in his pocket. He's suddenly a
little less eager to return it.

Armie films Monday and Tuesday in a kind of fog. He smokes too much – cigarettes on set, weed at night to calm down and sleep – until his throat starts to hurt. Liz demands long facetime sessions every evening, planning out her pregnancy, already scheduling a Cesarean for January next year as that would fit both their schedules best, discussing prams, clothing, nanny agencies, meetings with their publicists and a myriad other things it apparently needs to bring a new baby into their world.

Armie wants to tell her to wait, to let him breathe, to remember that she’s just in her first trimester and that anything can happen but his mouth is too dry and his head hurts so he just listens, nods and wishes for Harper to wake up from her nap and interrupt.

“Are you okay?” Liz asks on Tuesday night.

“Don't know. Maybe I have an allergy. My throat hurts.”

“Get some rest, husband.” Liz ends their call, blowing him a kiss. He forces himself to smile until the screen goes dark.

He rolls another spliff; he knows he should go to bed but doesn't move, exhausted but not in the condition to sleep.

Tim has cold-shouldered him the last couple days but that was to be expected after their fight.

God, the things he'd said. He wants to take them back. All of them.

But every time he thinks about approaching Tim, asking if they could talk, wording his apology in his head – there's this other, well-known voice whispering to him: 'Are you sure you are entirely wrong? Remember all the people who only want your money. Your status. All these false friends. There have been so many over the years.'

And he can't silence this voice entirely, because in deed – he only has acquired a handful of people he really trusts over the years. He meets all kinds of folks in his job but almost all of them have turned out to be schmoozers when viewed under scrutiny. He's learned his lesson.

Still, a part of him wants to believe in Tim's sincerity, his affection, especially after he's seen him on set the last two days, all professional and friendly – no airs, no arguing. He didn't make things difficult.

He didn't throw a tantrum and threatened to leave like Armie did.

But then, he's got nothing to loose here, has he? He's the young unknown maverick.

Armie envies him a little. To have this freedom once again...

Tim seems to use it responsible, even exemplary.

But it's not enough to quiet Armie's doubts. He can't decide, still doesn't know. For one thing: how can Tim behave so distant so quickly towards him if true feelings had been involved before?

Because the boy has been avoiding every contact outside a scene like the plague. He doesn't even look at Armie. Armie knows because he watches Tim.

If Armie has learned something over the last few weeks, it's that Tim is an exceptional actor. That
can swing both ways. Is he acting now, playing indifferent, or had he done it all along, feigning friendship... and more?

Armie lights another joint, knowing it won't help him but that it's better than doing nothing. He wonders how Tim copes, if he's moping like himself, overthinking, or if he's with Luca... or Esther... laughing, maybe even sharing some anecdotes about Armie?

No, he wouldn't do that. Or would he? To impress Esther?

Armie shakes his head to ban those thoughts. For a minute, he toys with the idea of going to Milan and get it out of his system. But even he knows that he's just too whacked right now.

When he eventually falls asleep he dreams of Tim lying in bed on his stomach, naked, but when he touches him and he turns it's the boy from Milan grinning up at him.

Armie jerks awake and has to take a cold shower to calm his beating heart – and get rid of his raging boner.

He watches Tim prepare for his first really big scene the next day. It's obvious that Tim is nervous. His piano playing sounds strained. When Armie looks in on him he's tense, a sharp crease forming between his thick, expressive eyebrows. Armie wants to tell him that there's no need to panic, that he'll knock it out of the park but they are not on speaking terms and maybe him talking to Tim right now will only make him more anxious?

So Armie keeps watching.

Which proves to be a good thing because when Tim stumbles and falls Armie reacts quickly. It's only natural for him to reach out and touch. And hold.

It feels oddly comforting to him and maybe way too familiar for the few days they shared intimacies. And yet, it's there... muscle memory. Holding Tim feels right. And the boy doesn't recoil. He lets Armie hold him. They laugh. Maybe they didn't ruin everything between them?

When they shoot the scene, it's not Oliver listening, it's still Armie watching. Tim playing the piano does something to Armie he hadn't been prepared for. It's otherworldly. Tim and Elio morph in this take until Armie doesn't know anymore where one ends and the other begins. It's mesmerizing. It touches a part inside him he has not words to describe. This is what making art should feel like, Armie realizes, and is suddenly overwhelmed with gratitude to still be a part of this project.

He can't take his eyes off Tim. That boy's a wonder, a revelation, and Armie doesn't have a clue how to ever disentangle himself emotionally from him.

When Luca says he just fell in love with Tim Armie almost opens his mouth to agree.

This night, he wanks furiously to the memory of Tim in his arms and when he comes, hard, he shouts his name into the dark void of his bedroom.
Wounds

Chapter Summary

Armie discovers what Tim has done.

Chapter Notes

Please bear with me. This starts out bleak but ends on a very hopeful note. They might have hurt each other enough and are maybe finally raw enough to truly engage with each other. Sorry, this got very long but I couldn't bring myself to cut it in the middle or give you just one perspective.

As the weather is holding they film various bike rides on the next day. Armie loves it. He's finally not sitting or lying around but moving, doing something physical. It helps him not to think about where he might stand with Tim.

Tim. Who seems to have a hard time right now. Poor city kid. Armie’s not sure when Tim might have ridden a bike the last time before this movie – if ever. Their prior outings seem to have been not enough training for this lanky beanpole.

Because after about two hours of cycling through the beautiful Lombardian countryside Tim audibly winces as gets off his bike.

When Armie looks over, Tim's face is tight. Armie can't suppress a grin. “Charley horse? Or are you getting sore?” He teases, standing in the shade of a plane tree, lighting a cigarette.

Tim doesn't smile. He's not even throwing Armie a dark look. He just casts his eyes down, his only reply a small shrug as he turns his back.

“Hey, you okay?” Are they going back to not being on speaking terms?

Another shrug.

Armie's about to say something but Tim slowly walks over to the supply car to get some water and then Luca calls for another take.

In the evening, Tim is positively limping.

“Ouch. Fuck!” He hisses, dismounting after cycling through the cobbled streets of Crema for the last half hour. He crouches over his handlebar, his forehead resting on his folded arms.

“That bad?”

There's something in Tim's eyes when he looks up - and Armie just knows.
Shit! He keeps staring at Tim. His face is white, covered in a sheath of sweat.

Should Armie say something or would Tim see that as an inappropriate transgression, given the delicate state of their relationship right now? Armie's still wavering when he sees Luca approaching. Tim's face pales even more and his eyes go wide. “I can't... please,” he mouths.

Armie decides on the spot.

“Come over to my place, okay.” He says under his breath, sidling up to Tim with two huge strides. It's much closer than Tim's apartment, just around the corner.

Tim locks eyes with him as if searching for some sinister purposes. Armie holds his gaze, steady and earnest. “It's okay. I have what you need.”

There's a beat in which he sees doubt in Tim's eyes.

“Hey, Timothèe, is everything alright?” Luca has reached them and puts an arm around Tim's shoulders.

Tim takes a moment to peel his eyes off Armie and plasters a sheepish grin on his face before he looks at their director.

“I think I've got a chafing, Luca. I'm not used to riding a bike all day.” Tim's voice is firm; he even manages to sneak in a giggle. “I'll just pop over to Armie's to get some lotion.”

Luca exchanges a look with Armie. “Okay, do that. We are done for today anyway.” He pats Tim's back, turns and yells something at the crew in Italian.

The cheerfulness is wiped off Tim's face the moment he turns, hobbling next to Armie.

“Fuck.” He hisses after a few yards when they've rounded a corner. “I thought I was okay. I just always forgot to go to the pharmacy. Sorry, man, you don’t have to... I really don’t wanna drag you into my shit.” Tim's staring straight ahead, biting his lip.

“Don't worry about it.”

Armie has to slow down so Tim can keep up with him. He lives close from where the crew dropped them off but it takes them almost ten minutes to get there.

Tim winces again as he climbs the stairs and Armie pushes his hands into his pockets to physically suppress the impulse of taking Tim's elbow to steady him and pull him along.

“You should clean up, take a shower,” Armie tells Tim after closing the door. He goes into the bedroom and returns with some antiseptic lotion and an unopened packet of sterile gauze dressings he keeps in his nightstand for purposes he's not yet to disclose to Tim. Or ever. “There's some Betadine in the cupboard under the sink. Just use the towels. And you already know where to find my painkillers. Oh, and wait...,” Armie goes back into the bedroom to fetch some clean, black underwear he hands Tim.

Tim doesn't look him in the eye as he takes the supplies and locks the bathroom door behind himself.

Armie waits until he can hear the shower running before walking over into the kitchenette to get a drink. His hands are shaking.

God! How bad is it this time? The way he'd moved... it didn't look good. And when did he do it?
After their fight? Just once? Or over the whole week? Armie knocks back his beer and stares at the closed bathroom door, not sure if he ever wants it to open again.

Guilt creeps up on Armie and threatens to overwhelm him. ‘It’s your fault!’ But he didn't want this to happen! His beautiful, fragile, talented Tim – succumbing to this kind of self-destructive behavior - it breaks his heart.

Armie won’t accept it. Can’t accept it.

Maybe Tim is still playing a game, seeking Armie's attention, trying to put the blame on him?

A few years ago Armie would have doubted that people could be so mean-spirited. But life in the film industry has taught him that there are no limits when it comes to fucked-up deeds and emotional blackmail.

So, does Tim do what he does to punish Armie and guilt-trip him into... whatever it is Tim wants from him? Or his he depressed? Maybe suicidal even? Armie doesn't know enough about these things, he usually tries to avoid other people's issues. He has enough of them himself.

He doesn’t want to think about them either.

It would be so much easier to be angry with Tim. Or pity him. Though Armie doubts he deserves the former and wants the latter.

But what is there, then? What can he offer? Compassion? Acceptance? Those things don’t come easy to Armie.

He sinks down onto the couch and almost out of habit rolls a joint. He's halfway through it when the bathroom door opens again and Tim emerges, just clad in those boxer shorts that are evidently too large for him – but the loose fit might actually be a good thing right now.

“Thanks, man.” He still doesn't look at Armie. “I put the towels into the washing machine. But Betadine's a bitch. I hope they'll turn out fine. Otherwise I can buy you new ones. I'm sorry... I'm sorry for the mess I've made. I tried to clean up as best-

“Stop talking.” Armie sits up. “I don't care about those fucking towels.”

Tim swallows. “Okay. Cool.” He folds his arms in front of his naked, narrow chest. His rosy nipples peak in the colder air of the lounge. A drop of water slowly runs down the side of his neck, traveling from his hairline until it pools in the hollow above his collar bone. Armie follows it with his eyes and is almost floored by how young Tim looks, how frail.

The silence stretches.

“Do you, maybe, need some other clothes?” Armie feels the urge to say something, anything. He doesn't want Tim to think he'd brought him here to hit on him. “I still have your pants from... the other night, remember?” God, did he really have to mention it? ‘They are clean now. And I can borrow you a t-shirt. Your's all sweaty, I suppose.” Armie almost trips over his words, so eager is he to ease the tension and show Tim that he just wants to help; at least provide some clothes so the boy doesn't have to stand almost naked and visibly uncomfortable in his apartment.

“Yeah, that would be good?” It sounds more like a question.

When Armie gets up he offers Tim the joint in passing.
“I really shouldn’t,” Tim says but takes it anyway, sucking a deep drag. He's still standing in the same spot when Armie returns with his trousers and the smallest t-shirt he could find. He places the items on the coffee table.

When he takes the reefer back from Tim their fingers brush. It's like a spark.

Tim doesn't seek the privacy of the bathroom to change. He dresses slowly, carefully, obviously still in pain. It hurts Armie to watch. Armie's t-shirt hangs down to the middle of Tim’s thighs. He looks even younger now than when naked, lost, like a wet stray kitten.

He's so thin, so breakable, Armie thinks, his skin so pale and soft, almost translucent, lean muscles visibly stretching underneath as he pulls the t-shirt over his head. Armie can still feel his fingertips burn where they touched Tim's. It might actually be time to stop smoking pot.

The silence between them feels loaded, despite Tim being properly dressed now. Armie’s throat is dry. Should he get another beer? Will Tim stay?

Armie is suddenly tired of beating around the bush. Let's address the metaphorical elephant in the room and see where that takes them. No need to pretend anymore, not between them. “Take care that your cuts don't get infected.” His voice is firm. There, he said it.

“I'll just go and find a pharmacy that's still open.” It's already getting dark outside. Armie hadn't noticed but it must be after nine. “I really should go.” Yet Tim's not moving.

“You can use my stuff.” Armie offers. Tim seems unsure, his gaze wandering to the door. “I don't want you to stray around Crema in your state. You should rest.”

Tim shrugs

“Want a drink?” Armie asks, maybe a little too jovial while something flutters low in his stomach. Maybe mixing weed and alcohol isn't the best idea but now that he's started he can at least get really wasted.

“I shouldn't.” Tim says again.

“Is that a yes?”

“I guess.” He sounds a little shy. His passivity does things to Armie. Wicked things.

“Sit. I get you something.” Their fingers brush once more as Armie hands Tim the ice-cold bottle a moment later. Tim takes a sip and starts to play with the drops condensing on the green glass, drawing patterns with his long index finger.

Armie stares and stares some more before he has to look away.

“Why do you do the shit you do?” He asks, almost unaware that the words leave his mouth. The room is getting gloomy. They are sitting in this unreal twilight and it seems that anything is possible right now. In this blue hour they can talk about things that they stay silent about at all other times.

Tim shrugs. “It's hard to explain with words. Why do you throw up?” He doesn't seem bothered by Armie's question.

“To stay in shape. But yours doesn't serve any purpose.”

“You think so?”
Armie can't see Tim's face clearly anymore but he thinks he senses raised eyebrows and wide eyes.

“It just hurts.”

“Maybe that's the point. Remember the things... we did. In bed.” Tim's voice is so low it's almost inaudible.

“But that's different.” Armie protests.

“Is it? Pain drowns out everything else.”

“What do you mean?” Armie doesn't want to know but has to.

In the dusk Tim is just an amorphous heap in the corner of the couch, like a ghost.

“Sometimes... there's so much... stuff going on. And I... can't focus. It feels like loosing control. It feels that... I'm not enough, too dumb, only a disappointment. I... get anxious. The pain helps to come back to myself.”

“Why are you so hard to yourself? Why do you punish yourself like that?” Armie feels so helpless in the face of Tim's explanation.

“Maybe because I don't like myself very much.” There's a laugh, too high, and maybe a breathy sob.

Armie gets suddenly angry. How can this beautiful, talented, precious boy say things like that?

“Don't give me this shit, Tim. What are you playing at? Is this fishing for compliments Millennial style?”

Wrong. Wrong! Now he spooked him, Armie can tell. The ethereal phantom on his couch tenses up.

“This has been a mistake. I shouldn't have come.” Tim puts the bottle down onto the same coffee table he knocked over a few days ago and gets up. Suddenly Armie wants, needs him to stay. The darkness makes him brave. The darkness will keep their secrets.

Tomorrow they can both pretend this never happened.

“Tell me what you want from me.”

The shadow stops mid-motion.

“What? Seriously, Armie, do you think the whole world evolves just around you?” All Armie can see is once again Tim's silhouette as the streetlamps outside flicker to life, their orange light shining through the window. Tim stands in the middle of his lounge, head hanging down, spreading his hands, his face in the shadows. “Nothing. I want nothing from you. I'm not even sure I really like you. I thought once but-,” he sighs.

“Well, there's already a queue.”

Tim rakes his hands through his hair. “Please, stop that. If you would just... I don't know, start to like yourself a little bit it might actually be easier for others to like you as well.” His voice is strained.

This hits home. Armie lashes out. Rinse and repeat.

“Well, look who's talking: The boy who resorts to cutting.”

This time, Tim isn't bolting from the room. Instead he takes a step towards Armie. “At least I tried,
Armie. I didn't do this for a couple of years. Despite being rejected at auditions again and again. Despite my films failing. Despite being alone.... And I know that I can stop again, that I can get better, seek help if needed. Can you?"

Who does Tim think he is? “There's no need... Everybody does it. Hell, even my picture-perfect wife!”

“I don't.”

“Wait till you get swallowed up by Hollywood, being forced you to maintain a certain image.”

“I won't allow it.”

Armie laughs. “I'm not sure if your naivety is endearing or ignorant.”

“I'm not naive.”

“No, you're definitely not. The way you played me, for example...”

A car drives by and in its wandering lights Armie gets a glimpse of Tim's pensive face.

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, come on, Tim, do you think I was born yesterday? I have people making passes on me all the time. For a donation. For a moment in the limelight. I get heart-wrenching letters begging for money. I have starlets slipping me their number with the promise of a blow job every time I go out. But with them I know where I stand, I see through them. Not with you, though, I still haven't figured you out, Tim.”

“Is that how you see me? As... a gigolo?” Tim's voice is flat, devoid of any emotion.

“I'd call you a honey badger but, yeah, that's what came to mind when I thought about the whole... thing between us.”

There's a moment of silence before Tim speaks again, his voice a little rough at the edges.

“Jesus, Armie, do you think yourself so unlovable that I need a reason to want to be with you other than simply wanting to be with you?” And with that, Tim closes the distance between them, leans over and in and kisses Armie, just once, chaste, on the lips.

When he moves back Armie swallows. “But why?” His lips sting from Tim's kiss.

He can hear Tim laugh, soft and a little sad.

“I really don't know. Because you are a mess like me? Okay, and hot as fuck but that sounds a little shallow, don't you think?”

“How can you just say these things?” Armie feels dumbstruck. Does Tim really mean what he says? “I thought you aren't sure you even liked me.”

“I am not sure. I consider myself still in the process of finding out. But, honestly, this last week has been shit. And then you touched me yesterday... and I realized how much I missed you. That. Being with you. In what way howsoever, I'm not sure.”

Armie has missed him too, he realizes. But he had tried to bury that feeling beneath contempt and hate. How could he ever think so badly of Tim? That boy wears his heart on his sleeve. He's simply
not capable of guile. Armie should have known if he hadn't been so fucked-up himself, trapped in his own paranoid fantasies.

“Stay the night.”

“That would be an enormously bad idea.” Tim tells him. It's not an outright no, though.

“Just sleeping. We don't have to do anything.”

“You really believe that?”

Probably not. “We can try,” Armie offers with a small hopeful smile. “And we can sleep in tomorrow. We just have the night shoot.”

“Oh, yes, La Dancing.” Tim sounds gleeful. Armie could throttle him. In a loving way.

“I find it... rather daunting.” Armie confesses. Time for some more truths. Somehow honesty seems to do the trick with Tim.

“Seriously? It's just hopping around a bit. It's fun.”

“Yeah, but I get rather... self-conscious.”

“You get embarrassed by dancing?” Tim sounds incredulous but not in a mean way. He's not taking the piss, he seems just genuinely bewildered.

“Yeah, I guess I do. I don't like being stared at.” Armie rakes a hand through his hair.

“You're an actor, that's your job.”

“Yeah, but not like that... when I make a complete fool of myself.”

Tim laughs softly, walks into the bathroom and returns with his phone, unlocking the screen. As he starts scrolling the bluish light reflects on his otherworldly face and reminds Armie again of a gorgeous specter, floating in the darkness.

Suddenly, an eerie beat fills the room.

What a world that I'm livin' in,
Will the rainstorms ever end?

“What? Fuck off. No.”

“Come on, man, this is my favorite song.” Tim starts to sway a little to the slow hypnotic beat, the velvet twilight only adding to the dreamy atmosphere.

As Armie still doesn't move Tim says somewhat forlorn “Please”.

Armie shakes his head but takes the still extended hand, not really believing that he's doing it. Tim pulls him up and close and wraps his arms around Armie's neck.

This feels better than anticipated. He can smell Tim.

“Wanna stand on my feet again?” Armie asks, smiling into Tim's still damp curls as his hands settle
on Tim’s slim hips.

“Let’s just take it slow, okay?”

Armie has no idea if Tim means the dancing or the apparently inexorable attraction between them – but he's okay either way.

They wake up the next morning entangled, legs entwined, Timmy tucked under Armie's arm - but still dressed in their boxers and t-shirts. They'd danced for hours with the help of some more joints Armie had rolled until a very tired neighbor had politely asked them to turn it down a bit at about two o'clock in the morning. They'd both apologized in what they hoped had been Italian before they'd simply crashed into Armie’s bed.

That's where Timmy finds himself right now. And it feels good. Maybe a bit too good, considering what has happened to them over the last week. But somehow it seems impossible to stay apart – for both of them.

Timmy lies close to Armie for a bit longer, just savoring his warmth, his smell. The sun is shining bright already through the window and a quick glance at his phone tells him it's past eleven. But they don't have to worry, it's a night shoot today. They are not expected to turn up before eight in the evening, when they will eat at Luca’s before driving out to the location.

The dancing had been fun last night. They'd started slow but eventually simply jumped and grooved around when Armie had lost his inhibitions. That of all things the prospect of dancing would embarrass him so much still makes Timmy chuckle.

Armie stirs but doesn't open his eyes.

“Water.” He croaks and Timmy giggles some more before he rolls out of bed and grabs some water from the fridge. Thank god he didn't drink last night, switching to water after the one beer! Armie had not been so smart.

“Thanks, man.” Armie sighs when Timmy passes him the bottle, his eyes still closed. He looks a bit rumpled but relaxed. Only after drowning half the bottle does he blink his bleary eyes open.

“What time is it?”

“A little past eleven.”

“Wow, haven't slept that good in days.” Armie stretches until his joints pop. Timmy grins.

“Must have been the physical activity from last night, old man.”

Armie swats him with a pillow. “Come to my age, boy, than we talk again. Ouch! My hamstrings!”

“You went pretty wild. Not actual limbo but... you described it as a form of Cayman folk dance.”

Timmy shrugs.

“Oh god, please, don't!” Armie groans and buries his face in the sheets. “How badly did I embarrass myself?”

“You were fine. Really. Dancing is so much fun. Just go with it. Feel the music. Don't be so self-conscious.” Timmy playfully punches Armie's biceps.
“Says the boy with ballet training from age four. I bet you never felt embarrassed wiggling your ass in front of others. But I'm 6'5 – everybody stares at me on the dance-floor.”

“You did better than most guys I know – your age.” He ducks another blow. Suddenly, Armie is over him, tackling him in the sheets, poking his sides. Timmy wiggles and squeals but Armie is stronger and has the advantage of being on top of him. Their t-shirts ride up and their skin touches, a naked thigh against an equally naked stomach. Armie suddenly lets go as if he’s been burned.

“Sorry…,” he breathes.

Timmy has no idea what Armie’s sorry for but as he starts to get out of bed he stops him. “Wait. I'll show you something. After that, I'm sure you'll feel a bit better.”

Armie rolls onto his stomach and looks at him, curious and expectant. Timmy grabs his phone and goes through his videos. Ah, there it is.

It’s a video from 2012, a school performance. As the music starts he turns the small screen towards Armie.

“Is that you?” He asks.

“Yep.” Timmy pops the p at the end of the word.

Armie starts to grin. “Oh my… seriously… what the fuck… Wow. That was quiet a move. Jesus, Tim, you are wasted as an actor, you should have gone into adult entertainment. Lap-dance. You’d be rich by now.”

Timmy grins and bites his lower lip.

By the end of the video, Armie is giggling, his blue eyes full of admiration.

“I know, right? See, no need to feel embarrassed.” Timmy laughs.

“God, I can’t believe you did that. On a stage. In front of all those people. It’s hilarious. Don’t get me wrong, you were amazing but…All that… gyrating.”

Timmy shrugs. “It was fun. I really didn’t care what people thought. I just went out there and performed. Some loved it. Some hated it. Well, you can’t please everybody.”

“Did you get calls after that?” Armie alludes to the number he had written on his t-shirt.

“Maybe.”

“I bet you did.” Armie bumps Timmy’s shoulder and Timmy turns away, blushing, lowering his gaze. “Boys or girls?”

“Both.”

“Sure.” Armie flops back down onto the mattress. “Thanks, man, for the morale support.”

“Anytime.”

They sit in bed, silent. Timmy tugs at the sheet, taking stock of his situation. Despite the dancing last night, his cuts don’t hurt worse. They might even be a bit better, thanks to the lotion and antiseptics. And they both slept in one bed without doing something stupid. Well, that’s progress, he thinks…
“What is it?” Armie asks, leaning up on his elbows.

“Nothing. I’m just hungry, I guess.” Timmy fidgets a little.

“How are you?”

“Okay.”

“Hm.”

They lock eyes. Neither of them moves. Timmy feels oddly at peace. There is still excitement tingling in his belly but it’s like being put on slow-burn. There’s no urgency.

“Shall we get some breakfast?” Armie asks eventually.

“Yeah. Just let me shower first.”
Chapter Summary

They film the dance scene and Tim gets jealous. Armie has to bear the consequences.

Chapter Notes

Let me warn you, I don't speak French.

They spend the day together, lazing about. Tim can't ride his bike or even walk much so they return to Armie's apartment after brunch, watching Netflix and listening to music. Tim calls it ‘getting into the groove’.

Armie puts on Madonna and Tim laughs so hard he falls off the couch.

“I know her, you know? I dated her daughter in high-school. Briefly.”

Armie didn't know. Being reminded of the many things he doesn't know about Tim's life is a bit unsettling. He really wants to find out more.

They play their favorite songs to one another and discover a mutual liking for Kanye West. Armie knows some Caribbean music Tim describes as stuff his mum would listen to on a sunny afternoon while chilling on their rooftop terrace. This remark initiates another of their wrestling matches. As does a discussion on Country and Western music. Armie wins both times. Tim ends up red-faced and short of breath beneath him, declaring defeat, giggling like a maniac.

Armie discovers where Tim is the most ticklish – his armpits - and isn't above using it. Well, and when Tim’s t-shirt rides up in the process he doesn’t seem to mind. Armie doesn't either.

In return, Tim introduces him to French hip hop which Armie truly likes. It doesn’t matter that he doesn’t understand the words. Tim sings along to some of the lyrics and listening to him, seeing how happy and excited he gets makes Armie smile and feel warm all over. He could listen to Tim all day.

Around six Tim decides to go back to his place and change. Only when he asks Armie for a bag does he remember Tim’s cuts.

“How are you?” He asks again.

“It’s getting better. I hope it’s okay if I take your stuff?”

“Yeah, ‘course, by all means.”

Tim blushes a little and goes into the bathroom to put the lotion and bandages into a plastic bag.

“Thank you.” He says just before walking out of the door. “For today… and everything.” He’s gone before Armie can reply.
Armie's rather proud how he managed during the day. He didn't make a fool of himself by being too clingy. He didn't pressure Tim into anything, he just let him be, simply glad to have him around again. A second chance. Tim is funny and goofy and, yes, so fucking beautiful. Armie tried very hard not to stare. He's sure he mostly succeeded.

Don't fuck this up, Armie!

He'd been rather moved how Tim had tried to lure him out of his shell last night. Holding him, dancing with him had been... Armie's not sure he can put the experience into words. They did fit perfectly and had quickly found a rhythm. Dancing like this had actually been a pleasure.

Waking up with Tim in his bed had felt so fucking right.

Armie compliments himself that apparently he kept his hands to himself and didn't molest Tim. He's not sure where they are standing right now but touching in a sexual way seems off the table at the moment.

And that's surprisingly okay.

But even over a relaxing day like this there loom Tim's issues. Armie still hasn't seen the cuts but from how badly they seem to have hurt yesterday he can imagine that it's worse than last time. He can't help it, he feels responsible for it despite knowing it's Tim's problem to tackle.

Even if he's not the cause for Tim cutting himself he might have been the trigger this time. That thought is hard to stomach. Yet Armie doesn't want to ignore this side of Tim any longer. If he wants him he has to want all of him.

This time, Armie has decided to try to accept his responsibility. He's not trying to cover it up or drown it out. He faces it. It's a new thing for him to do with unpleasant, challenging situations. But for Tim's sake he's, well, maybe not prepared but at least willing to deal with the trouble.

Because Tim deserves it. He deserves Armie's respect. And acceptance.

Because Tim makes these concessions for him without hesitation.

The way he'd dealt with Armie's anxiety last night... Armie's just so grateful. Usually, he gets told to get over his fears, to suck it up. His mum used to shake her head and sighed; Liz finds it annoying when Armie dares to voice his doubts. His friends take the piss.

But Tim somehow understood. And offered to make himself as vulnerable as Armie had felt, sharing the pressure, the embarrassment; by staying with him all day; by showing him a silly – if awesome – video of himself that had proofed to Armie how free one could feel if inhibitions were thrown overboard.

He's still not looking forward to tonight but the paralyzing dread is gone.

Tim will be there, with him.

And that will somehow make it... not alright but far less unpleasant.

Armie could get used to this kind of support.

The dinner at Luca's is relaxed as well. They are all unwinding, getting a little silly when talking about what will happen later, remembering the dance lesson Armie fled after about ten minutes in. There's drink but not too much, just Prosecco to lower everyone's inhibitions but not get them drunk
and tired.

Esther and Victoire join them for dessert. Armie is surprised that he's okay when Esther sits down next to Tim and starts to dig into his Panna Cotta. Tim grins at him as he licks his spoon before he turns and kisses Esther on both cheeks.

 Victoire flops down next to Armie. She smiles at him, winks, and tells him she's looking forward to the evening and their scenes.

There are about seventy extras already assembled when they arrive on set – an outdoor discotheque near the river in Ripalta Vecchia – all dressed up in casual 80s date night fashion. The boys wear pastel polo shirts and pleated jeans. The hair of most girls is crimped within one inch of their lives. The smell of hairspray still lingers between the trees decorated with colorful fairy lights.

They'll start to go through the blocking, arranging the extras, deciding their editor Walter is to play DJ tonight. For rehearsal, there's music blasting, some cheesy 80s ballad written by Giorgio Moroder – so Luca tells them – and as it's a somewhat slow grind it doesn't worry Armie. He just holds onto Victoire, who grins and doesn't seem to mind that Luca wants Armie to hold her very close and grab her waist – and lower.

When they go for the kiss, however, there's suddenly a tongue invading Armie's mouth. Well, that wasn't how he imagined it, but maybe that's the French way? He thinks it would be rather rude to tell Victoire to stop, especially as the night is just starting. Nothing's worse in Armie's experience than to piss off a co-star right at the beginning, especially when they are about to shoot an intimate scene.

When his gaze meets Tim's, however, he reconsiders. The boy looks outright murderous but guards his expression when he meets Armie's eyes. But it's too late. Armie saw.

Better to piss Victoire off than disturb his new-found equilibrium with Tim. So Armie tries to put a little distance between himself and the girl in his arm but she isn't having it.

"Hey, cauboi," she whispers in his ear, her French lilt heavy on the words, "you don't have to be shy with me."

Next thing Armie knows, she's pressing herself against him and pushes one of her long legs between his thighs. Over her blond curls Armie sees Tim light a cigarette, inhaling deeply while leaning forward in his chair.

He's still staring, narrowing his eyes.

If looks could kill...

When Victoire starts to rub herself against him in earnest her already short skirt rides even further up her smooth thighs, almost exposing her well-rounded bottom. It's strange for Armie to suddenly feel someone soft and plump in his arms after the nights he's spend with Tim, who is all elbows and knees.

Armie waits for his body to catch on and show some interest but both to his surprise and relieve that isn't happening.

When he looks again at where Tim has been sitting his chair is empty.

He only returns when they block and rehearse the scene with the group of youths around the table. As Armie isn't needed, he sits down somewhere in the vicinity of the set with a bottle of Coke to stay awake.
Next thing he knows, Victoire sits in his lap.

“We have to stay in character, don’t you think?” She giggles.

Armie suddenly understands Oliver doing a bunk but that’s certainly not what she means. He just smiles and nods and hopes that this will soon be over. Armie tries to catch Tim’s eyes but he seems busy listening to Luca and is very deliberately not looking in their direction.

Victoire apparently has her own ideas how to spend their break and wraps her silky arms around Armie’s neck.

“When we are finished here, I could come back to your place.” She rests her head against his shoulder, looking up at Armie, her fingers playing with the collar of his shirt. Armie can feel her full breasts brush against his chest. Her lips are pink and a little wet. Her short skirt exposes supple tanned legs. She smiles at him and tilts her head a little to the side.

Armie’s stomach lurches

“That’s… an intriguing offer, really. Very tempting.” He forces himself to smile back at her. “I just don’t think my wife would like that very much.” Sometimes being married has its merits.

Only, Victoire isn't fazed in the least.

“She doesn’t have to know.” She chirps, looking innocently up at Armie through her lashes. “I don’t mind.”

Armie’s still struggling to come up with an answer to this offer when he suddenly hears Tim say: “Am I interrupting something?”

Armie feels the strong impulse to shove Victoire off his lap. As this would be unacceptable, however, he just blushes and tries to put as much space as possible between himself and Victoire. Which is a ridiculously futile attempt, given their current position. The girl shows no intentions of moving. If anything, she settles in more comfortable.

“Je suppose que tu fais, Timothée.” She answers. Armie’s French isn’t good enough to understand but Tim’s face speaks volumes as his expression translates the meaning of her words.

“Je suis désolé.” Tim replies, his tone icy, “J'ai besoin de parler à Armie en privé.”

“En privé.” She echoes, starting to sound a little miffed but hiding it beneath a mocking smirk. “Are you afraid I’ll steal Armie away from you?” Armie’s sure she’s switched to English for his benefit.

He knows he should laugh at that, make a face, brush off Tim’s demand, maybe even send him away – but he can’t. Tim stays where he is, staring down at them both, for all the world cuddling in the chair, and his expressive face shows his only barely held back annoyance, and contempt.

Something flutters in Armie’s stomach as he suddenly understands what it is that has Tim on the edge. Oh. Well…

Later he wonders what would have happened if he’d dismissed Tim then and there, told him to leave them alone; if he’d taken Victoire back to his apartment and fucked her the whole night. Maybe that would have been something that Liz could have forgiven – even if Tim couldn’t.

It’s an escape route offered to him from this hell-bend road to disaster he's on with Tim. Of course, he gives it a go-by.
Instead, he says: “Sorry, Victoire, could you give us a minute?” He only looks at her, not daring to glance up at Tim.

“Are you serious?” The girl in his lap asks, sounding more surprised than hurt. As he nods and shrugs she throws her hands up in the air, removing them from around his neck. “Oh, you two love birds. Remember my offer. My patience is not infinite.” She hops off his lap and strolls off in the direction of the catering.

“What does she mean?” Tim asks when Victoire is out of earshot. His voice is cold.

“What do you think?” Armie raises an eyebrow.

Tim's face heats up. “Seriously?”

“I told you. This happens all the time.”

“Will you take her up on it?” Tim looks him straight in the face. There’s a muscle twitching in his right eye-brow. His hands are balled into fists.

“What did you want to talk about?” Armie retorts instead of answering.

Is Tim blushing even more? It's hard to say in the semi-darkness only illuminated by the multicolored fairy lights. “I just wanted for her to fuck off. She's been all over you the whole evening.” He bites his lower lip. Armie feels the proverbial butterflies in his stomach. He's never seen Tim like this.

“I won't.”

Tim seems to need a moment to understand but when he does he relaxes visibly and nods. “Good.” He takes the packet of cigarettes he needs for his scene, shakes two out and lights them both, offering one to Armie. “She might not push her tongue into your mouth again if you taste like an ashtray.”

Tim smirks.

Armie takes a deep drag to calm himself. Wicked boy. “What about you?”

Tim leans in and whispers in his ears. “You know I'd push my tongue anywhere, regardless.”

“I would kiss you if I could.” Armie whispers against Tim's neck watching gooseflesh raising his skin.

Oh, what a night...

^^^^^^

When they eventually film Oliver's dance scene it's already two in the morning and everyone is tired. There's no music, no alcohol and it's getting cold.

Timmy is tired of watching Victoire rub herself against Armie. He has a bad taste in his mouth. Might be all the cigarettes he smoked. She toned it down a little after he'd put his foot down but her behavior is still racy enough to profoundly annoy Timmy.

Seeing Armie visibly uncomfortable between takes had calmed Timmy down a little to the point where he had felt outright sorry for him.

During a break he'd walked over and reminded him of last night, taking out his phone and playing 'Sky Might Fall'. The smile that had gained him had made Timmy forget Victoire and her antics.
When it's finally his turn to enter the dance floor he gives her a good show. It's almost a mating dance.

Now it's all over and everybody is just glad to leave. Armie and Timmy are swept into one car while the girls are ushered into another. Victoire shoots Tim a spiteful look but he doesn't care. All that matters to him is that he's finally alone with Armie. If anything, her pouting only turns him on more.

He's felt on the edge all evening. Having to watch Armie kiss and touch another person – and a woman – had done things to him he hadn't been prepared for. At first, he'd felt sick. Then he'd gotten angry. As the evening progressed, both feelings had morphed into an unfamiliar possessiveness.

Armie is his.

And he's about to make this very clear to him.

“My place.” He tells him after they got out the car in Piazza delDuomo. He doesn't wait for Armie to answer, just turns and walks away in the direction of his apartment, even if Armie's is closer.

He smiles when he hears Armie follow without any objections.

They enter his dark apartment and Timmy is already pushing Armie against the wall before the door has fallen shut behind them.

God! It's been so long. He kisses him, hungry and open-mouthed and Armie lets him but makes no move to take control.

Timmy rakes his hands through Armie's hair and yanks, pulling away. They are both panting.

“You sure this is what you want?” Armie asks, his hot breath wafting over Timmy's face.

“Very sure. I had to watch Victoire climbing all over you the whole evening. Do you have any idea what that did to me?”

When Armie doesn't answer Timmy pulls his hair again.

“Apparently I'm getting an inkling.” Timmy can more hear than see the grin in Armie's voice and decides to wipe it off his face. This is not fun and games. Not between them. Not after everything.

He kisses Armie again before biting down his neck, removing his hands from his hair to tear his shirt open. They are both still in costume, having not bothered to change. The buttons clatter onto the floor, shockingly loud in the silent apartment.

“Giulia will not be pleased.” Armie's still smiling but there's suddenly a hoarse edge to his voice.

“I'm going to fuck you.” Timmy breathes against his yaw, his hands gripping Armie's hips hard. He's not asking.

Armie goes very, very still. Tim bites him again, a little gentler this time before touching the tip of his tongue to the patch of skin he's just worried between his teeth. When he presses his groin against Armie's, he can feel him twitch.

“Bedroom, now. Get those clothes off.”

Timmy steps back and turns towards the bathroom. He can hear Armie moving in the dark.

Shortly after all this had started between them, Timmy had bought lube and condoms. Not
necessarily for the scenario that's about to play out tonight but he's glad he's prepared. He stares at himself in the mirror above the sink for a moment, remembering the night he stood here when he first thought something would happen. He remembers standing in the same spot last Sunday night just before he set the knife to his skin.

How could all these things have happened and he's still just looking the same as he ever did? Only tonight, there might be a dark, predatory glint in his eyes.

“Do I know you?” He whispers before walking over into the bedroom.

Armie has switched on the bedside lamb and is gloriously naked, lying on his back atop of Timmy's covers, his tanned body a stark contrast to the white linen. He's hard, slowly stroking himself, the tip of his cock already red and shining wet.

“How do you want me?” There's no doubt in his face, no mocking smile either. If anything, Armie's eyes are even darker than Timmy's, his pupils black pools in a blue sea.

Timmy thinks he'd like him exactly like this but is also aware that he might not be strong enough to handle Armie in this position.

“On your hands and knees.”

Armie rolls over and positions himself as he's told.

Timmy allows himself to look his fill. Armie's buttocks a paler than the rest of his him. He takes in his muscular hamstrings covered in a golden fuzz, the wide expanse of his toned back, his ribcage expanding fast due to Armie's heavy breathing.

'He likes this', Timmy thinks. 'Good.'

His cock hanging heavy between his legs makes Timmy's mouth water.

He quickly takes off his polo-shirt, shorts, socks and Converse and climbs onto the bed behind Armie.

His long fingers pull Armie's cheeks apart before he lowers his mouth to Armie's core.

“Oh, god.” Armie breathes, spreading his legs a little further but not pressing back against Timmy's tongue.

He takes his time to taste and explore, alternating between quick kitten licks and broad, languid swipes. Armie's breathing becomes even faster until he groans: “Stop Tim, stop, or I won't last.”

Timmy raises his head and places one chaste kiss at the top of Armie's sacrum, highly pleased with himself.

“I'm sure you could go a second time.” He mumbles into Armie's hot, sweaty skin.

“But I want to come with you inside me.”

This almost undoes Timmy.

He needs to take a few steadying breaths before he can continue to prepare Armie.

He slicks up his index finger and slowly breaches the ring of muscles he's previously licked and kissed. It gives easily.
“Have you ever done this before?” He almost doesn't recognize his own voice, so deep and hungry does he sound.

“With a toy, yes. With another man, no.” Armie lowers his head onto his forearms, bracing himself as Timmy adds a second finger.

The sight of him pushing inside Armie, combined with his confession, has Timmy so hard he starts dripping onto the sheets. It's been a long week.

Thank god his cuts have healed enough so that he could remove the bandages. The skin is still angry red and sore but even the scab has fallen off.

He knows he should take his time. He wants Armie to like it. But he's almost overwhelmed by the need to just shove his cock up Armie's ass and fuck him so hard he'll see stars.

Instead, he adds a third finger. The sound Armie makes is something between a sob and a groan.

“Okay?” Timmy asks.

“Keep going.” Armie breathes.

When his fingers slide easily in and out, Timmy starts to turn and scissor them a bit. Armie sucks in air but bucks his hips, pressing back against the intrusion. Timmy's free hand goes to his side, brushing his fingertips lightly over his pectorals.

“You want me to fuck you?”

“Yes, Tim. Fuck me.” Armie moans.

Timmy reaches around and pinches Armie's nipple, just once, as he pulls his fingers out. Armie yelps and Timmy swats his arse not hard but his hand leaves a red mark on the pale mount of flesh. Timmy stares at it, watching as Armie cants his hips upwards.

He does it again and Armie sighs with pleasure. Timmy is sure he might come just from this sight alone.

As if Armie can read his thoughts he says again: “Fuck me.”

Timmy has to wipe his fingers on the sheets to tear open the blister pack. He's suddenly grateful for the condom, fearing that it might be over way too soon without it.

He lines himself up, nudging Armie's red, wet hole just with the head of his cock when Armie says: “Stop.”

Shit!

He's gotten cold feet.

It's too much.

God!

Timmy's sure in this moment that it's possible to die from sexual frustration.

He makes a rather undignified sound as Armie moves away, scrambling off the bed. He's sure he must look ridiculous with his hard condom-clad cock jutting out in front of him as he sits back on his
heels, utterly disappointed.

He should have known that this had seemed too good to be true.

Armie's even grabbing his shorts now. So he's leaving. Timmy doubts he'll be able to even have a proper wank because he feels just so humiliated. What did he do wrong? He thought Armie liked what they did...

Timmy starts to remove the condom when Armie climbs back into bed, getting back in position. He's holding a small brown bottle in his hand. A sharp smell hits Timmy when Armie opens it and sniffs.

“Just to relax.” Armie says. “Come on, do it.” His voice is thick with desperation.

But Timmy can't move. The last few seconds have been an emotional roller-coaster.

“Tim, I need you. Now.”

“I thought you would leave. I thought you didn't like it.” He blurts out.

“Why would I leave? Are you fucking kidding me?” Armie looks at him over his shoulder, his eyes hooded, face flushed. “Now, could you please just fuck me, or I'll need another hit.”

Timmy stares at him for a moment until kneeling up again, pressing the tip of his still raging erection against Armie's quivering hole. He hears him take a deep breath and pushes in.

His heart his hammering in his head, his chest, his stomach, his cock.

It's so tight!

Someone's making a noise...

Timmy slides deeper. And deeper.

He doesn't stop until his balls slap against Armie's perineum. He's clawing to Armie's hips, realizing that the man in front of him has gone utterly still.

“You okay?” He asks.

“Y-yes.” Armie's voice is shaky.

Timmy hears him take another sniff. He's afraid that he'll lose his composure completely should he lessen his grip to Armie's body. But he forces himself to unclench his fingers to tenderly stroke Armie's back.

His cock pulses inside Armie. God, this feels so good. He's never done this before and suddenly wonders why.

He can feel Armie relax a little after the Poppers hits and starts to move. He fears he might not last long but the condom takes the urge to come off and he's able to fall into a languid rhythm, pounding into Armie good and hard.

Armie bucks his hips as he tries to reach for his own cock and suddenly yelps.

“Fuck, Tim, there. There!”

Timmy thrusts again and watches as Armie's arms give out and he falls face-first into the crumpled
sheets, moaning like nothing Timmy's heard before.

He seems to be doing something right.

So he does it again.

Armie makes that noise again.

His hand is tugging at his cock, brushing Timmy's tight balls with his movements. Hmm, that's nice.

Suddenly, Armie bucks forcefully and Timmy loses his rhythm as he's almost pushed out by the erratic spasms of Armie's body. His hole clenches and his whole body twists and thrashes; it takes Timmy a moment to understand that Armie's coming.

“Fuck me, Tim, please...,” he sobs and Timmy starts to pound into him without holding back, suddenly so turned on his vision whites out. He falls forward, his chest flat against Armie's back, their mixed sweat making their skin slippery. They touch from knees to neck, Timmy buried as deep as anatomically possible inside Armie, who's shivering beneath him in aftershock.

They are one pulsating, twitching, needy body.

It just takes three shallow thrusts for Timmy to come as well, biting down on Armie's shoulder to stifle the moan that threatens to escape his throat.

“Timothée.”

Timmy's still inside Armie, splayed out over his back, unable to move. His legs feel like jelly, his thighs burning from his frantic movements. Armie squirms beneath him.

“Tim, I don't fancy a trip to the hospital to remove a condom from my rectum. Could you, just...?”

“Sorry,” Timmy comes to live again and carefully pulls out, gripping the condom around his still half-hard cock with thumb and forefinger to prevent it from sliding off. “Shit, sorry.”

Armie hisses when he's empty, scrambling to his feet and making for the bathroom while Timmy just drops onto his back on the mattress, too tired to bother pulling the sheet up to cover himself.

When Armie returns and climbs back into bed, he winces again. Timmy is proud that he at least manages to turn his head. “How are you?” He asks

“You should know.” Armie lies on his stomach, resting his chin on his folded arms, a small grin on his face.

“Well, I pale in comparison to you.” Timmy raises a hand to swat Armie but with surprising speed Armie catches it, brings his to his mouth and kisses Timmy's knuckles.

“You should really remove that.” Armie gestures towards Timmy's nether regions where the condom still covers his by now limp cock.

Timmy blushes furiously, rolls onto his side, away from Armie and disposes off the condom.

“Sorry....” he mumbles again. Armie touches his shoulder.

“Hey, no need to apologize. This was a first time for both of us.” He whispers into Timmy's nape.

Something tightens and then loosens inside Timmy. He turns, taking Armie's chin between thumb
and forefinger and kisses him almost brutally.

“Whatever happens, now you can never forget me, Armie. You were my first and I was yours.”

It fills him with a strange sort of pride. Armie blinks back at him, his eyes soft and dazed. It takes Timmy's breath away.

“As if I could ever forget you... this. Us.” Armie murmurs. Timmy feels suddenly on the brink of tears. The awareness that this will be over soon hits him full force. They will be over soon. Italy will be over soon.

He reaches up and over and takes the bracelet Armie has given him from the nightstand.

“How can you put it back on me?” He asks, his voice rough from emotion. Armie does, closing the clasp around Timmy's slim wrist.

“I promise to...,” he starts but Timmy presses his index finger to Armie's lips to silence him.

“Don't. It's okay. It's alright. We'll always have this.” Timmy raises his eyes from the dark stones circling his wrist back up to Armie's face, swallowing hard as he meets his gaze.

“Always.” Armie whispers before kissing Timmy. When Timmy kisses back it feels like committing himself.
Exploring

Chapter Summary

Just a fluffy interval. Armie's totally gone on Tim.

They sleep in late the next morning but it's not a free weekend for them, at least not for Tim, who has another night shoot, this time with Esther. They’ll do the scene by the lake and the scene in which Elio fucks Marzia as well as they can use the same location for both.

Armie doesn't want to go on set and watch Tim making out with Esther (no, it will be Elio making out with Marzia! Only Armie has apparently a hard time to get that into his head) - but Tim insists. He had to watch Armie with Victoire, he says. Quid pro quo.

Well, when the outcome is like last night, Armie's fine with that.

Yet he doubts he'll be able to take it again tonight. He's still sore. They'll have to come up with something else then. But Tim has proven to be creative.

Armie had anticipated feeling weird, emasculated even, after bottoming. But he doesn't. Tim had been so gentle and yet so possessive, so tender but so determined that Armie had simply loved to surrender. It had felt so fucking good.

He doesn't mind repeating it.

They linger in bed all morning, cuddling. Armie tickles Tim until he's flushed and breathless. Beautiful. They kiss. And kiss some more. Tim's bracelet rattles around his wrist, reminding Armie how he'd pledged himself to Tim last night – and of Tim's answer.

The last chapter of the book has mentioned dream-making and strange remembrances – Armie slowly starts to understand what that can mean not only for Elio and Oliver, but for Tim and him as well.

But he doesn't want to dwell on it. This is still too fresh to already think about it ending.

Armie has also seen the new cuts on Tim's body last night and it had hurt. He knows it's at least partly his fault this happened and swears not to give Tim any reasons to do this to himself again. He doesn't talk to Tim about it, though. He's sure Tim doesn't want to be reduced to his issues. Not on a day like this, when he’d topped the first time and will have to shoot his first sex scene in the evening. What a rollercoaster. Yet he seems surprisingly calm.

All Armie wants to do today is bath in his afterglow and enjoy their newly found connection. He knows he’s right where he belongs. With Tim.

As Oliver's shirt is ruined – they spend a good part of their time in bed making up harmless silly stories to explain what happened to the costume to Giulia, dissolving into hysteric giggles followed by more kissing – Tim borrows Armie his largest hoodie . It’s still barely fitting and therefore obvious to everybody that it belongs to someone leaner than Armie. But Armie likes wearing Tim's clothes, even if the sweater comes from the pile on his floor. It smells like Tim.
Does he imagine that Tim walks with a swagger when they go over to their cafe? If it helps Tim to get better, Armie will definitely let him fuck him more often. His newfound vibrant confidence is fucking attractive to Armie. Tim seems mature, more like an equal.

Armie watches him - with his sunglasses and his Yankees cap, Armie’s bracelet shining at his wrist - walking up to the counter to order their breakfast in Italian as realization suddenly hits him: He has to admit that he not just likes Tim or is attracted to him. On this sunny morning in a small cafe somewhere in Northern Italy Armie Hammer has to admit that he might – despite all his inner resistance and his fears – be a little bit in love with Timothée Chalamet.

Especially as Tim hands him his espresso, simultaneously taking a hearty bite from the cream-filled bun he always eats (and of which Armie forgot the name), and icing sugar sticks to the tip of his freckled nose. Armie can’t stop himself from leaning in, brushing his finger through the white dust and licking it off, never breaking eye-contact with Tim, who blushes and grins but doesn’t pull back or tell Armie to stop.

Armie’s so happy he thinks he might burst.

Life could be so easy.

They do some shopping after breakfast – toiletries, some food, wine, cigarettes and Tim's mandatory diet Coke – and then Tim wants to go to his favorite Gelateria to get an ice-cream. Pistacchio, of course. It starts to drip because Tim is talking more about his love for Italian Gelato than actually eating it and as they are in a quiet side street Armie takes his hand and sucks two of Tim's tacky fingers into his mouth, swirling his tongue around them until they are clean. It's truly satisfying to hear Tim's breath hitch.

"It's quite the oral fixation you have there, Armie.” Tim jokes but his eyes have gone dark.

“Let's go back to your place and I show you exactly to what extents I'm prepared to go with it.”

Ten minutes later they are back at Tim's and Armie's on his knees in front of the couch where a very naked Tim is sitting with spread legs while Armie swallows him down almost to the hilt. He's gagging and he loves it and isn't it revealing that he's apparently starting to explore his submissive streak with this wiry boy from New York City?

Armie's never given head, not with rentboys. It would have required for them to wear a condom and where’s the fun in sucking latex? He could blow his dildo instead. But with Tim he's willing to risk it and god, it's fantastic.

The way Tim tastes – salty and a little like his lemon body wash – is just too good. His short dark pubes tickle Armie's nose but they are also soft like downy fluff. His long lean thighs tremble at the sides of Armie's stubbly face and he makes a point of scraping his scruff against the sensitive insides of Tim's legs, giving Tim veritable beard burn.

He almost hopes Esther will notice tonight.

He's careful, though, not to irritate the fresh scar tissue.

Tim is moaning above him, whispering filthy encouragement while praising him.

“God, yes, like this, your fucking mouth, Armie... Oh my god., yeah, suck me like this... Fuck, yeah! That's so fucking good... Can you take me deeper?”

Armie tries, swallows, his tongue massaging the underside of Tim's shaft. He can feel it pulse and
swell and pulls off, just tracing the throbbing vein on its underside with the tip of his tongue, looking up at Tim through his long blond lashes.

He's a sight to behold: Tim's head is thrown back, exposing his long white neck; his back is arched, the expanse of his narrow chest flushed and heaving, his rosy nipples two hard nubs his long fingers are twisting – Armie has to quickly free his own erection before going down on Tim again.

It doesn't take long afterwards. Armie's fist flies on his cock and Tim is making almost animalistic noises until he shouts, trying to yank Armie's head away but Armie isn't having it, grabbing Tim's wrists, feeling the beads of the bracelet dig into his palm as he gulps down Tim's release as it floods his mouth.

“Let me...,” Tim huffs as his cock slides from between Armie's lips with a lewd slurp, and then Armie is pushed backwards onto the floor while Tim dives down between his legs to take Armie in his hot, wet mouth.

Being engulfed by Tim's heat is all it takes for Armie to come as well, shouting Tim's name until he presses his mouth to Armie's, silencing him as the taste of their spunk mixes in their mouths, their tongues brushing, seeking connection.

Armie's flying.

When they arrive at Luca's half an hour later for dinner Ferdinando is the first to remark on Armie wearing Tim's hoodie.

“Yeah, I stayed over.” Armie says candidly. He has no idea how much Ferdinando and Luca know or suspect, what exactly Tim had told them – they somehow never got around to talk about it and maybe it's better not to open this particular can of worms right now. He's sure Luca at least suspects something but Armie doesn't give a toss right now.

Esther looks up from her aperitif, her narrowed eyes darting back and forth between Armie and Tim, who to Armie's deep satisfaction doesn't bat an eyelid and just nonchalantly takes a sip of his drink, toasting her.

“Nice bracelet.” She says, pointing towards Tim's wrist.

“Yeah, isn't it?” Tim answers, gently touching the beads with the fingers of his free hand.

Armie feels a mixture of pride, arousal and possessiveness he tries to hide by staring at his phone.

“By the way, Giulia wants your costumes back.” Luca says as he puts a plate of Antipasti in the middle of the table. That sends Tim into a coughing fit and Armie makes a mental note to buy a sewing kit.

Luca had explained to both Timmy and Armie that it would be a closed set tonight and Armie had nodded before he'd started to climb next to Timmy into the car. Only upon Luca's irritated cough had he looked up.

“A closed set, Armie. That means no outsiders allowed, tesoro.”

“Yeah, I got it.”

Timmy had to fight hard to suppress a chuckle.
“Then what are you doing in our car?” Luca had asked, a little exasperated. But there had been laugh lines around his eyes.

“What? I'm not an outsider. I'm moral support.”

At that point, Timmy had started giggling, biting down on his knuckles.

“Look how silly he is. He needs me.” Armie had taken his seat next to Timmy in the back of the car and Timmy had taken his hand and intertwined their fingers, raising his knuckles to his mouth to kiss them.

“Thank you.” He'd breathed, batting his eyelids. Luca had rolled his eyes.

“But you stay behind. I don't want you to interfere... with Timothée's concentration.”

“Or Esther's.” Timmy had supplied.

At that Armie had rolled his eyes. “Okay, okay.”

Therefore, Armie had to stay back at the make-up and costume trailer. Now, near the lake, some 200 yards away from the parking lot, Timmy and Esther talk their scenes over. Esther had wanted to do the making out scene first. She's more afraid of the dark lake, she says, than of rolling around with Timmy on the grass.

“Boundaries? Hard limits?” Timmy asks, his hands stuffed into the pockets off his jeans, trying to come over professional.

Esther smiles. “Not really. Let’s just go for it.”

They get on the ground and Luca calls action.

Timmy lies on top of Esther, her skirt pushed up around her waist. He can feel her soft flesh while her hands grab his ass, reaching inside his jeans.

He kneels up and unbuttons his fly. Esther carefully avoids pushing his jeans and trousers all the way down. This wouldn't be exploitative, Luca had explained. They’d talked about if Timmy should wear a cock sock and it had seemed so ridiculous that they both had declined the need for it, laughing a little embarrassed at the idea.

Now Timmy’s suddenly not so sure.

He has never shot a scene like this before. He doesn’t know how his body will react. Wouldn’t it be mortifying if his hard-on sprang out, hitting Esther in the chin? She’s French movie royalty. Mortifying might not even begin to cover it.

He tries to remember that this is a film set. They are not making out for real. Above and behind them stands Sayombhu, the camera on his shoulder. Next to him a boom operator.

Breathe. Concentrate!

When Esther pulls him down again she spreads her legs, allowing him to get closer.

She's wet. He can feel it through her panties and his boxers.

It’s so soft, so warm. Fuck, this feels good. He buries his face in her hair. She smells so nice.
She pushes up and rubs herself against his crotch. He can’t prevent it, he’s getting hard.

She can feel it as well and laughs softly, squeezing his buttocks.

“Tu aimes ça?” She whispers in his ear. Is this Esther or Marzia?

He just groans and starts to move, bucking his hips in a quick, erratic rhythm. She spreads herself even wider and he has to admit this is turning into dry-humping very quickly.

Esther bites his earlobe before closing her lips around it and sucking.

Timmy remembers that Elio is to ejaculate prematurely and has no difficulties mimicking that.

He curses in French and almost comes for real when Esther’s small hands start to skim the skin of his back. In the last minute, he rolls off. His erection is tenting his boxers and he just prays that Sayombhu will focus on his face. He throws his arm over his eyes and says his lines, feeling probably even more embarrassed than Elio.

When Luca calls cut he dares to peak out from under his elbow. Esther sits up and rakes her hands through the mass of her dark hair. She doesn’t seem in a rush to cover herself as she smiles down at Timmy. With a mischievous grin she gives his erection one hard flick.

“Ouch!” Timmy swats her hand away.

“Tu ne l’as pas aimé?”

Timmy’s not sure. He pinches the base of his cock and hopes that his penis will obey and go limp again. Esther watches, still grinning.

“Tout à fait l’endurance…,” Esther licks her lips as she slowly pulls her skirt down over her thighs. Timmy stares up at the stars in the Italian night sky and decides to ask Armie how he copes with scenes like these.

Luca likes the first take. Esther looks a bit disappointed as they walk back to the trailer to change into new costumes.

Armie’s been sitting outside, chatting to the make-up lady, smoking, sipping a Coke. But his eyes find Timmy and stay on him as he and Esther approach the trailer.

“Armie, can you spare one?” Esther asks. He hands her the packet without looking at her.

“How did it go?” He asks Timmy.

He grins sheepishly.

“I don't kiss and tell.” He replies, shooting Esther a look. She lights up and rolls her eyes.

“Not much to tell there, Timothée.” She blows out a waft of smoke in his direction.

“Well, that’s contrary to my experience.” Armie quips back. Esther almost doubles over as she tries to swallow and fails.

“What?” She coughs.

Timmy’s not sure if he should be embarrassed or flattered.
“Just kidding.” Armie adds. “I mean, we got... quite close... during rehearsal.”

Now Esther giggles.

Luca approaches. “Let's watch the dailies. Timothée, Esther, mes chers, get changed.”

When Timmy emerges again in his new costume – the clothes he wore at La Dancing – Armie pulls him aside just as he leaves the trailer.

“Enjoyed yourself?” It's not aggression in Armie's voice – but a disappointed hurt.

“Well, you knew what would happen, you read the script.” Timmy tries to act unfazed but he’s sure he’s blushing.

“That wasn't my question.”

“I was practically humping her, she’s beautiful, I’m 20 – what did you expect?”

“You got hard.” Armie hisses.

“You fuck your wife once in a while as well, making babies.” Timmy spits out. Armie turns away, raising his hands in surrender but his posture screams defiance. Shit! Timmy reaches for his arm and drags him behind the trailer. There, hidden in the shadows, he puts Armie’s huge palm onto his groin. “Feel that? That's for you, and you alone. I don't care for Esther, but I like her. I like your wife, too. Think about the possibilities, Armie, while I have to wade into an ice-cold lake at night, almost naked. I doubt I’ll perk up in there.”

He saunters off, letting Armie stew in what he hopes is a mixture of frustration and arousal. A promising mood for the further course of the night.

Just as Timmy has imagined, it's no fun. Esther almost gets hysterical. There are leeches – and some fish. Timmy doesn't know much about fish. But they are quite slippery and scare the shit out of Esther. She clings to him, shrieking and squealing. He almost goes under.

“Fuck,” he splutters as they reach the shore again after Luca called an end to their ordeal. “You wanna drown me?”

“J'avais peur.”

“You... afraid? Are you kidding me?” He wraps her in a towel and hugs her. She’s almost crying.

“J'ai froid.”

Timmy starts to rub her shoulders.

“Let’s go back.”

It's late. Or early. Armie has dozed off in his chair.

“Hey.” Timmy wakes him, touching a cold, damp hand to his cheek.

“Fuck!” Armie almost falls out of the chair as he jerks awake.

“It's over. Let's go home.”

“Get dressed.” Armie says, taking a peek under Timmy's towel. “You are... shriveling.”
Timmy giggles. “Shriveling?”

“Yep. Looks like a slug. A very tiny slug.”

“Still big enough for you.”

Timmy can see Armie’s eyes go dark.

Esther walks past, pressing her hands over her ears. “Whatever it is you do, I don't want to know about it.”

“Tu ne vas pas.” Timmy says, but he’s still staring down at Armie. ”Just give me a minute.”

“Exactly one.” Armie replies. “Because I really, really like your French.”

Timmy is about to step into the trailer but then stops, waits a second and turns back. “You don't give a shit, do you?” Timmy feels his cock stir beneath the towel despite the cold.

“Right now? No.”

“Tu es impossible.”

“Let’s go back to your place so I can show you exactly how impossible I can be, Cherie.”

Armie pronounces it more like ‘cherry’.

“Oh god.” Timmy groans, shaking his head as he closes the door behind him. But he’s grinning, wide and a little lewdly.
Breathless

Chapter Summary

Armie and Timmy explore a bit more...
Careful, this shit can be dangerous!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They go back to Tim's place because he's adamant that he really needs a shower after swimming in that swampy pond. Armie sits on the closed toilet seat and watches Tim lathering his lean torso in fragrant foam. The little tease didn’t pull the curtain. There are lighter and darker patches of skin on his body and Armie idly thinks about tracing their margins with the tip of his tongue later in bed.

“… and then I almost drowned because Esther wouldn’t let go, there were haddocks or something…”

Armie laughs. “I doubt that.”

“What? Why? Esther was outright screaming. She swore a fish had bitten her.” Tim grins at Armie as he languidly starts to soap his cock with the aid of a soft sponge.

Armie really likes the view but shakes his head. “But not a haddock. They are saltwater fish.”

Tim just stares blankly at him, uncomprehending. Armie can’t believe it. “God, Tim. Saltwater. They live in the ocean, not in lakes in Northern Italy, city-slicker.”

“Well, something in the water did bite her.” Tim says defiantly.

“I'm sure it did.” Armie raises an eyebrow and winks. “Did you two watch 'Jaws' recently?”

“Oh, fuck you, Bear Grylls.” Tim throws the wet sponge at Armie, who narrowly dodges it. It hits the wall behind him with a wet slop. “No show for you then, know-all.” Tim turns around, pouting, presenting just his glistening back to Armie. “And there were leeches.” He says dramatically, leaning over to grab his shampoo.

He's so thin Armie can count his vertebrae. The view of Tim ass isn't bad either, though. “Wow, you truly faced dangerous wildlife out there. Wait, leeches?”

“Yep.” Tim starts to wash his hair. “Esther was hysterical.”

“Are we talking about thick black worms, about two inches long?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh.” Armie stares some more at Tim's beautiful, small bottom, the pale cheeks reddening under the cascade of hot water. It makes Armie wonder what else would make Tim's white skin red and burning. He loses himself a little in the enticing possibilities.
“What?” Tim sounds a little annoyed, both hands in his wet hair while foam runs down his spine, pooling in the dip of the small of his back right above his crack. “Now you’ll tell me that there are no leeches in Northern Italy either and what we saw were earthworms taking a bath or what?”

Instead of an answer Armie gets up and walks over to the bathtub.

“Spread your legs a little wider.”

“What? Oh!” Tim squeaks as Armie pulls his buttocks further apart. “Take some conditioner to slick me up.” He sighs as Armie lets his fingers brush over his tight pucker, rosy and so delicious...

Armie swallows. “Lean forward, brace yourself against the tiles.”

Tim does as he’s told. “I thought it's my go again but I… can’t say I mind… Ouch!”

Tim yelps as Armie rips the slick black leech from the sensitive skin between his cheeks. There’s a little drop of blood welling up where the creature had started to suck on Tim’s perineum just below his hole. Armie dangles the wriggling parasite in front of Tim's face who almost loses his balance and shrieks, high-pitched and shocked. He has to grip the shower curtain to steady himself, nearly tearing it off.

“Fuck! Where... just fuck, put it away! Put it away!” Tim screams, pressing his back against the tiles, eyes wide with panic. Armie laughs as he flushes the poor bugger down the toilet.

“God! What the hell...,” Tim splutters.

“So *Esther* was hysterical?” Armie’s almost crying with laughter.

“That’s not funny!” Tim turns the water off and steps gracefully out of the tub which makes Armie laugh harder still. “Shut up.” But now Tim is starting to giggle himself, wrapping his wet body in a towel like it’s a coronation cloak.

“Your face, Tim.” Armie bites the inside of his cheek to calm down.

He watches as Tim reaches out and cups his face in his palm. “My dragon-slayer.” He whispers against Armie's lips. “Let me show you my gratitude for saving me from this evil bloodsucker.”

“What do you have in mind?” Armie asks, his knees going a little weak. Tim’s eyes are dark.

“Tu verras ça.”

Armie smirks. “What’s leech in French?”

“Sangsue.” Tim bites Armie’s lower lip and sucks.

“Yeah, I like that.”

“Can we please stop talking about slugs and leeches or any other molluscs and go to bed? Now!” Tim drops the towel as he walks over into his bedroom, enticingly wiggling his slim hips.

Timmy reclines onto the mattress, spreading his legs, his hands behind his head as he watches Armie from hooded eyes.

“How do you want me?”
Armie sits down next to him. He's still fully clothed. “I would really love to ride you but I don't think I'm... able to.” Armie is blushing a little. Timmy raises his hand and brushes his thumb over the lower lip he'd just bitten.

“Yeah, I know what you mean.” He grins up, feeling smug. “So you liked it?”

“Couldn't you tell?”

“Sometimes I'm really not sure with you, Armie...,” Timmy let's his hand wander down Armie's stubbly jaw and throat before slipping his fingers inside the neckline of the hoodie. He can feel Armie's wiry chest-hair brush against his knuckles.


“You do.” Timmy grabs Armie's wrist to kiss it.

“Yeah?”

“You rip leeches from my body.” Timmy smirks.

“Yep, that was... that required a lot of bravery, actually. It was... a big leech.”

“How much bravery did it require to bottom?” Timmy asks.

Armie leans over, bracketing him with his arms on either side of his face. “With you? Not that much.” Timmy pulls him down against his lips with the hand still inside the hoodie.

“Good.” He breathes.

Feeling the fabric of Armie's clothes rub against his naked skin makes Timmy's whole body tingle. Armie kisses, nips, sucks and bites down his neck, his collar bone, his chest – paying special attention to both of Timmy's nipples until they are not only hard but almost sore. Armie's golden stubble grazes Timmy's sensitive skin as he moves lower, lower...

“Let me suck you off again.”

“Okay.” Timmy sighs, spreading his legs even wider.

Armie's lips close around the head of Timmy's already half-hard cock. He sucks a few times, bobbing his head and Timmy stiffens in his mouth. Soon, Armie's taking him deep, gagging and drooling a little as he swallows him down. Timmy feels his saliva drip onto his balls. God, this is good.

“Oh fuck, Armie, you're really getting the hang of it. Do you like that, choking on my cock?” Timmy gently bucks his hips and is rewarded with a vibration that goes directly to the pit of his stomach as Armie groans around him.

He rakes his fingers through Armie's hair and tugs, hard, before pressing Armie's head down, down. He can feel him struggle to adjust but is not met with real resistance.

“You're such a slut for my cock...”

When Timmy feels his glans hit Armie's soft palate he almost comes.

“Stop. Stop!” He pulls Armie off. His cock slides from Armie's mouth with a wet plop; Armie's lips are already swollen and glistening, his eyes glazed over.
“What?” He gasps and wraps his large hand around Timmy’s cock, squeezing. His tongue darts out to lick Timmy’s slit.

“Oh, god... I was so close.” Timmy stares up at the ceiling and tries to calm down a little.

“The perils of being twenty.” Armie grins.

“If you'd been rolling around with Esther, feeling her rub herself against you, you'd be pretty keyed up yourself.”

“Was she wet?” Armie's hot breath ghosts over Timmy's weeping cock head. As he looks down he can see precum well up from his reddened slit.

“God, Armie, you can't ask stuff like that. She's a colleague.”

“I bet she was wet and you thought about how her little frilly panties would smell if you pressed your face right there between her legs.”

Timmy leans up. “Shut up, Armie.”

“Did you want to suck her little pink clit? Push your tongue inside her and lick her soft, wet cunt? Or maybe use two fingers and watch them glisten with her juice...”

Timmy feels his cock twitch in Armie's grip. God, this is mortifying! How shall he ever look Esther in the face again when Armie plants those images in his brain?

“Stop it!”

“Make me.”

Oh. OH!

“That what you want?” Timmy asks, feeling suddenly heady.

Armie's blue eyes have gone very dark, almost all pupil, as he flicks his tongue once more against Timmy's frenulum. His face is slack, impassive.

Timmy sits up, pushes Armie onto his back and straddles him. Armie rolls over willingly.

“Take this off.” Timmy pulls at the hem of the hoodie. Underneath, Armie is naked. Timmy makes sure that Armie's hands are trapped in the sleeves above his head before he grazes his teeth down the soft, pale inside of his outstretched arm until he reaches the sweaty tuft of dark blond hair in his armpit. Timmy nuzzles there, biting and licking until Armie squirms and moans.

“Shhh.” Timmy's left hand comes round Armie's throat and squeezes, thumb and index finger pressing against the stubbly skin just below Armie's mandible. He can feel Armie's pulse hammering against his fingertips.

Timmy moves back and looks down, watching his fingers tighten, his free hand finding Armie's left nipple, twisting it. Armie yelps.

“You like this? Shall I tie you up and choke you?” Timmy asks, his hard cock grazing Armie's abdomen, smearing precum over his abs. He can feel Armie's erection, still trapped in his shorts, twitch against his ass.

“Yes.” Armie croaks.
The blood is thundering in Timmy's ears.

“Undress. I'll be right back.”

He's never done anything like this before but he'll be damned if he refuses such an offer. Only, he doesn't have the equipment Armie has at his disposition. So he'll have to improvise.

Rope?

In the pile of clothes on the floor he finds a belt. He's so thin that he needs one for most of his trousers except for sweat pants.

He throws the belt on the bed where Armie waits, already naked. Timmy climbs back on top of him, now sitting on his muscular thighs.

Armie's cock is curving up against his stomach. Timmy's mouth waters.

“How...?” He asks, feeling a little at a loss.

Armie stretches his arms above his head again. “Just put it around my wrists. Not too tight. Don't leave marks.”

The next week will be all closed set for five days as they'll film all the nude scenes. They both can't afford to sport traitorous bruises. There will be no thread of fabric to hide them under.

Winding the black leather around Armie's wrists stirs something in Timmy, something primal and possessive. He suddenly feels sure. They are in this together. Armie will guide him so they can both get what they want and need.

When Armie's hands are secured Timmy wraps his fingers back around his throat but doesn't squeeze. He waits for Armie to tell him what to do. “Press down like you did before.“ Armie whisper. “Hard. When you feel my pulse you have found the carotid artery.”

“And that's... good?” To Timmy this sounds a little dangerous.

“Oh yes.” Armie grins up at him, wide and a little manic.

Timmy's grip tightens, but he's still a bit unsure.

“Harder.” Armie's voice is thin.

Timmy obliges. He can see a vein swell at Armie's temple.

He choke him like this until his knuckles turn white and Armie's lips are a pale blue. But his cock is hard and leaking - as is Timmy's, coating Armie's legs with glistening sticky fluid.

“Stro-stroke... us. To-togehter.” Armie groans. His eyes flutter shut.

Timmy scoots up, takes them both in hand and tugs. Yes, that's it! He can feel Armie's pulse in both his palms, one around his throat, the other around his erection. It's thrumming through Timmy like he's a live wire.

Soon, both their cocks are slippery with their mixed precome. Timmy's hand speeds up, his hips bucking erratic as he pushes both their pricks into the circle of his fist. Armie's body goes slack beneath him.
Having such power over him is intoxicating. This tall, strong man is bound and helpless, even allowing Timmy to restrict his breathing. Armie's surrender, his trust is something so special to Timmy it feels almost sacred.

He pumps them harder and harder, chasing completion, becoming one as the boundaries between their bodies dissolve in white hot pleasure. Timmy's so gone that eventually he loses both his rhythm and his grip around Armie's throat as his orgasm threatens to consume him.

"Hey, no... what are you doing?" Armie jerks at his bonds around his arms in a futile attempt to bring Timmy's hand back around his neck.

Timmy stills, breathing hard, and looks down at him. "Shit. Jesus, Armie, I think you have bruises." He pushes Armie's head back and stares at his throat where red marks are starting to form beneath Armie's jaw.

Armie groans. "No. No! I was so close."

"You said it yourself – no marks." Timmy feels equally disappointed. Having Armie tied up and at his mercy is a thing he really, truly likes.

"Fuck!"

"You said that's not an option here."

Armie snorts a laugh. "It just felt so good...," he sighs.

Timmy looks into his flushed face, a crimson blush spreading all the way down to his chest. His eyes are still dark, hooded. His erection springs from its bed of golden curls, thick, rock-hard and almost purple. He's beautiful like this, overcome with desire. It can't be easy for someone usually as dominant as Armie to surrender like this, to confess his submissive, slightly twisted wishes. Timmy desperately wants to reward him.

"Wait." He suddenly has an idea.

Timmy gets up again and walks over into his kitchen. His own erection is bobbing in front of him and he grabs it as he searches through the cupboards.

"What are you...?" He can hear unease in Armie's voice.

"Don't worry." He finds the plastic bag they took their shopping home in. It seems big enough and hasn't holes in it. Thank god Italy doesn't care much for child safety. This will do.

When he returns with the bag dangling from his hand Armie's eyes go wide.

"Oh. You clever little fucker."

Timmy grins and nods.

He gets back into bed and pulls the blue, slightly translucent bag over Armie's head. For a brief moment he wonders exactly how far Armie trusts him.

"Is this too much?" He asks.

"No." The plastic rustles when Armie shakes his head, his tone charged as he seems to slide even deeper into some sort of hazy state of lowered consciousness.
Timmy hopes he'll prove himself worthy of Armie's faith in him.

He tightens the carriers of the bag around Armie's throat but is careful not to cut too deep into the skin. That would leave lesions. Soon, the plastic sticks to Armie's face like a creepy mask. His breathing becomes more elaborate, his chest heaving rapidly.

Timmy has wrapped his hand around both their cocks again, tugging gently at first. Now he strokes fast and hard, without much finesse. They both just need it rough and dirty.

Armie is close, Timmy can feel it. With the clear certainty with which he can read Armie's body comes a sense of responsibility. Timmy wants to take care of Armie, help him let go.

"God, I love you like this. Come for me, now." His voice is so deep he almost doesn't recognize it.

Armie's whole body tenses at the command. There's a short grunt and then he spills all over Timmy's fingers, his body shaking in spasms both from his orgasm and the lack of oxygen.

"Yeah, that's it!" Timmy fucks into his slick hand, almost too small to cup them both, and feels himself shatter as well, shooting his seed all over Armie's abdomen and chest.

He wants to slump down and just lie there against Armie's furry chest and rest but he has to free him first. He quickly pulls the bag off his head. Armie's hair sticks out in sweaty spikes and his face is red, eyes and lips puffy and swollen – but he looks totally blissed out. Timmy lies down next to him, touching his brow, his fluttering eyelids, his cheek with his clean hand before he remembers to remove the belt as well.

"Wow." Timmy gently kisses Armie's temple.

"Wow indeed." Armie coughs.

They just gaze at each other in wonder. Outside it starts getting light.

Timmy turns towards the window and then fishes for his phone that is still stuffed into the pocket of his rumpled jeans he threw on the pile on the floor earlier before taking his shower. It's 4:30 in the morning. "We should get some sleep," he says.

As he rolls back around, however, Armie has already closed his eyes and is breathing softly and relaxed, his arms still stretched out above his head. Timmy smiles and snuggles close, pressing his face into Armie's chest as he drifts off into a peaceful dream.

Chapter End Notes

I'll have to go to hospital to undergo an operation tomorrow (nothing serious). As I have no idea what the wifi situation will be there, and might be a little pre-occupied with health issues, there will be no update before Thursday or probably Friday even. The next chapters are written but not edited so far. But I think I leave you and the boys in a nice place here for the next week.

I might not be able to read and/or answer your comments until Thursday when I'll hopefully be home again. That doesn't mean I don't deeply appreciate them. I love you all <3!
Ghosts

Chapter Summary

Armie opens up to Tim about his family. Tim's determined to make things better.

Chapter Notes

TW for homophobia and mentions of suicide.
Disclaimer: This is all made up. I know nothing about the Hammer family apart from what you can read on Wikipedia.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Armie awakes, the room is bright, hot and stuffy. He's... sticky. As is Tim, starfishing all over his chest, dead to the world. Armie carefully rolls him over and sits up.

His head is pounding. He quickly kicks the sheets back before walking over into the bathroom, relieving himself. Afterwards, he grabs the obligatory can of Coke from the fridge and gets back into bed.

The blankets are sweaty and rumpled. But Tim naked and sleeping is a sight to behold, his dark hair a stark contrast to the white pillows. As are his cherry-red lips, slightly parted while he softly snores. His cheek rests on his left hand tugged beneath his face, his long, lean limbs stretched out as he lies onto his side.

Armie gently touches his index finger to the tan line on Tim's waist, watching his fingertip wander over the sharp ridge of his hip bone. Tim shifts a little but doesn't wake up.

Armie's gaze lingers at Tim's groin. His cock is soft and almost endearingly curled against his body in its nest of short dark curls. The surrounding skin is still reddened and raw but that can be explained by the alleged chafing from the bike-ride.

With a little make-up, Tim will be fine to shoot the nude scenes.

Basically, they will spent the next week in bed together. Armie looks forward to it – but he also dreads it. What if the truth shines through? What if people notice that he might not be acting? What if his true feelings show in the movie, for all the world to see?

Armie has walked a thin line between giving no fucks and protecting their privacy over the last couple days. He doesn't want to shout it from the rooftops, but on the other hand he's sick of people like Victoire and Esther making passes at him and Tim. He can always hide behind his wedding vow, but Tim? Besides, he simply doesn't want anyone hitting on Tim. He really doesn't like it.

If he's absolutely honest, he's had enough of hiding who he is and what he feels for a long time now. This film seems a safe if liminal space if there ever was one in Armie's life. He wants to make the best of this chance he's got with Tim while it lasts.
But he's not sure exactly how far he can let himself go. How discreet is what he's come to call the peach family? How understanding would Luca be? How much does he already know? He's a gay man himself, living in a committed relationship – but Armie's not sure what he'll think should he ever discover that he and Tim hooked up. Would he ignore it? Encourage it? Detest it because it might threaten the seriousness of his project?

Armie's not too eager to find out.

It is all still so raw and new with Tim. Somehow they are finding more and more common ground, accepting one another and their needs. Armie is still a little overwhelmed how much and how easily he trusts Tim. He'd never thought he could do that – surrender himself, giving up control and enjoy it.

Yet here he is.

Because Tim, despite all his issues, is a pure soul.

Armie smiles and lies back against the pillows, content and happy.

Until slim fingers creep up his thigh and reach for the can of Coke.

“Hey,” Tim sighs.

“Hey.” Armie answers, passing Tim the cold drink.

“What were you thinking? You look a bit worried.”

“It's private.” Armie tells him.

“I hope it is.” Tim's mouth traces the same route his fingers have taken earlier, licking and nibbling up Armie's leg until he reaches his hip bone. There, he waits, grinning up at Armie.

“God, you are insatiable.”

“The perils of being twenty.” Tim repeats Armie's words from last night right back at him, tilting his head just a little forward...

Suddenly, the room is filled with the sound of church-bells ringing.

“Do you hear that? Godly intervention.”

“You think so?” Tim's breath is ghosting over Armie's cock that gets rapidly interested in the proceedings.

"Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." Armie quotes. It had been one of his mum's favorites.

“What?” Tim sits up.

“Book of Revelation. The seven trumpets of-”

“I thought you were Jewish?” Tim stares down at his cut penis and frowns.

“Well...,” Armie starts, licks his lips and falls silent.
“My mom would accept me being with a dude but never being with a goy.” It only sounds half-joking.

“It's... complicated.” Armie takes the can from Tim's hand and takes another sip of Coke.

“You don't have to tell me if it's too personal.” Tim sounds serious now, shaking his head, sitting back on his heels, gloriously naked and a little disheveled.

Armie realizes to his own surprise that he doesn't mind to tell him. “No... it's... well, my paternal family is... was of Jewish descent but my dad converted when he married my mother. She has... very strict Christian views. Very strict.” He raises his eyebrows and nods to emphasize just how strict his mother's views are.

“Meaning?” Tim's voice is soft.

“Meaning she would never accept me being with a dude. Ever.” Armie swallows and shrugs before he forces an apologetic smile onto his face.

“Don't say that, man.” Timmy touches his shoulder, strokes it, plants a kiss onto his biceps. “She loves you. She's your mum. She'd accept it. It might just take some time.”

“No, Tim, you don't know her. You really don't. Believe me, she wouldn't.” Armie's voice sounds harsh even to him. He can sense Tim pulling back.

“I'm sorry.” Tim whispers, but there's a look of utter incomprehension on his face.

“No... it's not... Listen, “Armie is searching for words but can't find any. He wants to explain, maybe even to defend or vindicate his mother. But there's nothing he can say. So he sighs. “It's just complicated.”

Tim nods. “Is that why you never tried anything real... with a man? Because your family wouldn't approve?”

Armie's head whips up and around. “They wouldn't just not approve, Tim. When a cousin of mine came out as a lesbian my mum recommended her parents to get her into therapy. You know the things they do? Trying to 'cure' the gay in you, praying with you, kinda brainwashing you? She was carted off to some sort of Christian facility and committed suicide two years later.”

He can see Tim pale. “Shit. I'm so sorry.” As if to underline his words Tim leans forward and hugs Armie so tightly he thinks he might suffocate. His first impulse is to shove Tim away but then he gives in and lets himself be held.

“You don't know my family, Tim. Better keep it that way, okay? I don't want you near them.”


They sit like this for some time, Tim still embracing him, Armie resting his cheek against Tim's soft curls.

“What was her name?” Tim asks eventually. Why can't he let it go? But somehow, it feels good to finally talk about her. Armie hadn't said her name in a long time.

“Tina.” Armie's voice breaks a little. “I didn't really know her, she was older and we didn't have much contact. But my parents talked about her a few times. My mum said she prayed for her.” He closes his eyes. He doesn't want Tim tainted by this shit but he also can't stop telling him all now that
he’s started. “I remember her funeral. It was... bleak. No one addressed... well... it wasn’t even mentioned that she killed herself. I just found out later as we all gathered at her parents’ house. Another cousin told me. She accused my mum... sorry, I shouldn't say that but... she accused my mum of being responsible. It was the first time I truly questioned her believes.” Armie feels bile rise in his throat as he tries to swallow his tears. He can still smell the potpourri from a bowl in the hall of his aunt’s house mixing with the apple pie served at the wake; stale cigarette smoke and scotch and hushed voices and too much perfume on a hot summer's day...

He’d been sitting with his cousin Melissa on the stairs, having been relegated to the upper floor with the kids, watching their family and friends and many people he didn't know in their stiff, black mourning clothes. His mother had hugged his aunt, holding the hands of the gaunt woman with the puffy eyes, probably reciting a Bible verse.

Armie had been fifteen, overwhelmed by the shock that someone he knew, roughly his age, could vanish just like that, from one day to another, gone forever.

It had deeply hurt, even if he hadn't seen Tina in years. But he’d still remembered that she’d sneaked off with him and a bottle of cherry brandy at some other cousin's Bar Mitzva shortly after they’d moved to LA. They'd drunk the sweet liquor in some sort of boat house, splitting the bottle between them. Armie’d been so drunk he’d vomited in the car on the drive back.

That evening, Tina had told him that it was okay to be different, that she knew it was fucking hard being bullied at school but that he'll eventually find some people who'll like him. She’d also told him that she was planning to run away. 'With my girlfriend.' Armie hadn't understood what she’d meant by 'girlfriend' back then...

'You know what she did?' Melissa had asked, sounding well older than her thirteen years of age. She had been pale, thin and blond, wearing glasses that did nothing to hide her unnervingly sharp gaze.

'Who?'

'Tina.' Melissa had said, adjusting her glasses, twisting one of her thick braids around her finger.

Armie had just shook his head.

'She hanged herself. In her room. Wanna see?'

Armie had just stared at Melissa. Somehow he'd known that she’d been serious.

'No.'

Melissa had shrugged, a little disappointed. 'My dad says it's been your mum's fault. Tina liked girls and your mum said she was possessed by the devil. Her crazy faith, dad said. And that your dad should never have married a goy.' Melissa had sounded somewhat gleeful, reiterating all of this to Armie.

Armie still remembers feeling sick and cold all over despite the bright hot day. Luckily, they’d left soon after. To this day he hates apple pie. The smell alone makes him retch.

"It's okay.” Tim kisses him again. “It's okay. I'm sorry too.”

“Whoa...” Armie pinches the bridge of his nose as he slowly disentangles himself. “That wasn't how I wanted to start the day.”

Tim strokes his face, his hair. “Do your parents know about our film?”
“My mum knows I'm in Italy, shooting. She doesn't know what. She actually stopped speaking to me after I made J. Edgar and we only reconciled after Harper's birth. She strongly disapproved of Final Portrait and that was mild to what we'll be doing here. I have no idea how she'll react to this.”

“Or this.” Tim leans in and kisses him in earnest.

“Oh, I think I can vividly imagine that scene. She would get up and leave immediately, citing some Bible quote about eternal sin, fire and brimstone.” He tries to smile.

“She might call for an exorcism.” Tim giggles. It's a beautiful sound.

“She thinks I'm possessed. That was the last thing she said to me before our three years of silence.”

“Seriously? Wow... okay.” Tim still sounds confused.

It makes Armie think. He knew his mum was different from other parents but Tim's reaction just shows him how different she might be. At least he's learned to keep his distance.

“I told you. Better not meet her.” He can't risk these two worlds collide. Tim would be the one getting hurt.

“I don’t intend to.”

“Good. Now, where were we?” Armie rakes a hand through Tim's hair, pulling him in by the back of his head for a deep kiss – a kiss he hopes will make him forget all the ghosts from his past.

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Timmy can't believe that things like these really happen. Who does that to another person, try to eradicate their sexuality? As if it mattered who one loves? As if there was good love and bad love...

Timmy becomes suddenly aware that maybe he grew up much more privileged than Armie. True, his family are billionaires but Timmy's not thinking money right now. It dawns on him that his privilege has been to be loved and accepted regardless, without having to fulfill any expectations. His mom had bought him explicit rap records when he'd been seven. She'd never made fun of him for his music or dancing or criticized his friends or how he dressed. She didn't force any believe down his or Pauline's throat, despite being a proud Jewish women.

He'd thought that was normal, took it for granted. Regardless of faith or ethnicity – his friends, classmates, their parents, his teachers... everyone he knew was liberal-minded and permissive.

But now he's forced to realize that maybe not all parents love their children regardless, give them room to grow and be themselves, support and accept them the way they are.

Because Armie's upbringing seems totally different to his own, at least from what Timmy had glimpsed over the past weeks. He really doesn't know much about the man he shares his bed and body with – apart from the few films he'd watched and what Wikipedia had told him.

Armie seems to be way more complex than he's thought. And much more troubled.

Timmy has no idea what it means to grow up in such a climate of rejection and denial. How must that have been for an adolescent Armie, discovering that he strayed from the path his parents thought was the right one? Timmy's heard about the sort of “therapy” Armie’s mom had advised but it never figured that he might actually encounter someone who'd been affected by it, even peripherally. It seems so... medieval.
Had it been a real threat for Armie, living in fear that his parents might cart him off as well, to cauterize his desires and change the way he loved? What had that done to Armie, knowing that if his parents knew how he truly felt they would very likely never speak to him again, even condemn him? Timmy can't wrap his head around it – how can parents do that to their child? – but it might explain Armie's deep-rooted doubt and self-hatred.

Timmy promises to himself to try to make up for it as good as he can. To show Armie that it's okay what they're doing. But how?

He starts with a blow job. Nice and slow, taking Armie deep, kneeling in front of him on the floor, urging Armie to pull his hair. Armie strokes and pets him until he purrs around Armie's cock filling his mouth, almost choking him.

But this is not Armie being dominant. He's not forcing himself down Timmy's throat, making him gag and splutter. This is Armie gentle receiving Timmy's devotion. Timmy strokes Armie's thighs in rhythm with his sucking, up and down, up and down, Armie's soft blond hairs tickling his palms.

He swallows around Armie, his tongue massaging the velvety underside of his erection. God, he tastes so good! Timmy wants to drown in his scent, his flavor, never letting go. He wants to worship him, to show him that he's worth it, this, that something that feels so good and right and makes them both so happy can't be against any deity's commands.

He wants to show Armie how much he loves him. So he sucks him deeper and deeper with ever increasing vigor, swirling his tongue, not caring that his jaw starts to hurt and his lips get rubbed raw.

Timmy will take everything he can, everything Armie has to offer, embracing it, loving it, cherishing it.

When he feels Armie swell Timmy pulls off. Armie strokes his cheek, looking down at him with hazy blue eyes, face flushed, mouth hanging slightly open.

“Tim...,” he whispers. There's no urgency in his voice, no heated arousal, no aggression. It feels as if Armie sees him for the first time and Timmy baths in the warmth of his gaze.

“Come all over me.” He sighs, just loosely stroking Armie's hot, glistening shaft. It's so big Timmy's almost unable to wrap his long fingers around it. “Please, Armie, do it. Mark me.”

Armie doesn't break eye-contact as he wraps his own hand around Timmy's and squeezes. Their fingers entwine. Timmy feels him pulse and twitch and then the first shot of spunk lands on his chest, dripping down his breastbone. The second shot hits his throat, pooling in the hollow at its base.

With the third load Armie paints his face. Timmy opens his mouth to catch as much as he can. Armie watches him, eyes wide, one hand pushed into his hair again, holding him in place to rub his cock against Timmy's cheek, his lips, and Timmy eagerly, hungrily welcomes it, licking and sucking it clean.

He's so hard himself that it feels he might burst but he wants to be good. This is about Armie, to give him what he needs as he had allowed Timmy to take what he needed to be sure and whole over the previous days and nights.

Timmy wants to draw it out now – for himself and Armie.

“Tie me up.” He begs, still kneeling, casting his eyes down onto the floor and his own raging erection.
Armie smears cum over Timmy's swollen lower lip, rubbing his seed into Timmy's skin with his thumb.

“I won't be able to have another go for some hours, you know?” He says, sounding wrecked and almost sorry.

“I don't care. We don't have to... I don't want to... I just want you to tie me up, leave me here, do with me as you wish, as long as you want.”

“God, Tim.” Timmy's head is yanked back and Armie's mouth crushes against his, so hard that he tastes blood. Timmy whimpers into the kiss, opening wide to give Armie everything he wants to take. Generous. Free. With love.

“Use me, I'm yours.” He whispers as Armie eventually releases him.

“Give me a minute. Don't move. Stay on the floor, eyes down, hands on your thighs.” Armie climbs out of bed and walks over into the bathroom.

“Yes, Armie.”

Timmy lowers his gaze again, his heart beating hard and fast in his chest as he awaits Armie's return.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so very much for your good wishes! You are lovely! It really helped! As you can see, I'm back from hospital. Everything went well so I can continue Armie's and Timmy's story.
Panic

Chapter Summary

Armie has a fucking stupid idea. Of Course, Timmy’s on board with it. And, of course, it turns out it is a fucking stupid idea...

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: heavy angst + panic attack

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Armie knows they will spend the next week even more naked than usual on this movie so he has to be careful. Belts or ropes would leave marks (Tim bruises so easily). And Tim doesn’t own ropes anyway. (He really should buy some and leave them at Tim’s apartment. Armie makes a mental note but today is Sunday so no chance.)

Instead, Armie takes two of Tim’s large fluffy white towels and rips them into long, slim strips. The material is so soft it won’t even cause a chafing.

When he returns to the bedroom, Tim is still kneeling in the same position he’s left him in. His chest is heaving, his head bowed down, cum drying on his torso. He looks like a fallen angel.

His makeshift bonds won’t be long enough to tie Tim up in a fancy position. No elaborate Shibari play today, just good old-fashioned restraints.

“Get up, eyes on the floor. Lie on your back on the bed.” Armie instructs Tim and he obeys in one fluid motion, like a marble statue come to life.

First thing Armie does is to blindfold Tim with one if the towel strips. The white terrycloth is almost the same color as his skin; despite having spent weeks in Italy by now, there are just a few freckles showing on the ridge of Tim’s nose. Armie wants to kiss them.

They’ve never done it like this before. Tim had always been able to see what Armie was doing.

“Is this okay?” He asks, careful not to tangle Tim’s hair in the knot he ties at the back of his head.

“Yes.” Tim sighs.

Armie caresses Tim’s arms and legs, stroking and licking them as he arranges him spreadeagled on the bed, tying each wrist and ankle to one of its four bed-posts. The bonds are tight but not cutting into Tim’s skin.

When he’s finished, Armie stands and looks. Tim is spread out before him, open and defenseless. His breathing is accelerated but not dangerously so. His skin is beautiful alabaster flushed a pale pink down to his navel, marked with Armie’s seed.
His hard cock lies against his flat stomach, in a small puddle of clear precome.

“Can you move your fingers and toes?”

Tim balls his hands into fists and wiggles his toes. Armie’s mouth goes dry as he watches Tim’s gorgeous slim feet and swears to himself to suckle every long pale toe before he’ll untie him.

But for now, he sits down onto the mattress, near Tim’s face. He must have felt the bed dip because he turns his head in Armie’s direction. His mouth is slightly open as he tries to take deep, steadying breaths. Armie sucks his index and middle finger into his own mouth before pressing them to Tim’s lips, coating them with his saliva until they glisten, adding to his cum.

“You are so beautiful.” He tells him, his voice loud in the quiet room.

Tim opens his mouth and tries to catch Armie’s fingers so Armie has to withdraw them.

“No, no, no.” He says softly, smiling down at Tim; so eager, so needy.

He strokes his fingers down Tim’s neck, feeling his Adam’s apple bop as he swallows; then further on, over his sternum, his belly, dipping in the hollow if his belly button, stopping only inches away from the leaking head of Tim’s erection.

“Please,” Tim whimpers, trying to buck his hips.

“No, not yet, babe.”

Tim sighs and Armie watches his cock twitch, oozing even more precome onto his abdomen. Armie gathers some of it with two fingers and presses them once again to Tim’s lips.

“Open. Suck.” Tim does with abandon and as much devotion as he previously payed to Armie’s cock.

“Good boy. Just like that.” Armie presses Tim’s tongue down with his fingers and the boy stills, willingly accepting the intrusion. “I’ll be feeding you your cum later.” Tim moans in reply, gagging a little as he tries to swallow.

“But for now, I just want you to stay like this.” Armie removes his fingers, wiping them on the inside of Tim’s thigh, higher, higher, just stopping at the marred skin of his groin. Tim’s hips twitch as he groans in frustration and Armie pinches him to get his attention.

He takes Tim’s phone from the nightstand, calling up his contact on the screen before pressing it into Tim’s right palm. “I’m getting breakfast. If you want to stop this, just press the home button. I’m just down in our café round the corner. If you call, I’ll come up, untie you and it’s over. You understand?”

“Armie, please…”

“Shh.” Armie flicks his fingers hard against the sensitive inside of Tim’s left upper arm and he yelps. “You’ll be alone up here for a while. Do you understand?”

“Yes.” Tim mumbles.

“I trust you not to come.” Armie strokes his fingers up over the underside of Tim’s erection, tracing the vein, and Tim’s whole body shivers. “Or we make it another week of chastity. This time while we roll around naked in bed all day on set.”
“Sadist.” Tim whispers but his mouth is smiling.

“On the contrary, I will allow you to watch me wank every evening, kneeling beside me, maybe even make you lick my cum from the floor afterwards.”

Tim bites his lower lip as a thick drop of precome wells up from his slit.

“Oh, is someone getting excited by that prospect? I think I better go. Later.”

Armie quickly gets dressed in the bathroom, takes Tim’s keys and leaves.

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Timmy lies on the bed, bound, blindfolded, utterly helpless, writhing with need, so keyed up he fears just his phone vibrating could trigger an orgasm. He has no idea how long Armie’s gone by now. Lying in darkness, he has lost all sense of time.

All he feels is his body and its needs. God, he’s so hard! But all he can do about it is squirm a bit and buck up unto nothing but the warm air of his bedroom still smelling of sex.

He hates Armie for this!

He loves Armie for this!

Armie, who’s taste, mingled with his own, still fills his mouth. As it should be – both of them, united, becoming one.

Argh – he’s sounding cheesy. But he can’t help it, his brain just comes up with this sentimental bullshit.

It’s the movie. His character is getting to him. Right now, he fully experiences Elio’s horniness, his body and mind flooded with hormones. He needs SEX, in capital letters.

His thirst for his own Oliver is real. He wants him right now with every fiber of his being.

Strangely enough, he’s not afraid. He doesn’t know much about BDSM etiquette but he doubts it’s accepted behavior to leave someone alone, tied up and blindfolded during a scene. And yet, it turns him on to no end. It’s reckless and bold and irresponsible – it’s Armie.

Timmy trusts Armie. He truly does. He wants to prove it, to show Armie how much he means to him, what he’s prepared to endure just to make him happy – that enduring it for Armie makes him happy.

Armie deserves it.

The story Armie has told him has got to Timmy.

He wants Armie to see that he’s not some sick freak, that he doesn’t have to change or pretend to be someone he’s not – not for Timmy. Timmy takes him the way he is – he doesn’t want him any other way.

He doesn’t care for the ever-smiling, perfect movie star.

They only have so little time – it’s not worth wasting it with hiding behind facades and lies. He’s not here to heal Armie or make him a better person – Armie doesn’t need that. He just needs someone who accepts him and loves him regardless.
And that's what Timmy will do for the short while they share their summer bubble.

But as Timmy drifts, thoughts creep up on him that he usually keeps at bay. This shoot will end some time soon. In a few weeks… and then, what?

He’ll go back to New York. There are some projects he’s auditioned for and maybe something will work out. But they are all scheduled for autumn. He’ll be stuck in New York for the whole summer.

And Armie? Timmy knows he has an upcoming shoot, some action film with Dev Patel. They’ll be filming in India pretty much till the end of the year.

But, of course, that’s not the real bolt that will bring all what’s developing between them to a grinding halt once this film is finished. The thorn in Timmy’s flesh is Elizabeth Chambers.

Somehow, Timmy is glad that she didn't take Armie’s name. So Timmy can still pretend that she’s not connected in the most profound way to Armie; as his wedded wife and mother of his child. Children. She has every right to him. Timmy can give Armie sexual abandon, indulging their mutual kinks, maybe even friendship and a sense of support in their field of work – but he can’t be his family, he can’t give him kids, he doesn’t even have a proper home himself.

Imagining Armie in his tiny room in the apartment he shares in New York makes Timmy almost giggle. Armie might not even fit through the door.

God, what is he doing? Is he really dreaming about building a home with Armie, playing house?

Oh, he's so fucked! If he’s honest with himself, in the moments just before he falls asleep, he has imagined how it could be. Selfish as he is, Timmy had envisioned Armie leaving Liz, she agreeing to a divorce, all amicable, shared custody and all.

It would be easier if Timmy moved to California. A house by the beach… waking up with Armie every morning in a sun-soaked bed to the sound of the waves crashing on the shore, making love, making movies… sharing that bed every night, doing the most intimate, dirty, embarrassing things to one another, then whisper sweet nothings in the darkness until they’d fall asleep…

Timmy knows it’s a fantasy. That the reality wouldn’t be this idyllic. He’s never had a long-term relationship or as much as lived with a partner but he sees his parents and had flatmates ever since moving out – he knows the realities of life with someone else. Dirty socks and dirty dishes, talk about money, mortgages and maintenance, fights, falling asleep on the couch in front of the telly more often than passionate lovemaking… and yet, sometimes this mundane domesticity is all he wants.

In their case, there would be kids involved as well. Timmy’s barely twenty. He can’t really fathom the responsibilities that come with caring for children. Last time he looked he’d been one himself.

And from what Armie has told him just this morning – the pressure of coming out, especially to his family, could break him.

Then there’s the work to consider… Brian always tells him to be careful. He’d never outright asked about Timmy’s proclivities but he knows his agent isn’t stupid. Gaydar it’s what they call it, isn’t it? Anyway, Brian has told him numerous times that to pursue an acting career is hard and borderline crazy but doing so as a queer actor is almost impossible. He should know. Timmy trusts him. So, if he and Armie ever go public, it could ruin both their careers. Timmy doesn’t know how it is for Armie but in his darkest moments it’s always been the prospect of acting that have pulled him through. He needs it like air. If he’d lose it it would wreck him.
And them, in the long run.

And yet, he can't get these ideas out of his head. *What if…*

The thought makes him feel happy, warm. He shelters this little fantasy world of his in which he and Armie are together.

Until today, he’d never put serious thought into the idea. But maybe what Armie has told him about death and love, rejection and despair, mixed with sex and the intense experience of being totally at someone's mercy and okay with that has opened a floodgate?

Now Timmy can’t close it.

The idea of not being with Armie anymore, unable to touch him, hear his voice, smell him, make him laugh, look at him tightens his throat. Because that's what realistically will happen, isn’t it? They’ll finish this film and they’ll part. Who knows if they ever find a distributor, if anyone will even see the film they poured their hearts and souls into?

If they’re lucky, they might meet again at some festivals, do a bit of promo together, some interviews, press junkets, maybe a day or two before they’ll have to part again, working on different projects, maybe even on different continents. Armie will have two kids by then.

Timmy will be lucky if he has a job.

He laughs bitterly as he remembers that the prospect of their little affair having no future had been quite alluring only a few weeks ago. So what has changed?

He knows it, of course. But is he ready to admit it?

He feels his heart skip a beat before beating faster.

Oh god, he’s not just in love with Armie.

No, it's even worse. He *loves* Armie.

When did that happen?

He remembers Armie bursting into his piano lesson – certainly not then. He remembers Armie choking him in Luca’s kitchen. He remembers staring up at his silhouette against the open window before kissing Will. He’d been fine! Fascinated, intrigued, maybe even attracted but nothing more.

So, how the fuck did this happen? Why the fuck did he allow this casual fling to become something more?

Love.

Or is he just lying to himself? Is he the one pretending? Has he been lost ever since he came in Armie's lap? Or does he mistake desire, lust and need for something deeper?

Timmy's reeling, confused by feelings that make him happy and sad at the same time...

Suddenly, he hears it. There's that small voice from a dark corner in the attic of Timmy’s mind that is whispering ‘*You knew it all along. You knew you would get hurt. You knew this wouldn't last. Because who could love you back? You really think he'll give up his picture-perfect life for someone like you? He just wants to fuck you! Like a cheap whore. And, of course, you let him. Oh, Timmy!*’
No!

Timmy throws the door to that dusty attic shut and runs down the stairs as fast as he can. He’s not listening to that voice. Not while he’s tied up and helpless… if he’s having a panic attack right now it might truly get dangerous.

Armie. Think of Armie! Fuck, where did his erection go? He tries to swallow to taste him again but his mouth is dry. The darkness is closing in on him. Words echo in his head – *who could love you – cheap whore – who could love you – you knew it – who could love you – air. AIR!*

A sob is wrenched from his throat. He can’t breathe.

The phone. He’s still holding his phone. He just has to press the display and Armie will answer, will come back…

Will he?

*YES! SHUT UP! SHUTUPSHUTUPSHUTUP!*

He will.

Please.

He has to.

Timmy’s hands feel a little numb by now but that can be attributed to the lack of oxygen. He tries to move his fingers but they are trembling and… fuck, no! No!

The phone slips out of his grip and lands on the wooden floor with a dull thud.

He’s lost.

Breathe. Just breathe. Count and breathe…

But he can’t. The panic overwhelms him, pulls him under. He starts to tuck at his bonds but he somehow can’t feel his limbs anymore. Everything tingles and he has no control over his body any longer…

All he can do is scream.

“Armie!” He croaks, his voice rough with fear. “ArmieArmieArmieArmie!”

There’s no answer.

“*Oliver!*”

Chapter End Notes

Please, don't hate me for the cliffhanger. 
You never, ever leave someone alone during a bondage session.
Catch Me I'm Falling

Chapter Summary

Guilt, self-hatred - and some love. They try in this chapter but it that enough?

Chapter Notes

Again, sorry for the cliffhanger.
Chapter title is from a song by Real Life, released in 1983.
*I lay down to rest my head*
*My soul to keep the night I dread*
*It's no dream*

Armie hears it the moment he unlocks the door and opens it.
Muffled gasps, like a wounded animal grunting.
Yet his brain needs a moment to process the signals his eardrums pick up.
Fuck!
For a second, Armie freezes completely, unable to move, horror-struck.
“Oliver!” Tim's voice sounds broken. His safeword! It jolts Armie into action.
What the hell...?
Tim had his phone. Why didn’t he call?
Armie gets his answer a second later when he barges through the bedroom door. Tim’s phone lies on the floor next to the bed.
On that bed, Tim is thrashing in his bonds. His arms and legs seem to cramp and spasm while his head hits the mattress again and again. He’s blue in the face.
Armie feels everything around him slow down. It’s like walking through surf. He wants to do ten things at once but is at the same time paralyzed with shock.
Thank god, he reacts on autopilot. He’s not even consciously thinking, just running over into the kitchen to get a knife, outright skidding through the lounge after cutting a corner. He’s back within a moment yet it feels like eons pass before he's able to still Tim enough with a palm pressed to his chest to cut his wrists free, pulling him upright with one arm around his shoulder.
Tim is shaking and silently screaming, his face contorted and streaked with tears dripping from below the blindfold.
“I’m here. It’s okay. Just try to breathe.”

But Tim doesn’t. He’s gasping, a horrible wheezing sound emanating from his throat, his arms flailing uncoordinated, almost hitting Armie in the face.

Armie props Tim’s trembling body up against his chest and grabs the plastic bag still lying around from their scene last night to press it over Tim’s mouth before tugging off the blindfold.

Tim’s eyes are glassy, wide with panic.


Tim is coughing by now, spluttering, tearing the bag away from his face. His hands grab Armie’s legs, arms, shoulders, clawing to every part of his body he can reach, twisting in Armie’s embrace until his whole body is distorted, seeming desperately needy for contact.

“Careful. Let me untie your legs.” Armie wants to move but Tim holds onto him so tightly that he would have to push him away to reach his feet. So he just strokes his hair, his arms, softly kissing Tim’s temple, tasting salt.

Armie closes his eyes. He’s hot and cold at the same time as he feels himself start to tremble violently.

“Sorry. Please, Tim… I’m so, so sorry.” He’s on the brink of losing it, pleading with Tim, with fate, sending a quick prayer to a god he doesn’t believe in.

The abyss opens up before him, guilt and her ugly sister self-hatred rearing their heads from the all too familiar hell-mouth, laughing at him while opening their arms wide to welcome him back in their suffocating embrace.

In greeting, their shrill voices scream at him all the things that could have happened. Asphyxiation. Trauma. Death!

Tim could have choked agonizingly slow had Armie decided to order a second espresso. Armie remembers how it had felt like, fighting for breath last night. But he had wanted it. Tim had been with him. Maybe what they’d done wasn’t exactly safe and sane but at least it had been consensual. Armie had wanted Tim to choke him.

What had just happened hadn’t been Tim’s choice. It had been Armie’s fault. Again.

Guilt and self-hatred throw their heads back and roar with laughter.

‘You fucking idiot! You swore to never hurt him again. Look at him now!’

It feels as if they put splints beneath his eyelids. Armie’s unable to blink or avert his eyes from Tim’s distorted, damp face.

He knows Tim’s prone to panic attacks and hyperventilating. He knows Tim’s still fragile. He should have anticipated that he could drop his fucking phone and should have stayed in the fucking apartment. But he’d so badly wanted to play this power game, have Tim totally helpless and at his mercy.

It had made him so fucking horny.
He’d acted irresponsible. He’d brought Tim in real danger. Mortal danger.

Tim could have died.

By Armie's hands.

Armie’s own breath stutters. Pain fills his chest, making it too tight as his two vicious lifelong friends enfold him, promising to take him down with them into their realm of darkness.

He remembers holding Tim’s bleeding body in the bathroom just a couple weeks ago. Didn’t he promise to keep him safe from harm?

But then his brain had dropped between his legs. What kind of immature, dumb, selfish fucker is he?

Guilt and self-hatred nod in agreement. 'Now you're talking, honey. Welcome back.'

He knew he didn’t deserve Tim and wasn’t this mess proof enough for-

“Please don't leave me. I don't want you to go.” Tim chokes out against Armie's shoulder, snot soaking through the fabric of his hoodie.

It's like as if Armie's brain short-circuits, his black thoughts and self-pity derailed by Tim's shaky plea.

“Tim, what...?”

“Sorry. Sorry, I didn't want to upset you... I'm an idiot...” The boy is still crying, babbling, curling up in Armie's arms. Is it really Tim who's apologizing for what just happened?

“No, I'm the one to blame here, Tim. I should never have left you alone, that was neglect...”

“You didn't know I would freak out. I'm just such a pussy, didn't you say so yourself?”

Tim's voice is too high, he speaks too fast.

What is happening here? This is a complete reversal of roles.

“Tim, please, calm down. It's over. I'm here. I'm not leaving you again.” Armie holds him tighter, trying to ground Tim by providing what has been denied to him on so many occasions. Why does he always need the worst to happen before he can find this connection with Tim?

“You will in about four weeks.” Tim sniffles.

Guilt and self-hatred have by now taken box seats, watching how Armie fucks up once again with their pointed chins resting in the dirty palms of their bony claws, grinning mischievously.

“That is... let's not...,” Armie is stammering. What can he say to this?

'Oh boy.' Guilt snarls. Self-hatred nudges her in the ribs and cackles.

“Let's not do this right now, okay. You're upset. You're not in the condition to discuss this.”

'Chickening out, Armand, like always.' Guilt croons. 'Coward.' Self-hatred supplies.

“I am upset because... because...,” Tim’s words suffuse in a violent sob.

“Hey,” Armie rocks him in his arms. “Hey, it's alright.”
'Yeah, you tell him.' Guilt high-fives self-hatred. 'Just keep lying and lying and lying.'

“No, it's not! This will end, you will leave, I will never see you again, you will go back to your wife and kids and your Hollywood life and there will be no place for me.” Tim's words tumble from his mouth, voicing Armie's deepest fears.

Cold dread settles in Armie's stomach. He doesn't want to imagine what Tim describes. He simply can't. He's known him only for a few weeks but a life without him already feels empty.

“Shh. Don't. Don't say stuff like this.” He can't deal with it right now. Not after finding Tim fighting for air, almost losing him after violating him once again. All Armie wants right now is to keep him and protect him, to stick his own head in the sand and fingers in his ears. He's usually very good in ignoring unpleasant truths.

Guilt and self-hatred grin and nod, carving another notch into the chart listing Armie's shortcomings.

But Tim doesn't stop.

“It's true, though.” His beautiful face is blotchy with tears, his eyes red from crying.

Armie feels like he's falling. Guilt and self-hatred are slowly unfolding their well-tried safety net to catch him.

“Let’s just not think about it, okay. We still have time left.” He's almost begging.

“I can't do that. I can't push these thoughts away. I tried to ignore them, reality, Liz, the baby, but...” Why can't the boy shut up? Armie silences him with a kiss.

“Just don't.” He whispers against Tim's lips.

“I can't, Armie.” Tim looks up at him through wet lashes. “Fuck, I think I love you.”

Guilt and self-hatred freeze, staring at each other as the thickly woven net between their long, spidery fingers dissolves into thin air.

It takes them a moment before they crack up, wiping their dead, cold eyes as they collapse in a heap of hysterical laughter.

Shit! Fuck!

Did he just really say that?

Isn't it bad enough that Armie has to find him panicking and screaming? An overwhelmed kid unable to handle a bit of bondage? He has killed the mood already. Did he have to top that with a pathetic love confession?

Who could love you?

He wants to take the words back, swallow his tongue. But Armie grabs his chin and forces him to meet his eyes. The look Armie gives him makes Timmy go utterly still. He's still weak and shaky but now starts to feel physically sick.

“Don’t say that. You can’t say things like that.” Armie's voice is flat.
'See, you knew it all along!' The voice in his head is hideously triumphant and Timmy wants nothing more than to flee this room and Armie's presence and bang his head against against the wall until that voice is silent. Forever.

Because he knows it's speaking the truth... yet suddenly desperate anger flares up inside him.

Having gone this far he can go the whole way. Fuck the consequences, their carefully balanced equilibrium. He has nothing to lose right now.

“Why not? We can fuck but we can’t talk about our feelings?”

Armie blushes.

“Because....” Timmy witnesses Armie crack in that moment. It's like watching the Soda-Mentos-experiment he remembers from junior high in slow motion, only instead of sticky froth there are emotions erupting from Armie which he's up until know kept bottled up. It's fascinating but also messy and uncontrollable. “Because I don't want this to end either. Why did you think I freaked out when I heard about the new baby? But I had to understand that this is too much. All of it. Us. You. Talking about it makes it real. It's like unleashing a monster. It will just make us sad and in the end destroy both of us.”

Timmy wants to crawl in Armie's lap and hold him but his feet are still tied to the bed.

“Armie, don’t.” Timmy touches his face. Armie seems not to hear him.

“I've never in my whole life experienced what I did with you over the past weeks. It's like I'm living in a dream. You're all I ever wanted.” Armie holds Timmy's face between his huge palms and it feels like he's staring right into his little bruised soul. His eyes are very blue, clear and serious and Timmy's short of breath again

He braces himself for the final blow. “But?”

“But.” Armie doesn’t let go of him. “But dreams are not reality. Isn't that even a fucking song?” He huffs a laugh but it's full of sorrow and regret. “I already pledged myself to another person. I didn’t do that lightly. It means something to me.” Armie whispers.

Timmy tries to nod but all he wants is to recoil to get some distance between them. Yet Armie holds his head in a vice-grip, not letting go. Timmy doesn’t think he can bear to hear Armie professing his undying love for his wife but he can’t escape.

What Armie says next, however, throws Timmy's whole world off-kilter.

“I was sure back then. I have to be sure now.”

What?

“Are you saying what I think you're saying?” Timmy asks. When Armie stays silent and just blinks he feels new tears well up in his eyes. “Armie, please don’t give me hope, don’t make promises you can’t fulfill. Please.”

Armie slowly lowers his hands, stroking Timmy’s neck, his thumbs brushing over his Adam’s apple before resting at the base of his throat still covered in his dried cum. Timmy swallows hard and it hurts. Armie’s face contorts as if he can feel Timmy’s pain.

“What do you want me to say?” Armie sighs, looking suddenly drained and tired.
That you love me, too. That you mean it. That you will stay with me.

'Don't be silly, little Timmy!'

'Who could love you?'

'You really want this man you profess to love destroy everything he's built, steal away his children's father, take the husband from a pregnant wife – just for a good fuck?'

“I don't know...,” Timmy carefully disentangles himself and starts to pick at the knots around his ankles. Armie hands him the knife.

They are silent until Timmy has freed himself, pulling his legs up to his chest and hugging them, placing his chin on his knees. He shyly smiles up at Armie from below his fringe, a lopsided grin trying to ease the tension and to indicate a change the subject.

It seems to work.

“I had such plans.” Armie says. “I wanted to watch you fall apart.”

“You did.”

Armie pulls him close and Timmy goes willingly into his arms. This seems to be the only place for him right now, his sanctuary between a gloomy past and a lonely future. Zwischen immer und nie.

“Let’s just enjoy what we have.” Armie kisses his cheek, his jaw, his neck. “We don't know what the future brings.”

Why wait for it, though, Timmy thinks? Why not take charge and do something, shape the future? Their future. But that's not for Timmy to decide, is it? He's not the one who would loose his whole existence if they decided to be openly together.

“Don’t you mind?” He asks, playing with the cord of his hoodie Armie’s still wearing. “What I said? How I feel about you?”

Armie presses his lips to the crown of Timmy’s hair. “No. Why should I mind? I know I shouldn’t encourage you… but fuck it, Tim... You are truly something special. To me. I never had what I have with you. With anyone. Not even with Liz.”

Timmy’s heart skips a beat. Where over the last hour bleak cold darkness has spread within him now glows a small warm flame. Timmy knows it’s dangerous to nurse it but he can’t help it. Armie’s not a free man but that doesn’t mean they can’t make this work... somehow.

'Stop overthinking', he tells himself. 'Just play along. Don't be a nuisance.' He fists the front of the hoodie to pull Armie in for a hard kiss. “Yeah? I take whatever I can get. Just so you’ve been warned, Armie.” And he means it. He loves Armie. And Armie didn't laugh at him or push him away now that he knows. That should be enough for him.

But will it be enough for both of them?
Revelations

Chapter Summary

Armie and Timmy film the first kiss. Some things see the light of day.

Chapter Notes

This got a little kinky - but if you know me you knew this would be coming.
Also, there is this video of Tim filming Armie in the gents - I'm not making things up here, folks. Well, of course, I am.

They arrive at Luca's together the next morning, having spent the night at Armie’s. Tim had ridden him until Armie’d thought he might have a coronary, Tim's lithe body swaying above him, panting, begging for his cock. Deeper, harder. Just the thought of how tight he’d felt makes Armie squirm in the back of the car that takes them to a grove with a little pond near Capralba that will serve as their Monet’s Berm.

Sunday is still a bit of a blur to Armie. Tim saying he loved him had pulled the metaphorical rug right from under his feet. He'd loved and hated to hear it. He wants Tim to say it again and knows at the same time that he really, really has to distance himself. For both their sake.

But he can't. He simply can't. It gives him physical pain to be apart from Tim. When he went to shower and left Armie sitting alone on the bed for about fifteen minutes yesterday he almost cracked up and had to bury his face in the sheets to inhale Tim's scent to keep it together.

What is happening with him?

What is this all-consuming emotion of never close enough; the possessiveness; the physical pull; the anxiety that's only soothed when some part of him touches some part of Tim's body?

It hurts deep inside him when they're apart. It's more than lust or desire or attraction. It's an itch he's unable to scratch. No matter how much Tim gives him – Armie wants more.

He wants to get under Tim's skin, crawl inside him, flail him, devour him, have Tim beneath him, aching for him. He wants to taste every part of him, his blood, his semen, his spit; he wants to mark him for real, not just with a bracelet Tim can take off but with something permanent – a scar, a bite, a brand, a tattoo, something marring Tim's perfect skin. He imagines his finger touching his mark imprinted on Tim's body while he lies next to him, tied up and gagged, his eyes pleading for more, promising more...

To silence these troubling thoughts, Armie had resorted to an established distraction. He'd taken Tim to bed.

Now Tim sits next to him, staring out of the window, eyes hidden behind dark sunglasses. He’d winced a little as he sat in the back of the car and that had filled Armie with a silly yet undeniable
pride. Tim is sore because he couldn’t get enough of his cock last night. He’d begged him to finger him after they’d fucked, taking four of Armie’s fingers and still begging for more.

Armie remembers how Tim had reached back and touched his stretched ring of muscle with his index finger, sighing with pleasure. He’d looked incredible, beautiful, gorgeous, sexier than anyone Armie’d ever shared his bed with.

Tim had been lying on his side, his sweaty back against Armie’s chest, muscles working under taut skin as he’d whispered: “I want your whole hand inside me.”

The thought of Tim’s rough, broken voice forces Armie to cross his legs. Tim still looks out the window but Armie sees in his reflection that a dirty smirk blooms on his face. The boy knows exactly what Armie’s thinking about.

Last night, Armie had wanted it. God, and how he’d wanted it, to wreck Tim completely, rip him apart, push his whole fist inside him, listen to him groan and gasp as he would have tried to take it. It would have taken hours. Armie stares down at his left hand in his lap and balls it into a fist. When he looks up again Tim bites his lips and has at least the decency to blush a little.

They hadn’t done it. Not last night. Armie could still count the times Tim had had anal sex on the fingers of the very hand that had been buried three knuckles deep inside his hole. Taking into account how the day had started, Armie had decided to refrain from another experiment. Tim was still way too tight for what he had proposed. If something would have gone wrong they’d have to go to hospital the night before an important shoot. Bad idea!

But just the fact that Tim had wanted it, would have allowed Armie to do it, had made his spend cock hard again last night and does the same right now.

“Do it on our last night. I want to feel you until I’m back in New York. Ruin me for everybody else.”

And Armie had promised, cradling Tim’s pliant, trembling body in his arms, rubbing his prostate over and over until he’d milked him dry. “Don’t stop, don’t stop.” Tim had panted even as his body had been shuddering with over-sensitivity.

He’d whined when Armie had eventually withdrawn his hand but had fallen asleep almost immediately after, too exhausted for a serious sulk.

This morning, he’d sunken to his knees in the shower without having been told and sucked Armie off while he’d washed his hair. That might have been a sensible thing to do, regarding what they would film today.

Elio’s and Oliver's first kiss.

Armie remembers Tim coming in his pants when they’d rehearsed that very scene. Up until then that had been the hottest thing Armie had ever experienced. At least today he feels sated enough to be able to prevent an embarrassing boner while rolling around with Tim on the grass. And that’s a good thing as they won’t be alone like they were in Luca’s garden. It’ll be a closed set but still there’d be Luca, Sayombhu, a boom operator…

It’s not that Armie ever really had to film a nude scene before but from the stuff he’s done so far – kissing, photo shoots etc. - he knows that it’s never sexy or hot. It’s work. Hard work – no pun intended. On the other hand, he never had to do such things with a lover. So there’s that. He fears lines might blur.
The state Tim must be in should help him as well to keep control. Totally fucked out. And if not… now Armie is the one with a dirty smirk on his face. Maybe they could wander off during a break and Armie could give Tim a hand behind one of the pine trees, always in danger of getting caught. Tim would have to be very, very quiet. Armie might be forced to silence him with a hand over his mouth...

Suddenly, the car stops and Armie is torn from his deliciously filthy daydreams. They have arrived at location. Luckily, the weather is bright and sunny because the water in the shallow pond is truly freezing. They film the dialogue scene there first. It's fun, splashing around in the water. Tim is acting naive yet provoking and Armie gives back as good as he gets. The playful attraction between them is palpable. Luca is highly pleased.

They break for lunch, picnicking at the bank of the pond. Tim's deep in conversation with Luca so Armie decides to wander off into the pines alone to relieve himself. As this is a very lonely rural spot Luca had decided to do without facilities to go easy on the budget.

Armie is just wearing those very short Adidas shorts without a fly so he has to pull them down to mid-thigh to get his cock out. There's no room for boxers or even brief below them, just the netting holding his dick and balls. He's mid-way during emptying his bladder against a pine, having made sure that he can't be seen from base, when he hears a twig cracking and looks up. Tim is leaning against a tree some five feet away, watching him.

“What the fuck!” Armie gasps and almost pisses on his shoes. “What are you doing here?”

Tim grins.

“I wanted to look.”

“At what? Me pissing?”

Tim nods and bites his lower lip.

“You are a perverted little minx.” Armie can't believe it. God, what is it with this boy? His stomach starts to cramp and tingle simultaneously as he's desperately holding it in while at the same time bathing in Tim's heated stare.

“And you love it.” Tim grins even wider. “Go on. Or do you want my help?”

Armie blushes. “Thanks, man, I can do that on my own.”

“Yeah, but I'd like to... give you a hand.”

To his own embarrassment, Armie can feel himself getting hard. He takes a deep breath and tries to relax. He breathes in and out and eventually a few more drops dribble from his cock.

“Are we getting excited, Mr Hammer? Do we like being watched while pissing?” Tim's voice is rough and deep and suddenly closer than expected.

Armie's having enough. He raises his head and discovers that Tim is standing right beside him. “Do we have a watersport fetish, Monsieur Chalamet?”

Tim reaches around Armie, placing one hand at his hip, only inches away from his open fly. “I guess I do.” He sounds surprised but also not in the least embarrassed.

Armie shakes his head. But hadn't he been thinking about sharing everything with Tim? Can that
boy read his mind? “Seriously?”

Tim just shrugs. Oh god, this is opening up a whole new barrel of kinks. Armie swallows, meeting Tim's gaze.

“Okay, then. Be my guest.” It's no big deal after all, Armie tells himself. Dudes do it all the time in public lavatories. Yet it is a bit different here, in this enchanted Italian grove, being watched by his lover who has an arm around his waist while pissing before filming their first kiss.

But Armie's bladder is near bursting and so he just lets it flow, aware of Tim's eyes on his cock. He has to admit it's hot. In a very twisted way. He even pulls at his dick a little, giving Tim a better view. He can hear the boy gasp, his curly head resting on Armie's shoulder.

When he's finished he wants to pull the shorts up and tug himself away but Tim is quicker and wraps his hand around his damp cock.

“Let me.”

Tim spins him around and shoves Armie against the tree before sinking on his knees faster than Armie can step away, sucking him into his mouth, twirling his tongue once, twice around his still moist glans before releasing him.

“Not bad. Not bad at all.” He says as he gets back on his feet, wiping his mouth with a smug smile before gently pulling the shorts up until Armie's decent again.

“You dirty little bastard.” But Armie can't suppress a grin either. If he's honest he finds all of this rather arousing. As if to prove this to Tim his cock stiffens visibly beneath the thin polyamide and he has to pinch its base through the fabric with three fingers to get some control over his traitorous body.

They wander back to base holding hands. No-one remarks on it.

When they lie on their indicated spot on the grass they have almost as much fun to experiment as they had in Luca's garden. During their first attempt, Armie can taste his own salty flavor in Tim's mouth and groans. Tim grins against his lips and opens wider.

Luca is impressed by their dedication to the scene. They try different angles and positions. Should Tim lie down? Should Armie bracket him? Should Tim straddle him in return? From where does the camera get the best view of the proceedings? Tongue or no tongue?

It takes almost an hour but none of them seems to mind. Until Tim starts to rub his face. “I feel scrubbed raw.” He smiles. Luca calls the make-up lady to apply some soothing lotion and suntan.

“What's it called in English? Beard burn? Happens to us all.” Luca smiles at Armie, stroking his own dark stubble on his chin with one hand. “Armie, shave closer the next time.”

“I did.” Armie protests. “Tim's just too sensitive.” He touches Tim's cheek with the back of his hand and his breath stutters when Tim's eyes flutter shut with a sigh.

“Okay, can we go again?”

This time, Tim doesn't outright press his lips to Armie's when he comes up for the kiss. He just licks Armie's open lips with the tip of his tongue before leaning in. Armie feels butterflies in his stomach and is glad he's already lying down.

“That's it!” Luca shouts, punching the air. “Just like this. Do it just like this.”
The dick-grabbing becomes a bit of a nightmare, though. The shorts are too short and Armie can't help it, Tim wrapping his fingers around his prick, outright massaging his groin, does things to him. He's only human after all. He flops back onto the grass, an arm thrown over his face. His hard cock hurts in its too small confinement but Tim doesn't take his hand off him.

"Sorry. So sorry. Tim, Luca, I know-."

"Don't you worry, Armie. Nothing to be ashamed of. It happens to the best of us. We can remove it in post-production. Timothée, tesoro, take your hands away from Armie or bring him off, but stop teasing him."

Tim's squeezing fingers are suddenly gone as if he's been burned. Above him, Armie can sense Tim go very, very still.

"Do you need a moment?" Their director asks them, looking kindly from one to the other. Sayombhu has lowered the camera and wandered off a few yards to take a smoke.

Armie swallows convulsively, hoping for Tim to say something, crack a joke, anything to ease the tension. But he stays silent.

"Do you think I'm stupido... senza discernimento... what do you say? Without eyes?" Luca's voice isn't angry or mocking, though. It's soft and gentle.

Armie sits up and just stares at him. Tim seems frozen, his cheeks bright red.

"Sorry...," He croaks out. What else is he supposed to say?

But Luca just waves a hand. "This is a save space for you. This film will allow you to... explore. I won't intervene. You are both adults. I'm not judging you. I want to see your love and show it to the world."

Their love? Luca said it just like that – as if it wasn't earth-shattering.

Armie feels suddenly on the brink of tears. "What if we are not ready to show our... love to the world?"

"Oh, mio caro, it is so beautiful. No one will mind, I promise. I make sure what the world sees is a work of art."

Luca thinks their love is... beautiful?

'Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.' So his mother's bible lessons eventually offer something in return for Armie.

Tim seems to come back to life at Luca's gentle words. He huffs a laugh and shakes his head. "Since when have you known?" He plucks the grass between his feet with his right hand.

"Since your first rehearsal in my garden. You were very obvious. Though if I'm honest, I knew you'd fall for each other since I walked in on you on the first day in my living room, rolling around the floor. You clicked. But there was more to it."

"Yeah." Armie nods, feeling light-hearted, almost undone by Luca's simple truths. Tim laughs his bright, sunny laugh and on the spur of the moment Armie takes his hand still tearing at the grass and
entwines their fingers. They look at each other and he gives Tim a small nod.

“You okay?” Tim asks softly.

Armie takes a deep breath. “Me okay.” He feels safe. Loved. They are in this together.

Luca claps his hands together. “Great. Don't act. Just be yourself. Say your lines. Sayombhu!”

The next take is perfect. No-one cares about Armie's balls falling out of his shorts. That's the least important thing that got exposed today.

^^^^^^

“Shit! Oh shit! Shit, shit, shit! He knew all along!” They are back at Armie's apartment and Timmy flops down onto the couch, punching the cushions as he let's out a string of expressive expletives.

Armie sits down beside him, his head in his hands.

“So you didn't tell him...?”

“Of course I didn't!” Timmy can't believe Armie thought he'd spilled the beans.

“Well, I thought, maybe when I told you about the baby...”

“I went over to them, yes, I was distressed, yes, but, god, I'd never...,” Timmy throws his head back and stares at the ceiling.

“It's okay. Sorry.” Armie mumbles into his palms.


“Why does it matter to you?” Armie asks, sounding deflated..

“Well, it's private.” Timmy says, astonished. “It's no-one's business but ours.”

“You really think anything on a film set stays private for long?”

Timmy sits up and stares at Armie with sudden horror dawning on him. “Oh, fuck! I don't think anyone will tell Liz.”

Armie's head whips up. “That's really not my first worry right now.”

“Oh... Okay....” Timmy says slowly, a little at a loss what it is that obviously troubles Armie.

“It's... I don't know... the whole world will see it... us. I'm not ashamed, it's not that. I just... I want this to stay between you and me.”

“And a hundred people on set.” Timmy smiles, taking Armie's hand, kissing his knuckles.

“I trust them. No idea though what others will make of this.” Armie gestures between them with his free hand.

“Well, my agent warned me to take a 'gay role'.” Timmy makes air quotes. “Type casting and all. But it was a lead. In a Guadagnino film. And it's not that I had anything better on.”

“My agent warned me too. It's my third time 'playing gay' and he seriously questioned me and my choices. Why I wanted to do it. He asked if there was something he needed to know. If your agent
asks you that you know you're fucked.”

“I think Brian... knows... something. But better let him suspect that I'm gay than that I cut myself. If he'd knew that he'd deem me unstable and drop me.”

“You think so?”

Timmy shrugs. “I know that it does look like I'm nuts. You can be a gay actor. Look at... Zachary Quinto... Neil Patrick Harris... But no one wants to work with someone mental.”

Armie chuckles. “Oh Tim, I worked with so many crazy people. Believe me, you aren't nuts.” He pulls Timmy in for a soft kiss.

“Look who's talking. You might be biased.”

Armie scoots back a little. “We are a match made in heaven, don't you think?” He gives Timmy a lopsided smile that makes him feel warm all over. He grins back.

“Is that an allusion to the novel?” He asks, feeling smug.

Armie swats him over the head. “Smart-ass.”

“I thought you loved me for my intellect and not just my looks?” He realizes too late what he just said. His mouth snaps shut.

“I... I... sorry, that was inappropriate.” He stutters pulling back a little.

“I do, in fact.” Armie takes his hand again.

“Haha, very funny, nice try, Armie. It's okay, it was stupid. I-”

“I love you, Tim.”

Timmy swallows. His hand starts to sweat. He should pull it away from Armie's grip but somehow he can't bring himself to do so.

“Yeah, alright. Here. In Italy. During the shoot. Sure, man.”

“That's not... that's not what I meant. The time I spent here, with you... these past weeks were kinda the best days of my life. Despite all the shit that happened. You are... I don't know how to say that but today, filming the kiss with you, in this beautiful countryside with beautiful weather... it just felt so right. It felt like... us. Not Elio and Oliver.”

Timmy's head is swimming. It's what he'd wanted to hear so badly and now that Armie's saying it he has to mitigate it. “Transference. You are projecting what your character feels and does on yourself. It happens when actors immerse themselves in a role. So I've been told. In high-school.” Timmy still stares down on his slender fingers resting in Armie's huge hand. He likes it. It looks good. Right.

He has to blink rapidly a few times to clear his vision.

“You think so?” Armie asks. There's something in his voice Timmy can't quite name. Hurt? Disappointment?

“Yeah. Besides...,” he bites his lower lip. “You made it very clear yesterday: you are already taken.”

“That was yesterday. I was overwhelmed. Shocked. I couldn't think. And the state you were in... but
today... Shit, Tim, I can't be without you.”

Timmy closes his eyes. He simply can't believe Armie changed his mind so quickly. It frightens him. “Armie, please, don't do this. Don't make promises you can't keep. I might be very young but even I know that a fuck on a film set isn't the ideal basis to question every life choice. Just don't put that on me.”

“I don't put anything on you.”

“Just because Luca knows and seems okay with it doesn't mean others will be. As you said, I have nothing to lose and even I don't harbor under the illusion that this here is anything but temporary. Let's enjoy it while it lasts.” It hurts for Timmy to say these things but the alternative – accepting Armie’s words as truth, starting making plans for a future together – would hurt even more.

Last night, Timmy had wanted so badly to forget, to just get fucked, for Armie to hurt him while making love to him to cauterize his silly dreams. He'd wanted to be reduced to a fucktoy, being used for what he's good at – giving Armie pleasure. So that when this would end Armie would at least remember the passion. It's the only thing Timmy thinks he has to offer. It has to be enough.

He'll do every depraved, lewd thing if it will leave an imprint on Armie's soul, so when he wakes up in a month or a year or a decade at night from an exceptionally dirty dream it will be Timmy's voice in his head and Timmy's face fading as his eyes snap open. Because if dreams is all they'll ever have he'll make sure that at least an infinitesimal part of Armie's brain will never forget him.

When he'll turn over to his wife in a month or a year or a decade, watching her sleep, Timmy wishes for Armie to regret at least for a second that it's not Timmy lying there next to him.

At the same time Timmy hates himself for these thoughts.

Aren't dreams so very fragile, bound to shatter? And he might shatter with them. So he has to kill them before they're fully developed.

“So, this is just a showmance for you.” He hears Armie as if he's under water and has to shake his head to resurface.

“No! But, god, Armie, can we please look at the realities we are dealing with here? Because I need you to be sure you know what we're talking about. You are married with kids. Imaging what happens when you walk away from that, your family, to hook up with a man ten years younger than you. That isn't just career suicide – that's social suicide. Are you aware of that?”

“So we can't even think about it? Talk about it? Maybe there is a way...”

“No!” Timmy finally pulls his hand away. “Don't dangle such hopes in front of me. Yesterday this was out of the question and today you want to make plans for our future?”

“Tim, please, I know this might seem a bit inconsistent...”

“A bit, yeah. I don't even think you'll want to live up to those ideas. I don't want you to live up to them. I don't want you to ruin your life for a boy you've known a few weeks. You know nothing about me or my life. This is all just a dream, our Italian summer romance. It can't be more. Please, don't do this to me. If I mean something to you, please don't do this.” Timmy sinks back into the cushions, not sure if he's on the verge of crying or throwing something. All he wants is to feel numb. Feel nothing, so not to feel anything.

Armie stays quiet.
“I’m sorry.” Timmy sighs, pressing the balls of his hands into his eye-sockets. “I think Luca really got to us. The whole shooting day was intense. We shouldn’t talk about things like this. Let’s forget it.”

“Okay,” is all Armie says.

Timmy wants to tell him that it’s really okay, that he doesn’t expect anything, that he knows his heart will break by the end of the shoot anyway but that it might hurt less if he can prepare himself. If they don’t talk about a possible future together he might be able to come to terms with his loss and heartache. Eventually. He might survive.

He’s simply too fragile right now to give in to hope.

But when Armie breaks the leaden silence between them, it feels like a slap in the face. “If you can do it like that, I envy you.”

“Do what?”

“Just switch your feelings off...”

“I’m not... that’s not what I meant. But I have to protect myself.”

“How about you let me protect you?” Armie sounds suddenly fierce as he turns towards Timmy.

“You can’t.”

“Why are you so sure?” Armie touches his shoulder and gently shakes him. “Look at me.”

“Because there are things that you can’t control. Neither with your money or your looks or your... love...”

“What are you talking about?”

“Armie, you don’t know me. I don’t know what this is to you... if you suddenly feel free and brave because you can follow your desires openly here but... it’s just reckless. And sooner than later you will see that yourself. You can’t throw your life away for a New York theater kid with questionable prospects. I don’t want you to do that. I don’t want to bear that burden. I...”

“Yes?”

“You mean too much to me than I would allow you to destroy what you have. And your kids.”

“Don’t tell me how to live my life.” Suddenly, there’s anger in Armie’s voice.

“No. But I’m telling you how I intend to live mine and being the gay toyboy wrecking the ideal Hammer-Chambers family isn’t on my list.”

“God dammit, Tim!” Armie takes out his cigarettes and lights two, passing one over to Timmy.

“Thanks. Sorry.” Timmy drags smoke into his lungs, grateful for the momentarily distraction.

They sit in silence for a while. There’s just nothing Timmy can think to say.

“When are we expected to dinner?” Armie asks eventually. Luca has invited them over.

“Eight.” Now it's six.
“Any chance for some making out before or did I kill the mood?”

Timmy starts to cough as he can't suppress a laugh. “Smooth, Armie.”

“Hey, you said we should enjoy it while it lasts.” The smile on Armie's face is a little forced.

They end up entangled on the couch, Timmy on top of Armie, snogging, grinding against each other until Armie proposes to transfer things into the shower. Rolling around on the grass all day has made them both itchy in more than one way. And with Luca's dinner invitation ahead of them, neither of them is particularly keen to come in their pants.

They kiss and kiss under the hot spray, touching each other with hands slick with soap, bringing each other off with silent gasps. It feels a little desperate and leaves Timmy somewhat hollow. The usual post-orgasmic euphoria somehow fails to set in.

He wonders if Armie feels the same.
Covenant

Chapter Summary

More misunderstandings - but they are in this together.

God, what is it with this boy?

Armie hadn't planned to tell him he loved him just like this – but still, he'd estimated a different reaction. Happiness. Reciprocation. Frantic making out. But instead, Tim had stalled and almost turned him down. Why didn't Tim believe him when he said he wanted to protect him, to take care of him? Why didn't he believe that Armie was sincere when he said how much Tim meant to him? Why did he refuse to even talk about a possible future?

Armie's old doubts start to creep back up on him. This is nothing serious for Tim, just a fling, a casual affair...

But when he remembers their weekend he pushes these thoughts aside. They had shared so much more than bodily fluids over the last few days – even Armie isn't that thick that he doesn't understand that this is something very special.

So, why is Tim avoiding The Talk? Armie has been so sure they could make this work- somehow. Maybe not instantly. It would need adjustment. Compromise. But he travels quite a lot, for films or other commitments. He's actually rather often in New York.

And if he's not mistaken, this film will have Tim's career skyrocket. That means Hollywood. He just lives round the corner. Liz spends a lot of her time in Texas.

There could be ways. They could try. They could continue this for a while, carry on, see how it's going.

Armie's not a total idiot. He's gone on Tim but not that gone that he's willing to file for divorce after a few weeks with him. But it's also true that he's never met anyone like Tim and he's not in the least inclined to let him go. He now realizes that he's been slowly suffocating in his marriage, his false life, before he'd met him. He's tried to fill the emptiness with rentboys but they simply will never be able to satisfy his needs. He wants a true connection with a man – on more than just a physical level.

That Luca kind of encouraged them to explore had made Armie brave. His words had opened a window through which Armie had dared to glimpse the possibility of a future for him and Tim after Crema. It had been like a breeze of fresh air, blowing through his shallow, comfy existence built on lies, subtly rocking its foundations.

He really wants to talk about this with Tim.

But Tim apparently doesn't.

What is that nonsense about destroying Armie's life? Armie's life has been pretty much fucked up before he'd met Tim. Tearing down the Potemkin village of the Hammer-Chamber marriage would be liberation, not destruction. And, as his great-grandfather would have said, sometimes you have to destroy the old to built something new. Creative destruction – what could be more fitting for them?
Thinking about the sham his private life is, Armie's now sure that it's also reflected in his professional life. Might that be the reason he never really felt at home in these huge studio productions? Because it was all so false and he had enough of that already in his day-to-day life?

Maybe the constant pretending to be someone else had made him want to become an actor? But then it had started to drain his creative energy as he'd been forced to pour more and more of it into keeping up appearance than into making art?

He knows this film is different. Because of Luca. And Tim. And maybe because Armie has finally arrived at a crossroad in his life where he needs to make a decision? Where he wants to make a decision.

He tries to convey all this to Tim but he seems to think it's a spur of a moment fancy and not something that has been building for years and is now eventually culminating with him as the conductor.

When their verbal connection doesn't seem to work today, Armie tries to get physical. He needs some form of reassurance that they are still on the same page despite Tim's refusal to consider them past Italy. This is too important for him to let go.

Their making out is sweet and tender and Tim is beautiful, sighing and moaning – but somehow it feels to Armie as if the link between them is suddenly too weak to transmit his feelings.

Should he have kept silent? Did he say too much? Has he ruined what they have?

Or maybe he's just projecting? It's true, it has been an intense, exhausting day.

They arrive at Luca's still a little flushed, their hair damp. No-one says anything. Instead, Michael asks how it had gone today while Amira starts to interrogate Tim as if she's his mum and he just had a date.

Armie likes it, smiles and relaxes a little.

But Tim is avoiding his gaze and that's something he doesn't like.

The food is delicious as always so Armie eats. And eats. And drinks.

Yet somewhere through the third course he's realizing that Tim is just picking at his plate. Even Ferdinando remarks on it.

Tim just shrugs. "With all these nude scenes coming up I can't afford to get fat.” He grins over at Luca who wacks a finger in his direction.

“You might be the only person at this table who really doesn't need to worry about that, Timothée.”

Tim is still not looking at Armie but the whole exchange feels like a slap in the face nonetheless.

As if in defiance Armie takes a second serving of Tiramisu and drinks more port and wills these culinary delights to somehow make him feel better and fill the dark, hollow void opening up inside him once again.

He really hopes he might be able to keep his furies at bay tonight. But it might be a lost cause...

Despite Tim having been distant the whole evening, they fall into step when leaving Luca and return to Armie's apartment together.
“Is it okay if we don't do anything tonight?” Tim asks, and that he feels the need to do so just increases Armie's lugubrious mood. “I'm just knackered.” He stretches a bit too obvious and tilts his head in the direction of the bedroom.

“You hardly ate anything.” Armie says by way of an answer.

“No appetite.”

Armie nods. “Of course, it's okay.” He tells Tim quietly.

“Yeah, then... I'm off to bed?” It sounds like a question.

“Yes, good night.” Armie's surprised when Tim walks up to him and kisses him softly on he lips.

“Don't be too long.”

Armie keeps standing where he is, rooted to the spot, until he sees the light switched off in the bedroom. He's been silently counting and has reached 736. His mind is blank now, filled with just one single determination. Quietly, he closes the bathroom door behind himself and locks it.

Timmy lies in Armie's bed, stripped down to just his boxers and t-shirt, his head buried beneath a pillow to will sleep to come and pull him under. But it's futile. Something is missing, that solid weight next to him he apparently got used to quite quickly over the past few nights.

Or maybe it's because Armie's words from earlier still echo in his head.

A future...

Fuck!

Why had Armie felt the need to talk about stuff like that?

It had upset Timmy and ruined his appetite.

Instead of eating, he'd watched Luca and Ferdinando, their easy camaraderie, their friendly banter, their fond understanding and deep affection expressed in small yet tender gestures. A hand on a shoulder in passing, a thumb stroking the back of a hand, a long glance; no overtly loud declarations but silent appreciation.

Timmy had been unable to look at Armie the entire evening for fear he could read Timmy's hope and longing for exactly this.

Because it's pointless and will only hurt them both.

Yet just the idea of having this domesticity with Armie makes Timmy dizzy. Could that really be them in a few years time?

Armie said he loves him. And Timmy loves him back. Can they built something on that foundation?

“You are such a romantic slob!' The voice in his head cackles.

Timmy punches the mattress and pulls the pillow tighter over his ears. God, what is he thinking! It's nothing but a fantasy. And yet... right now, he wants to drown in it. He craves Armie's body beside him. Just to hold him for a while. He wants to cuddle up against him and pretend that their summer
will never have to end...

Where is Armie? What the hell is he doing? Why doesn't he come to bed when he knows that Timmy is here, waiting for him?

Maybe he felt rejected? Shit, no, that hadn't been what Timmy had meant. He'd wanted to assure him that what they have here is fine, that he doesn't demand any commitment after Italy, that Armie doesn't need to pamper him or spare him from the realities of his life. In his feeble way he just wants to protect Armie.

He doesn't want to hear promises that will inevitably turn out to be lies, just told in the moment because Armie thinks it will make things better for Timmy. Easier.

Timmy can't allow himself to have any expectations.

What they have now is good and to want anything more would be to tempt fate.

Timmy doesn't dare to.

That voice inside his head huffs out a cynic laugh. ‘You better not, boy.’

Fuck! Why can't he sleep? He just wants Armie close. Now. When it's still easy and possible.

Timmy sits up and peers at the door he's left a little ajar. Only the light from the streetlamps outside three storeys down at the Piazza illuminates the flat. But it's enough to make the beads of his bracelet still sitting on the nightstand – next to the half-empty bottle of lube – shine with their opaque, mesmerizing glint.

Timmy touches the stones. They are cold. He gets his phone and swipes the display to life. He's been lying here for almost half an hour.

Where the fuck is Armie?

The apartment is eerily dark and silent.

A strange feeling creeps up Timmy's spine. A hunch? A premonition?

Whatever it is, it has Timmy climb out of bed as he decides to get up and look for Armie. It might seem desperate but he feels alone and sad and there's no need for that with Armie probably just in the next room, feeling maybe as miserable as Timmy does.

Only, Armie isn't in the lounge. Nor is he in the kitchenette.

“Armie?”

Timmy hears something, a muffled noise like... a groan?

Fuck!

There's only one room left.

“Armie, are you in there? Armie!” Timmy tries the bathroom door but it's locked. “Armie, for fuck's sake, open this fucking door!” He starts to bang his fist against it.

From it's other room comes another sound – retching? Heavy breathing? - then something clatters to the floor.
“Armie!” Timmy feels suddenly sick. Cold dread pools in his gut. He thinks he has an idea what is happening behind that door and being helpless, left out, makes him want to scream on the top of his lungs.

But he just closes his eyes and wills himself not to panic.

“Armie, just please open up.” His voice is small. He doubts Armie can hear him. “Please.”

Timmy leans his brow against the door, wishing he could somehow diffuse through the wood. 'Please...', he thinks again.

Suddenly, there's a click and the door swings open. Timmy stumbles forward, crashing face first into Armie's sweaty, bare chest. He just wraps his arms around him and holds him.

“Stop this shit, please.” He whispers.

“I thought you wanted to sleep.” Armie's voice is rough.

“I wanted to lie in bed with you.” Timmy looks up at him. Armie's face is ashen, his eyes red-rimmed, sunken deep into bruised sockets. There's the characteristically sour smell of vomit hanging in the air. Not even the lavender air freshener can hide it.

“I just need a minute.” Armie tries to pull away but Timmy grabs his shoulder and doesn't let go.

“I mean it. Stop this shit.” His fingers dig into Armie's muscle.

“You said it yourself. Loads of nude scenes coming up and I had two servings of Tiramisu tonight.”

Timmy can't believe he's heard right. “No... what? I just said that because I couldn't very well tell the table that I had no appetite because we fought earlier and I was sad because I had been reminded that there will be nights very soon that I won't be spending with you anymore.” He simply feels horrified that Armie could think he would somehow, anyhow, condone or even encourage what he's been doing to himself.

“But you were right.” It's as if Armie hadn't heard him.

“No, Armie, this isn't something you should feel the need to do.” Timmy holds him even more fiercely. He just wants to shelter him from all his self-loathing induced by his family, his wife and a merciless industry. There must be a way.

“Like you cutting yourself?” Armie's words hit home.

“You can't...” Timmy falls silent, staring up into Armie's face, his dead eyes. Maybe he has a point there? Maybe Timmy could use it? “Listen, I stop cutting if you stop throwing up.”

“As if it's that easy.” Armie snorts, trying to entangle himself from Timmy's grip. He doesn't let go.

“Let's try.” Timmy sounds surer than he feels. But what has he to lose?

Armie blinks. He looks so worn and tired.

“And if I don't stop?”

“Then I won't either. Every time you throw up I'll add another cut. Somewhere visible.”

Armie swallows, hard, swaying slightly in Timmy's grip.
“That's unfair.” He licks his chapped lips.

“Your choice.” Timmy whispers. “Now go to bed. I get you some water.”

To Timmy's surprise Armie obeys.

Timmy slips into bed next to him two minutes later with a cold wet flannel for his face and a bottle of water.

“Did you take anything?”

“No, just pushed my fingers down my throat.” Armie's lying facing away from Timmy, his naked back rigid.

Timmy reaches out and lightly touches his shoulder to encourage him to turn around. It takes a minute before Armie rolls onto his back, eyes closed. Timmy gently wipes his brow.

“Promise me.” He says before kissing Armie's temple. His skin feels clammy against his lips.

“Only when you allow me to talk to you about after Crema. About us after Crema.”

“Armie...”

“Quid pro quo, Tim.” Armie turns his head a little to look at him. It seems to take an enormous effort. His face is gaunt, his eyes dark and sad.

This has to stop. If what it takes is for Timmy to sit through another futile discussion of an impossible future for them, it's the sacrifice he has to make. He can't watch Armie hurting, not just his body, but his very soul. He seems to be profoundly lacking something. If Timmy can help him find it it's worth bruising his own self a little more, he reckons.

“Okay. But not this week. It's all too much. We shoot Elio's and Oliver's love scenes, then we talk.”

Armie nods. Timmy gathers him up in his arms and strokes his golden hair until he's fallen asleep.
Chapter Summary

Acknowledging their new openness, Armie takes Tim on a date.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The next day Armie is not really required on set as they will mainly shoot Elio's masturbation scene with Oliver's red bathing trunks. He'll just be in one shot, walking through the garden. But it's a good enough reason to accompany Tim on set and hang around the whole day.

They do different takes of Tim playing around with those red shorts. Armie isn't in the room but from what he overhears it's looking good, real, authentic. Intimate. Luca tries a few things until he has enough material to work with.

Armie walking down the lawn is filmed after lunch. Before, they all eat together under the trees in the garden. Armie just goes for salad. Tim is watching him, still hyper, his wiry body twitching with adrenaline as he fidgets in his chair. He touches Armie's bare knee under the table and grins up at him, naughty and open, before resting his head against Armie's shoulder. Armie ruffles his hair in return.

That's when Tim leans in and kisses him, open mouthed, with tongue, in front of all the crew. He tastes of garlic and lemon and pepper and tomatoes and Orangina. Like summer. Delicious and a little innocent.

Armie's not sure if he should have a heart attack or just embrace this unguarded tenderness and new found freedom. He's put out of his misery by Luca: “Tesoro, pass me the bread, will you.”

That's all.

No one laughs or makes a joke or takes the piss or as much as raises an eyebrow.

Is he really allowed to kiss Tim? In the open? Just like that?

To test this theory he puts an arm around Tim's waist and pulls him in, just pecking him on the lips.

He's neither struck by lightning nor does the earth swallow him whole.

This is possible. Tim's smiling face, flushed and happy, starts to swim a little and Armie wipes his eyes, pretending to brush away an insect. Tim takes his hand afterwards and playfully bites his knuckles.

He goes through the afternoon in a kind of haze as they shoot various scenes with Tim inside the house. He's half-naked most of the time and sidles up to Armie in between takes, hugging him, one time even sitting in his lap.

It's just so natural. It feels so good.
Armie gets a glimpse of what making peace with himself could mean.

“I want this, you know.” He tells Tim as they walk over to the car to take them back to Crema.

“What?”

“Us, like this. Being affectionate. In public.”

Tim looks at him and nods but doesn’t say anything. A frown is creeping up his forehead but he's wearing his shades so Armie can’t see his eyes.

They hold hands during the whole drive back.

When arriving in Crema, they part. Tim wants to go back to his apartment to take a shower, change and grab some fresh clothes to stay over at Armie's again.

Back alone at his apartment, Armie uses the time to clean up the remains of last night and the morning: empty Coke cans, a half-eaten baguette (now hard as stone), cherry pits Tim spat into the already overflowing ashtray...

That boy is a slob.

As he's already at it, Armie also rinses their mugs and changes the sheets.

It's all gone so fast, he muses. Usually, when you meet someone, you go out with them a few times before you end up in bed. True, he and Tim went on bike rides and out to breakfast and dinner – but it had never been some sort of romantic venture. They went out to eat because they were hungry, not to treat the other to something special. Or it had been some kind of foreplay, Armie parading Tim around with come still drying on his face. The attempt that had come closest to a date had ended with Tim getting a blow job from a stranger...

Suddenly, Armie has an idea. He feels enamored tonight.

Getting his phone out, he writes: 'Put on something nice. Like, really nice. I'll come over in half an hour.'

After taking a shower, he shaves thoroughly and gets into a snug pair of blue jeans, a white shirt and a soft white jumper with blue stripes. Then he heads over to Tim. On his way he buys a cooled bottle of champagne in one of the bars at the Piazza.

“Hey, you got glasses for this?” He asks Tim as he opens his apartment door.

“Armie, wow. What is this?” Tim's wearing his tight black jeans again, this time combined with a short-sleeved black shirt. Armie recognizes with a flutter of pride that the bracelet is back around Tim's wrist.

“A date.” Armie grins as he walks past Tim and into his kitchen to look through the cupboards.

“A date?”

“Yes, Tim, a date. That's what people usually do before they fuck each other. Go on a date. At least where I come from people my age do that. Maybe it's time to introduce the habit to Millennials from New York City? It's a rather nice custom.”

“A date.” Tim still looks somehow dumbfounded.
Armie finds two almost clean glasses – one with a handle, the other for red wine – decides they’ll do and pops the champagne. It spills over his hand and onto the tiled floor but regarding the overall state of Tim's apartment – best described as artistic squalor – he doesn't think Tim minds.

He hands him the red wine glass and raises his own. “Salute.”

“Salute.” Tim smiles shyly. God, he loves this boy.

Armie takes a sip and steps close, pressing his mouth to Tim's, flooding it with cool sparkling wine. When he pulls back, Tim gasps.

“Thank you for today. You were amazing. So beautiful. I can't believe that you're mine. And that we can show this to the world. I want to take you out on a date tonight. Okay?”

Tim nods, looking a little dazed.

“Great! Drink up, I'll call a cab.”

Armie takes him to Via Vai. The last time he's been there he'd had an angry five hour lunch after Tim had stormed off, consisting mostly of red wine and spirits. Being here with him now feels like healing a wound.

Stefano shows them to a quiet table in a corner. After they've ordered, they talk. Not about the movie, but about them. Not music, films or books – but about their families, their school years, the places they've been.

Armie listens to Tim talk about his summers in France. The freedom he'd felt, compared to New York. The sense of belonging, being part of a large family with aunts, uncles, cousins. Family traditions. The alienness of the language he'd had to adapt to every year until he'd been so fluent in French that speaking English again back in September had felt even more weird.

This balancing act between two worlds – old and new, American-Jewish on the one side, French on the other; growing up with a feeling of in-between had been both liberating but also filled him with a sense of emotional lability, Tim says. His fluidity in most things might be the result of this upbringing. It can be a good thing, Tim muses, but it can also make him feel unmoored, drifting.

In return, Armie tells Tim about his early youth in Texas before they moved to the Cayman's. He'd felt kinda free as well but his mother's shadow and her strict rules and expectations had always been looming, growing larger and larger as he got older. He tells Tim about carefree days spent on the beach or in the tropical groves behind their house – but he also mentions the incident with his broken arm.

Tim first pales and then looks angry. “That's horrible.” He breathes, taking Armie's hand.

Armie shrugs. “She meant well. She did what she believed was best...”

“Stop defending her!” Tim actually raises his voice. “That was just fucking cruel. I'd call that abuse.”

Armie feels something inside him clench. He doesn't want Tim to say things like that. “Wait till you have children yourself before judging other parents.”

Tim looks down at their entwined hands. “Would you do something like this to Harper? Deny her comfort and help when she comes running, crying in pain.”

“Of course not.” Armie says without thinking. Just the thought of Hops being hurt, calling for him
makes him sick.

“Then I'm glad.” Tim looks up at him, a serious expression in his beautiful green eyes. He holds his gaze for a moment. Then it's gone, replaced by a playful sparkle. “Can I have desert?” He asks, smiling wickedly.

“Whatever you want.”

The grin spreads on Tim's face. “Here and at home?”

“I so hoped you'd say that. I'll spoil you tonight, babe.” Armie smiles back, squeezing Tim's hand.

Jesus fucking Christ! Timmy swears to give it to her straight should he ever meet Armie's mum. What a fucking bitch! He knows he shouldn't think like that about the mother of his lover but he can't help it.

She sounds like a monster, and Armie defending her makes it only worse. It shows Timmy to what extent Armie has internalized and accepted her abusive behavior. Sure, on a rational level he knows what she did to him had been wrong – but it seems that on an emotional level he believes that he somehow deserved it.

Timmy sees now that the image of the crazy yet friendly Californian summer boy is just a mask Armie puts on to face this world. Timmy wants to show him that – at least with him – there's no need for that.

He'd been slightly overwhelmed when Armie had dropped by and announced they were going on a date. And a proper date it had been, with champagne, great food, a beautiful location, Armie looking drop-dead gorgeous... not that Timmy had been on many dates, the fanciest thing he could think of was taking someone to Katz's Delicatessen – so a candlelit table at Via Vai easily jumps top of the list of Timmy's dating experiences.

But despite all the lavish amenities of the evening the best thing had been to really talk. They both seem to realize that they have to get to know each other better for the thing between them to progress any further than frantic fucking.

Timmy had tried as well today on set to forge their bond. Last night had still sat with him. It's easy to forget that Armie is a sensitive soul when all he shows you is a smiling giant of 6'5. But last night he'd again hit rock bottom, giving in to his self-loathing, the reason of which Timmy understands a bit better after their dinner.

To cheer him up and prove a point Timmy had been openly affectionate on set today. As Luca knows he sees no need to hide his feelings any longer. Yet he hadn't been sure how Armie would react. The happy, easy acceptance he had shown, actually reciprocating, had pleasantly surprised Timmy and made him bold.

As long as Armie doesn't push him away he'd pursue this path from now on. Had someone asked, he'd shrugged, grinned and cheekily attributed it to staying into character – but nobody did.

What a day! It almost feels like they are normal boyfriends. Timmy grins sheepishly at the word. It doesn't begin to describe how he feels about Armie but then he never had a real boyfriend and he simply wants to give in to make-believe – even if it's just for a few hours.

They return to Armie's apartment shortly before midnight.
“How fitting.” Armie remarks as the cathedral clock strikes twelve times.

They'll film the midnight scene tomorrow night, followed by the morning after scenes.

“You think we should... I don't know... rehearse?” Timmy asks, looking up at Armie from under his lashes.

“Definitely.” Armie wraps him in his arms and lifts him up. Timmy clings to his huge frame as Armie carries him into the bedroom, his long legs curled tightly around Armie's waist.

They kiss as Armie slams Timmy's back into the wall, trapping him there while his tongue pushes deep into Timmy's mouth. His large, strong hands are on the back of Timmy's thighs, pushing up until they cup his ass.

Timmy moans. “Fuck me, Armie.”

Somehow, they land on the bed, Timmy now straddling Armie's lap, kneeling up.

“Fuck, you are too tall, you skinny thing.” Armie groans as he pushes his hand in Timmy's hair and pulls him down, their erections grinding against each other. Yet there's still way too much fabric between them.

“Get this off.” Armie starts to unbutton Timmy's shirt. His fingers are shaking, Timmy realizes. Finally, the shirt hangs open and Armie presses his face against Timmy's belly, kissing, biting and mouthing his way up his chest until he manages to capture his right nipple. When he sucks, Timmy gasps, raking his fingers through Armie's short hair.

“Harder.” Timmy can feel Armie bite down on the erect nub and a shudder runs through his body from head to toe. “Fuck, yes. Harder!” He pulls Armie's hair but nonetheless he releases Timmy.

“Can't. Would leave marks.” Armie stutters. His breath ghosts over Timmy's still wet nipple and he throws his head back sighing in frustration.

Armie uses the short break to pull his shirt over his head. Timmy sits down in his lap and nuzzles his throat, breathing him in while deftly pulling his chest hair.

“You little devil.”

Armie flips them over, burying Timmy beneath him.

It's delicious, being pinned down by Armie's body. He can take both of Timmy's wrists in one of his hands and brings them up above Timmy's head, pulling back just enough to unzip Timmy's fly with the other. Timmy shimmies out of his jeans and kicks them off.

“No underwear?” Armie asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Why bother?” Timmy grins up at him.

“You know, sometimes I'd love to put you over my knee and spank your tiny ass.”

“But you can't leave any marks on me.” Timmy purrs.

“Well, when this week is over, I can.”

Timmy bucks his hips in answer, brushing his hard cock against Armie's stomach.
“Then I'll be extra naughty on the weekend to give you a good reason for a sound beating.” Timmy feels his face heat up. Who'd thought he could get so turned on by fantasizing about spanking?

And he's obviously not alone in that. Armie dives down with a deep moan to capture Timmy's mouth again, fumbling with his own belt to get rid of his jeans.

They push and pull and wiggle until they are finally both naked, their hard, wet cocks touching. They grind against each other a few times before Armie reaches over to the nightstand to get the lube.

Timmy pulls his knees up and spreads wide, shamelessly exposing himself, begging to be taken. His hands grab the headboard as Armie pushes one, then two slippery fingers inside him, thrusting fast and hard.

“Oh fuck, please, please...” Timmy can feel his cock twitch and jump with every move of Armie's hand. He's so keyed up he fears he might embarrass himself.

“You ready for me, babe?” Armie groans and Timmy sees that he's equally affected, eyes dark, lips slightly parted, staring down at Timmy's bared and open entrance that's only waiting for him, that has only ever been breached by him, Armie's cock the only thing Timmy can think off right now to fill the alarming emptiness inside him.

Timmy just nods. It's pretty clear that they both won't last much longer if they engage in more foreplay.

Though the preparation has been superficial at best Armie quickly slicks himself up, hooking Timmy's knees up further, pressing them to Timmy's shoulders, lines up and pushes in.

“Oh, god.” Timmy gasps. He can hear Armie curse as his cockhead breaches his still tight hole.

“Fuck! Just relax, babe. Just relax.”

Timmy takes a shallow breath and tries as best he can.

It doesn't hurt like the time Armie went in without any preparation and just his spit to slick the way up. But it still burns and Timmy needs a moment to adjusted to the intrusion.

He's grateful that Armie does wait for him. “You okay, babe?”

Timmy stares up at him and nods, biting his lip. He's not sure if Armie's aware that they've forgotten something in the heat of them moment but he won't remind him.

“Hold on tight. I'm going to give it to you the way you need it.”

Timmy wraps his sweaty fingers firmer around the metal bars of the bed-frame as Armie starts to fuck him, hard and fast.

It's exactly how Timmy needs it. He rests his heels on Armie's strong shoulders and gives himself over to the almost brutal sensation of Armie literally plowing him.

Armie's hands hold him around his middle, his thumbs nearly touching beneath Timmy's bellybutton. The look with which Armie stares down at where their bodies are joined is wild and it seems he can't get enough of watching his cock violently invading Timmy's delicate body.

Until he suddenly stills.
“Shit. Fuck.” Armie starts to pull back.

So he noticed.

Timmy quickly brings his legs down around Armie's waist and locks his ankles behind the small of his back.

“Don't. Please...”

“Tim, this is fucking dangerous.” Armie is panting, visibly trying to hold back.

“I don't care!”

“But I do.” Armie strokes the insides of Timmy's thighs but doesn't move

“Don't. Just forget about it. Fuck me. I want you to. Come inside me, please. Please, Armie, I trust you.” He dings his heels into Armie's skin as he tries to shove him back inside. It had felt so fucking good.

“There's trust and then there's running headlong into harm. Tim, I can't do that.”

“Please, just once. I want you just once.” Timmy clenches his sphincter muscles and Armie's eyes flutter shut. Timmy knows he's won.

“You are batshit crazy.”

“As are you. Now fuck me.”

Armie does. He resumes his rhythm, ramming into Timmy rough, almost cruelly. His eyes are firmly shut.

“Armie, please, look at me, please.” Timmy's already close. Just the thought of Armie inside him, bare, without the usual sheath of latex separating them makes him so hard he's on the brink of coming.

He removes one hand from the headboard – the one donning Armie's bracelet - and starts to stroke himself in time with Armie's thrusts. Armie opens his eyes and stares down at him. The hard look frightens Timmy. He can see arousal, passion, want – but also anger, fury, defeat. Timmy forces himself to hold his gaze.

He feels Armie's hands flex around his waist, not daring to grab him too tight but obviously longing to squeeze him until he can't breathe properly. He seems close but also in need of something more.

“On the weekend, you can punish me for this.” Timmy feels the beads of the bracelet brush against his lower abdomen. It only heightens the sensation. “You can spank me with your hand, or use your belt on my ass, my back, my thighs, across my chest, until I cry and beg for you to spare me, to stop. But you won't. You'll have to gag me. And afterwards you can touch and stroke the welts and come all over them...”

Timmy can't help it, he's coming himself, shooting all over his chest, cum even hitting his chin. He doesn't dare to close his eyes.

Armie fucks into him during his orgasm, merciless, brushing his prostate with every odd thrust. Timmy whimpers but Armie doesn't slow down.

“God, please, fill me. Do it!” He's almost screaming, his trembling legs falling open and Armie could
pull out now – could have done so in fact since the beginning, Timmy is not really a match for him – but all he does is grab Timmy's ankles, shoving them up, up, almost tearing him apart as he sinks in deep, so deep, and then he's coming, too.

Timmy can feel Armie pulse inside him and imagines the thick hot spurts shooting from his cock painting his soft, rosy insides white.

It's enough for Timmy to sigh and shudder once more as another drop of cum is oozing from his slit. Armie must feel his hole spasm again because suddenly the dark look is wiped from his face and there's a new expression: awe, tenderness.

He strokes Timmy's face, brushing his fingers through the dollop of cum on Timmy's chin, offering it to Timmy to lick it off. He raises his head, chasing Armie's finger until he can taste himself, swirling his tongue around before gently biting down.

Armie frowns and pulls out. Timmy whines, suddenly fearing being left alone, abandoned, but Armie doesn't move away. Instead, he holds Timmy's legs up and apart, staring down between his cheeks.

“God, yes.”

Timmy can't see in but feels it, warm wetness seeping from his hole. He takes his hand still holding his limp cock away and reaches lower, behind his empty balls, until he can brush his fingertips against his gaping pucker. The ring of muscle is loose and slick and it's easy to push his index and middle finger in to the first knuckle.

“Yes. Fuck.” Armie gasps.

Timmy moves his fingers a few times, feeling his own soreness before pulling them out, bringing them up against his lips.

“Open, suck!”

Timmy does, moaning as Armie's salty taste mixes with his own tangy flavor in his mouth.

Armie just stares and holds him open, watching. Timmy feels his hole flutter.

“Can you squeeze it out, just a little?”

Timmy almost doesn't recognize Armie's voice. He swallows and tries to relax once more, pressing down – but not too hard. It feels strange, outright unsavory as a thick glob of cum oozes out of him.

“Yeah, that's it...,” Armie groans.

Suddenly, he releases Timmy's legs and dives down and in, his tongue breaching Timmy, sucking, lapping. Timmy gasps and spreads wider, grinning like an idiot as he whispers Armie's name over and over, canting up his hips to give him better access until Armie eventually sits up, grabs him by his sweaty hair and crashes their mouths together.

Timmy can taste sweat and salt and something darker, muskier...

God, this is so filthy! He loves it. And Armie loves it too, obviously.

Only, as he finally pulls away, the anger is back in his eyes.

“That what you wanted, Tim?” Armie's voice is harsh.
Timmy just nods. He feels mellow and slack, in need of comfort, so he tries to touch Armie, his face, his shoulder, his hair— but Armie pulls away, out of reach, a scathing smile on his face.

“I hope it was worth it.” Armie's sounds hoarse as he gets up, avoiding Timmy's gaze. Seconds later, the bathroom door slams shut behind him and all Timmy can hear for the next fifteen minutes is the shower running.

Chapter End Notes

You didn't really think this would have a happy end, did you?
Last Try

Chapter Summary

Timmy has enough. He gives Armie an ultimatum.

“Armie?”

Armie’s standing under the scalding spray, scrubbing his already red skin a deeper shade of crimson when he hears Tim's voice.

He doesn't bother to answer.

God, that fucking stupid boy!

But if Armie's honest, he knows he should blame himself.

He could have stopped. Tim's strong but Armie's stronger.

Yet he'd wanted it. God, how he'd wanted it...

But it's so much easier to blame Tim.

Shit, what had they done?!

“Armie?” A cold waft of air hits Armie's back as the bathroom door opens tentatively. He doesn’t turn around.

He can hear the shower curtain rattle as Tim steps inside the tub behind him.

“Armie.”

Wiry arms wrap around his waist before Tim leans against him, his forehead resting between Armie's shoulder blades.

Armie doesn't acknowledge Tim's presence but he doesn't flinch either. They just stand there, together, lost for words.

“I'm sorry.” Tim whispers eventually, his breath ghosting over Armie's wet skin.

“Are you?” Armie's voice is sharp, hard, unyielding.

“I got carried away.”

“Did you?”

“What do you want me to say?” Tim sounds anxious. “Look, I wanted it. It's okay.”

“Is it, now?”Armie turns so fast Tim almost loses his balance. “For you?”

Tim's hair is plastered to his brow, droplets of water glueing his dark eyelashes together. Rivulets run
down his face. Or is he crying?

“Told you.” Tim spreads his hands at his sides. “You were my first...”

“That’s what you told me.” Tim looks as if Armie just slapped him. “But you are a cunning little fucker, aren’t you? In the habit of hooking up with strangers. You even send me a clip of that. What do I know? For all I know it could’ve been your habit fucking your co-stars since you were fifteen. I bet some of them liked that.”

Armie can see every word he says hitting Tim right where it hurts. He looks about twelve now, too thin, shoulders sagging. Like a drowning stray kitten.

“Please, don’t do that.” There’s a crack in Tim’s voice.

“What?” Armie turns the water off and steps past Tim, out of the tub, grabbing a towel. Tim doesn’t move.

“Please don’t say those things.” Tim wipes his face with both hands, brushing his hair back.

“Why not?” Armie’s throat is suddenly painfully tight.

“You don’t mean it.” Tim’s voice hitches.

Who does this boy think he is, telling Armie what’s going on inside him, pretending to understand what Armie himself doesn’t? And why does Tim have to look so god damn fragile, standing there, now crying openly, about to break down? Armie hates how much he cares for him – and how Tim can play him because he does.

“Stop that shit.” Armie hisses. “Don’t think for a second that you know me.”

“Armie.” Tim looks devastated. There’s no other word for it. Armie might as well finish him off right here and now. Better for both of them.

“I have a wife, Tim. Liz trusts me.”

Tim huffs and Armie balls his hands into fists. It takes true effort for him not to hit Tim.

“Whatever I’ve done, I’ve always been safe.” Armie spits out through gritted teeth.

“So, how come you know about PEP then?” Tim blinks, his face crestfallen.

“That’s none of your business.” Armie feels called out. Why does Tim always go for his weakest spot?

“But of course it is. We are together. You said you love me!” Tim raises his voice but it’s thin and weak.

“That was before you took advantage of me.” Armie feels he’s kicking someone already on the ground.

“I took advantage? Why didn’t you stop, Armie? You wanted it as much as I did and now you’re angry that you wanted it but we did it and the risk is all with me and I’m fine with it so why are you doing this to me?” Tim climbs out of the tub, closing the distance between them with two quick strides, grabbing Armie’s biceps. His eyes are wet but also blazing with an almost divine fury.

Armie feels his resolve crumble, his anger reduced to a bad taste in his mouth. Why is he really
freaking out here?

“I told you we shouldn't do that.” He croaks.

“But we did. And I loved it. You loved it. Stop denying it.” Tim's thumbs rub his upper arms in soothing circles. “Just calm down.”

“I... I can't take the responsibility for... for this. I just can't, Tim. I have to trust you that we are on the same page in bed. Just now, we weren't.”

“Then why didn't you stop?”

“Because I'm a sick twisted fucker. And you know that. You knew I wanted it and that I wouldn't resist...” Why is it suddenly Armie who feels on the verge of crying?

“Stop. Stop! You are not sick or twisted.”

“I just fucked you without protection! A boy I hardly know. Of course I'm sick and twisted.”

“I told you it's okay! Why do you never listen?”

Armie untangles himself from Tim's grip and stares down on him. “Did you realize I was going to take you without and purposefully didn't remind me to use a condom?”

Something flickers over Tim's face.

“I knew it! Is that your way to force my hand? Do you think that now I will have to come clean to Liz, confess what we've been up to? That she'll ask why we suddenly need condoms and I'd tell her that you and me barebacked and then she'll throw me out and we'll be together happily ever after?”

“Yes. No!” Tim reaches for Armie again.

But Armie pushes him back. “Don't touch me!” He feels sick.

“Armie!” Tim has to grab the sink to steady himself. “I wanted it because I want you! All of you! I trust you. I thought you trusted me as well. I thought you wanted it as well. You could've stopped but you didn't. Stop blaming me for your desires. Accept them. I thought you didn't get a condom because tonight was special.”

“You want me to trust you with my wife's and child's life?”

“I trust you with mine!”

They are both yelling by now. Armie suddenly feels all the air leave his lungs as if he's been punched in the solar plexus.

“For fuck's sake, just love me, Armie!”

“I'm not sure I can do that, Tim. Not the way you want it.”

^^^^^^

What the fuck is the matter with Armie? Why is he freaking out like this? The things he says to Timmy... one could think he's just some hooker Armie picked up for a quick shag.

Timmy had given himself over to Armie – body and soul. If anyone's at risk here – and Timmy truly
doubts it – it's Timmy. He's never really engaged in risky or promiscuous behavior.

He's not so sure about Armie – but Timmy's willing to take that risk. He wanted this so much. Just once. He's an adult, he can decide for himself. Why can't Armie accept that?

Or is Armie unable to accept himself? Unable to accept that he'd wanted to have Timmy like this? Fuck, they've done so much dangerous stuff... this thing between them has never been safe and sane. So why does barebacking suddenly cross a line? And if it does – why didn't Armie stop?

This is not Timmy's fault! He refuses to take the blame this time.

When Armie tells him that he's not sure he can love him it's too much. Timmy has enough.

“I'm not... I'm not a cheap whore you can discard when it gets too intense, you know! Fuck, do you remember when you tied me up on Sunday and left and I let you? I mean it when I say I trust you with my life. I thought you did the same.” Timmy pushes past Armie, head held high, walking over into the bedroom to get his clothes.

Don't cry! Just don't cry again. Get out of here at least with your dignity intact.

He furiously starts to pull on his jeans and almost trips over, more sensing than seeing that Armie has followed him.

“I don't want to get between you and your wife. I wanted to show you how much... fuck, how much I love you! I wanted to give you everything.” Timmy pulls up his zipper and starts to look for his shirt, unable to meet Armie's eyes.

“Tim.” It sounds defensive.

“No, just shut up. Let me get dressed and then I go. We are free tomorrow during the day. I'm sure I can get a test done. I'll ask Luca. Will that put your mid at ease, yeah?” He grabs his shirt and starts to button it up. Where the fuck are his shoes?

“Tim.” Armie sounds tired, worn out. Timmy hates this tone.

His shoes must be in the lounge. Timmy makes for the door but Armie steps in his way.

“What? Let me go.”

“I... we... I didn't know...”

“What? What you mean to me? Seriously? After all the things we've done? Do you really think I'll do that with just everyone? Let them fuck me, tie me up, gag me, choke me? Than you truly are the dumb blonde you look like.”

Armie looks again as if he wants to hit him but Timmy doesn't care or flinch. Physical pain would be so much easier to deal with than the emotional cataclysm he's in right now.

But Armie just exhales and grabs the towel around his waist, staring down at the tiled floor between them.

“You know, Tim... loving you... I thought it would be easy but... I'm so fucking scared.” He whispers.

Timmy stills, takes a deep breath. What?
“There's no need to be scared.”

Another painful exhale.

“What will we do when the film is finished?”

No, he's not getting into that with Armie right now.

“I don't know. Go back home? Work?”

“That's not what I mean.” Armie eventually raises his eyes.

“Then ask me what you mean.” Timmy has enough of talking in circles.

“How will you cope when this is over and I'm back with Liz?”

Timmy forces himself not to avert his gaze. He wants to face him when Armie deals the final blow.

“Will you be?”

Armie swallows

“Well, then you know where I live. You have my number.”

“Yeah. But... But I'm not sure I will be able to handle it... when it's over.”

Armie's voice is so low that Timmy almost didn't hear him.

“Well, then you know where I live. You have my number.”

“You don't really mean that.” Armie stares into the dark bedroom, fixing a point just over Timmy's left shoulder. “I can't... you shouldn't wait for me. You are too young for that and I... can't take the responsibility...”

“Why do you never believe me? I do mean it. I trust you. I love you. That's why I'm not afraid to let you fuck me or choke me or kiss me in front of all the crew. Whatever happens happens. But believe me, I'm not tricking you into anything. If you chose Liz then I'll accept that. But I wanted this, just once. To have you without anything between us. Becoming one.” The words just fall from his mouth. Is that really him talking?

Armie nods, sighing, raking a hand through his hair. “We should've talked about it before.”

“We have. I thought you wanted it, too. I mean, you did want it, too. Just accept it. We did it. You'll see Liz... when? In a few weeks time. I promise you on my mom's life that I'm clean but you'll have enough time to have a test done and be sure.”

“Why are you not afraid, Tim.” Armie asks, sacking against the door frame.
“Because I have nothing to lose.”

They stare at each other for almost a minute. Armie’s the first to move.

“I’m so fucking sorry. All the things I said... I lash out when I’m scared. But that’s no excuse...”

“No, it isn’t. You treated me like a piece of shit.” Timmy will not let him off easy.

Armie swallows. “I know.”

Timmy waits but Armie stays silent. “So, that's it, then?” He starts to move past Armie. His whole body hurts, his heart beating too fast, his lungs are burning as if he’d just run ten miles.

“Please, stay.”

“I can't.” Timmy’s shoes lie in the small hallway leading up to Armie's apartment door. He pulls the left one on. “I can't do this anymore. Getting close to you only to be pushed away again when we are finally getting somewhere. That is... too much for me, Armie. I tried to help you fight your demons but you have to want it yourself, too. You have to let me in. But you don't.”

“I can't.”

“See?”


“Maybe that's not enough? Maybe I want to see you take some action. Try to change. I don't mean to leave your wife for me... but to show that you trust me. To accept me and respect me. Me. Who I am with all my shitty issues and flaws and imperfections. I love you, Armie, and you say you love me but I need you to show me to keep doing this.” He's finally managed to put on his second shoe.

“Tim.”

He holds up a hand to silence Armie. “I see you tomorrow... today... later. On set. Please, just think about what I said. Please, try.” He's about to cry again. Armie doesn't look much better. He has to go.

He pulls the door silently shut behind him.

Over at his apartment the champagne and their two glasses from earlier still sit on the kitchen counter but Timmy can't deal with them right now. He just strips and falls into bed.

But before he drifts off into sleep, he takes his phone in hand and writes a text. 'Don't worry. I'm not doing anything stupid. I love you. Good night.'

Armie's reply arrives within seconds. 'You are the best and kindest person I know and I have no idea how I deserve you.'

Timmy grins despite feeling empty and alone. 'Man, don't. You can be good and kind as well. Just cut yourself some slack.' He decides to put a smiley at the end of his text.

'I'll try. Sleep tight, Tim.'

A moment later another text comes in: 'I promise, I'll really try.'
Midnight

Chapter Summary

They film the midnight scene and something gives.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Armie arrives on set at the Villa that evening, he's nervous. Not just because he'll have to make out in front of a camera. That's always embarrassing and unnerving enough. It's true, he's done it before – but not to the extent required from him in this movie. And not with the sincerity and openness expected by Luca and James. There's no room to feel silly here. This has to be as real and honest as it can get while still staying in the realm of acting.

He's also never been that intimate with a dude for a film. A few kisses, touches and glances – nothing more.

He tries to reassure himself that it will be mostly about blocking and pretending and not looking too ridiculous while doing it. There will be clear instructions for them – so the camera can catch what Luca wants to show.

The fact of having to do that with someone he genuinely likes and, yes, desires should make it easier. But it doesn't.

It makes Armie's mouth go dry and his hands all sweaty.

Add to this meeting Tim again after their row and you have the outline of Armie's emotional mess.

He wonders if they are good again? Will they have to talk before they shoot?

Armie doesn't want to go back to their silent days. But he fears that he might reveal too much by speaking, much more than by just rolling around with Tim naked.

Isn't that the point, though? Isn't that what Tim demands? Honesty, openness, commitment? Then why is it so fucking hard for Armie to figure out what to do?

He knows Tim expects something from him. But what exactly? And how is Armie to deliver it?

Tim had said it's about respect, acceptance and trust. That he trusts Armie and expects him to do the same.

And isn't tonight the perfect opportunity to show Tim how much he trusts him? They'll bare themselves to each other, making themselves vulnerable while faking something intimate for all the world to see they've done in private many times over the last weeks.

Will lines blur? Will they give away their intimate secrets? Are they ready to fully show themselves to others?

Deep down, Armie thinks it's no one's bloody business but theirs. He doesn't want to share what they
have with a faceless, cruel public. It's a mixture of jealousy and protectiveness, shyness and need for privacy.

As an actor he lives a huge chunk of his life for others to witness. He just wants to keep this for the two of them.

But apparently that's not going to happen.

Everything is set up for the balcony scene while Armie is in make-up. When he steps outside into the balmy Italian night he wishes suddenly the reefer was real.

Tim's leaning against the railing, looking serious, concentrating, more tense than usual.

“You okay?” He asks. Armie just nods.

Tim smiles and hugs him quickly, giving him a soft kiss on the cheek. Okay...

During their scene out there Tim's a little withdrawn while Armie searches tentatively for reassurance. It fits the mood of their characters just fine.

While the crew works around them in Elio's bedroom, they rehearse. It's mostly about the height difference which isn't a big problem when they're both standing but makes things a little bit more difficult when they get over to the bed and Tim straddles Armie.

Armie's clinging to technicalities. He knows it holds him back but he can't help it. He wants to know exactly where to stand, where to sit, where to put his hands, his mouth...

“Armie, relax, give yourself over to the scene, feel the desire.” Luca tells him a little exasperated, gesturing with both hands.

Tim stays silent, more distant than usual.

“Just try to be natural. React to Timothée.”

Armie doesn't think Luca really wants to see that.

The first take is a catastrophe. Armie's too stiff – and not in a good way – almost wooden. There's simply no connection between them.

The second take is just mechanical. They stand in the right spots and do the things they've agreed to do or that the script calls for but the sparks are not flying. It feels forced.

Luca calls five minutes and walks off set, talking to Sayombhu. Time's against them. They can work with filters but the sun will rise in around three hours and they still have most of the filming to do. The pressure doesn't help Armie.

He had known that this role was too big for him. He's just not a good enough actor to fill it with life. Tim deserves someone more talented, an equal, not just some mediocre pretender. Why hadn't he refused the part? Yeah, he'd wanted to be taken seriously. What a laugh! Oh, your hubris...

He wants to smoke a cigarette but is told he's not allowed to on set for insurance reasons which he finds ridiculous as Elio and Oliver smoke pot in the scene. When he offers to go downstairs into the garden the script supervisor tells him there's not enough time.

He's getting increasingly worked up, on the brink of punching the wall when suddenly Tim's by his side, taking his hand and pulling him over into Elio's small room.
“Hey...,” he starts but falls silent, looking a little helpless.

“Hey.” Armie feels suddenly uneasy, his skin tingling all over.

“I just wanted to tell you, I went to a doctor today and had the test done. Results should be in by Friday.”

Armie wants to say there's no need for it but can't. “Good. I appreciate that. Thank you.” He mumbles instead.

Tim bites his lip and nods.

“Listen, about the scene... maybe we should go for it like yesterday. The blocking, I mean. Not the rest... everything... just...”

Before Armie can answer Luca calls them back.

This time, when Armie closes the inner door to the bedroom, he somehow puts too much momentum in his movement and the door crashes shut. He's sure Luca will call cut – especially as Tim is literally cracking up – but all stays silent. Armie bites his fist and stares at Tim who nearly doubles over, his eyes full of sparkling mischief and excitement and suddenly it's them, not Elio and Oliver.

Something inside Armie softens, gives. They click.

He's with Tim, after their date, before their fight and Tim's beautiful and horny and wanting and they melt together and laugh quietly and Armie breathes him in and sighs his name against his skin as Tim literally tries to climb him, rubs himself against him, and Armie grabs him and holds onto him, welcoming Tim, offering safety and security to give him everything. They connect beautifully, without words, just by touch, sighs, kisses and whispers.

They almost don't hear Luca call cut.

Next, they sit together on the bed, both breathing a little shakily as the lights are adjusted. Armie had felt Tim growing hard against him and now glances over into his lap.

He opens his mouth to say something reassuring but Tim cuts him short. “Don't you dare.” There's a smile in his voice.

Despite Sayombhu being only a few feet away, Armie lets completely go in the next take. He presses his mouth to Tim's bare skin, nips, licks, kisses, bites, pulls his hair, rolls him over with such reckless speed that his chain with the Star of David drops onto Tim's narrow chest. He takes it in his hands while staring up at Armie with dark eyes before putting the golden pendant into his mouth, his wet pink tongue playing with it.

That's when Armie can't hold back any longer. He pulls his belt from its loops – hearing Tim's voice in his head encouraging him to spank him for being naughty – before shoving his pants down while Tim shimmies out of his jeans.

Armie can't stop himself, he grinds down onto Tim, covering his whole delicate body, skin touching everywhere and it suddenly doesn't matter that they are on a film set, that people are watching, that others will probably see this on a big screen – it's them, together, becoming one.

That's all that matters.

They kiss and Tim sighs and gasps and Armie spreads his legs as he remembers staring at that
fluttering hole dripping with his cum barely twenty-four hours ago and Tim rolls his hips and bucks up and he's hard, head thrown back, throat exposed, chest heaving and Armie suddenly knows that this is too much, that no one should see Tim like this, that he's exposing himself to an extent he'll regret later and so he brackets him, bending down to kiss him but also to protect Tim's body from curious glances by pulling a sheet up over them both just as Sayombhu climbs onto the mattress with the camera on one shoulder, trying to zoom in on them.

Thankfully, Luca calls cut.

Armie's brain feels foggy, his vision hazy, heart beating hard in his chest.

Tim is still panting and squirming beneath him. Suddenly, warm wetness spreads between them, the sticky moist texture unmistakable. Tim bites his lips, rolls his eyes and stares at the wall, blushing a deep crimson that is even visible in the dim twilight.

“Armie, Timothée... that wasn't how it was planned. Listen, James wrote...”

“Luca, please, can we have a moment.” Armie cuts in but he's not looking at their director, he's staring down at Tim.

'I've got you.' He mouths and Tim swallows before throwing an arm over his eyes, groaning.

“Yes, sure.” Neither Luca nor Sayombhu move.

“Alone?”

“Oh... hmmm... of course, but we really need to-”

Tim's lower lips starts quivering as he worries it between his teeth. He's about to cry. That's enough, Armie decides.

“Now! Sorry, please, just leave us!”

Armie rarely ever gets loud so it takes about ten seconds for the set to clear and for the outer door to the corridor to fall shut.

“Fuck. Sorry.” Tim breathes. Armie pulls his arm away. His eyes are wet.

“Are you okay?”

“Apart from just coming for all the world to see, yeah, I'm fine.” Tim's voice sounds strangled.

“Well, maybe you have a exhibitionist streak?” Armie tries to lighten the mood.

“This isn't funny, Armie.”

“Umm... yes, it is.” He smiles down at Tim before kissing the tip of his nose. Tim giggles softly.

“Don't you want to get off of me?” He sounds so small it makes Armie want to gather him up in his arms and rock him back and forth. But then more carnal thoughts take over. Tim is so wet for him right now...

“Nope. Not yet.” Armie rolls his hips so his hard cock glides through the gooey mess on Tim's tummy. It's deliciously slippery.

“You can't!” Tim glares up at him. But simultaneously he spreads his legs wider and Armie bends
down to kiss him again.

“I can.” Armie tries to coax Tim's lips open with the tip of his tongue.

“No.” Tim grabs Armie's shoulders. “Shit, I just came during my first nude scene. God, Luca will think I'm just a nervous kid. What if I mess up the peach scene tomorrow?” Tim turns again towards the wall and now his face looks ashen in the blueish lights. He closes his eyes and pulls his hair so hard his skin visibly tightens at his temples. “Fuck.”

“Hey, don't...,” Armie can't watch him like this, humiliated and embarrassed. Tim shouldn't look like this. He's so special, precious, open – Armie doesn't want him to regret or change that, ever. It's what makes Tim such a good actor and will surely make him a great one in the future – if this gift is not destroyed by demands and exploitation.

Just in this moment, the door cracks open and Luca puts his head around.

“Armie, Timothée? We really have to do this scene again.”

Timmy freezes. Armie can feel him tense up, all his muscles locking.

Trust. Acceptance. Respect. Armie hears Tim's voice say these words to him as if it was a credo, the holy trinity of faith in another human being. Suddenly, he understands what they mean.

This scene is not only hitting too close to home for Armie.

Right now, Tim feels violated by a voyeuristic industry that wants everything an actor can give off himself regardless how vulnerable and exposed it will leave him.

But this won't happen tonight.

“No.” Armie tells Luca.


“Armie, tesoro, I know this is demanding but James gave very clear directions in his script... and what you just did... Dio mio, I had Sayombhu pan out onto that tree like in a 1950s movie because we could see a lot that was going on below with you two but sadly not what James envisaged.” Luca makes some very graphic gestures.

“Okay.” Tim says, his voice flat.

To Armie it feels like he forces himself to grin and bear it. It's awful! This whole scene seems suddenly abusive. If they continue it will taint everything between them.

“I won't shoot this scene again.” Armie says firmly.

Luca steps in and closes the door.

“Why not?” Their director sounds both curious and annoyed.

Armie entangles his body from Tim's, carefully wrapping the sheets around the boy while scrambling off of him stark naked, not bothering to cover himself or his wet, still more than half-hard cock glistening with Tim's cum.

He sits on the edge of the mattress, his head in his hands and takes a deep breath.
“Because I just came all over Tim and I really feel too raw to do this one more time. And I don’t think Tim wants to experience that again either while everybody watches.”

Tim makes a choking sound and curls up under the blanket.

“We can continue with the morning after scene... or film some more of Elio's and Oliver's night. I don’t even mind full frontal. But if you demand me faking to fuck Tim one more time I'll take my nervous breakdown right here and now.”

Armie stares at Luca who frowns, hands in his pockets. Then he nods. “Get a robe. I talk to Sayombhu. We'll look at what we have and decide how to proceed. Meanwhile, clean up, please.” Luca looks a little uneasy and faintly disgusted.

When he's left, Armie falls back onto the bed and Tim rolls over.

“Why did you do that? It was me who messed up.” He asks.

“I have first billing here. I am the more established actor. For once, I can put that to good use, don't you think?” Armie gently touches Tim's pink cheek.

Tim pecks him on the mouth. “Thank you, Armie.”

He grins back. “Come on, you heard Mussolini. Let's clean you up.”

Oh god! It happened again. It seems to be some kind of Pavlovian reflex – Armie moves against him and Timmy comes. No matter when, no matter where – even on a film set with people watching, recording his humiliation for posterity!

Maybe Armie's right and he has an exhibitionist kink? Timmy remembers being chased by a naked guy through the streets of Hell's Kitchen when he'd been fifteen. The dude had even thrown poop at him. That's what he thinks an exhibitionist is. Does he want that? Fuck, what's happening with him?

He's fairly sure he doesn't want to chase anyone naked and throw faeces at them but apparently people watching him having sex don't bother him – on the contrary, it's even a turn-on...

Well, what is he to make of this?

It's totally unprofessional, that's what it is! A major inconvenience. If he wants to be taken serious as an actor – by Armie and Luca - he has to get a grip.

Should he admit it to Luca? Explain what happened? Would he understand? Or would he come to realize he hired a horny kid who can't hold his movie together because his dick got in his way?

God, the humiliation! It's one thing to fuck your co-star but a totally different thing to be unable to separate private from work related matters.

Therefore, Timmy's fucking grateful for Armie to take the blame. He doesn't quite understand why he does it but at least it spares Timmy to cop to his own inclination toward premature ejaculation in public.

He's even more relieved that Armie refuses to shoot the first-time-scene again.

When Timmy had read the script he had blushed. He'd had a hard time wrapping his head around that the sweet elderly gentleman he had met a few times had written this... smut. Timmy had watched
porn that had been less explicit.

James' ideas are very graphic in his description of what he wants Elio and Oliver to do: the both of them being naked, legs spread, giving head, fucking, Oliver coming onto Elio's chest, rubbing his semen all over Elio's skin... it had made Timmy hard reading it but he'd also shied instinctively away from doing this with another person on camera.

Even before he had known Armie. Now it had meant dragging their most intimate fantasies out into the public eye. And Timmy, who prides himself on his openness, just can't do it! What a dud shell he is! A true actor would have gone for it no matter what. But Timmy is sacrificing his art for the sake of his privacy. Maybe that's why it is frowned upon to hook up on set?

Gladly, thanks to Armie's intervention, they won't have to do it – at least not to the degree intended in the script.

Armie's resistance astonishes him, though. He usually does what Luca wants as if his word is gospel.

Timmy hadn't known what to expect today. It had been no surprise that filming had been tense between them at first. Not even Timmy telling Armie that he's had the test done had cleared the air.

Timmy had mulled it over on his own, pacing his apartment, until he'd taken courage and asked Luca for a doctor without specifying why. Luca had simply recommended his GP and didn't ask further questions.

Timmy had decided against using his health insurance for an HIV test. Instead, he'd payed cash. 250 Euros. About 300 Dollars if he'd done his maths right (he's still struggling with this currency. Even during their summers in France exchange rates had always confused him. He'd never known if something was a bargain or rip off.) It's his weekly allowance. He hopes it's worth it if it puts Armie's mind at ease.

He hadn't demanded a test from Armie in return and he wonders if he's realized it.

But Armie doesn't seem to mind lying in his bodily fluids that now start to uncomfortably dry between them. On the contrary... That's a good sign, right?

During their first time scene Timmy had flashbacks to last night. Armie's hands all over him while he ground down onto his lap, Armie undressing him, throwing him onto his back, crouching over him in all his naked glory.

'Fuck me, fuck me hard!' He'd wanted to say and had to bite his tongue not to break character.

It hadn't prevented his body from embarrassing himself, though.

Timmy can tell that Luca isn't happy by Armie's refusal but he eventually accepts it. When Luca's gone again Timmy jumps out of bed and runs over into the bathroom – only to discover that there's no real water supply. Sometimes he forgets that the Villa is just a film set and not a real home inhabited by him, his parents and Armie.

“Fuck.” He hisses. His cum has started to dry and now makes his crotch itchy. Luckily, Armie find's a discarded water bottle, still half-full, and Timmy can wash himself perfunctorily with the help of one of the towels. It's not much more than a cat's lick but better than nothing.

When Luca returns he has decided after a short conversation with Sayombhu, the script supervisor and the AD to just shoot them in bed together. Still naked but post-coital – literally in Timmy's case. But he's suddenly glad that he's already spend because a naked Armie cuddling with him, touching
him everywhere, rubbing against him is something that is bound to arouse him immensely up to triggering at least an erection if not more.

As they lie there together in the semi-darkness, gazing at each other, kissing, laughing, they forget their lines which only makes them giggle more. But Luca lets them, taking what he's given. Timmy has no idea if it's even worth the film it's edged into as this is essentially him and Armie making out without a trace of Elio and Oliver – but that is not for him to decide.

Eventually, Armie manages to say those lines that give the title to book and movie – Timmy doesn't envy him as he can feel his aroused state all too profoundly – there can't be much blood left in his brain. The thought makes him snigger again.

That's why Timmy almost slips and says 'Tim' instead of 'Elio'. He sees that Armie has to concentrate too to call him Oliver.

It's a revelation to feel Armie finally open up during their scenes. He lets go, gives in and becomes Oliver – or rather he has embraced Oliver's tenderness, shyness, kindness towards Elio and incorporates these character traits into his own behavior.

As they now embrace and kiss it's like lines blurring, character bleeding into their reality and vice versa – and Timmy knows he's not the only one experiencing it. This is the transcendence every actor aspires – becoming one with the protagonist, connecting deeply in a scene, acting without thinking, losing oneself in the process of evolving into someone else without fear or reserve.

This is the moment, their moment. Timmy rolls onto Armie to never let him go.

Armie's so considerate, attentive, meeting Timmy's needs. He gives himself over like he did during the night Timmy topped – trusting, loving, accepting him.

Even Luca seems mesmerized. He just lets them be together, look their fill, kiss, touch, until they almost forget that the camera is there.

Coming out of this fog eventually to do the morning after scene is a different challenge though. Timmy has to act dismissive just when he feels the closest he's ever been to Armie. But he's also Elio and Elio is simply overwhelmed, a little shocked, a little in pain, doubting himself and his desires after tasting them the first time for real.

Doesn't that sound a lot like Armie?

To access his inner turmoil Timmy goes back a few weeks and remembers his and Armie's first night. It had been extreme. They didn't talk enough. He has the material right there to draw from – and also from last night. He channels his fears, his anxiety, his insecurity, pouring them all into Elio and seems to do it so well that afterwards Armie scoots over almost reluctantly, asking if he's still okay before taking Timmy's hand and hugging him tightly.

To keep up the loving yet fragile atmosphere while the crew packs up Luca suggests they watch the dailies. It's another revelation.

During filming Timmy had just realized that it worked. As an actor he can't reflect too much at what he and his counterpart are doing in a scene. It has to flow – and it did today, with Armie, who accepted him and rose to the challenge, a true, trusting partner during these difficult takes.

But now when Timmy sees how good they were together, what they actually delivered – staring over Luca's shoulder, clad in just one of Luca's huge black jumpers and nothing else, a strong cup of coffee in hand – he can't believe his eyes. Armie's now in a fluffy white robe, hugging him from
behind, and Timmy can hear him take a deep breath and feels his grip tighten as he watches.

It's breathtaking. Nothing lurid or exploitative, just tender, gentle, yet utterly erotic and so very intimate Timmy feels a lump in his throat. To his surprise, Armie seems even more affected and has to wipe his eyes, nuzzling into Timmy's shoulder, holding him close. Timmy entwines their fingers as they continue to gaze at themselves – rather than Elio and Oliver - on the small screen.

The morning after floors Timmy completely. Armie looks so sincere, so caring and by the end of it so anxious and confused that Timmy feels as if he'd stabbed him. He wants to reassure and protect Armie, take him in his arms and tell him that it's not real. That he's forgiven. That right there it's Elio, not Timmy – though on second thought he's not sure if that's the truth. Where does Timmy end and Elio begin?

“Sorry. Thank you.” He manages to whisper, burying his face in Armie's neck. There's a shadow of stubble and he smells like sleep and fresh sweat and the chamomile stark used for the sheets – a smell Timmy will forever associate with this summer.

“No, thank you, Timmy. Thanks for helping me through this.” Armie mumbles in his ear.

“Me?”

“Without you as my partner these scenes would've come out flat and trite. You allowed me to go all in. I felt so safe with you.”

'Partner' – Timmy likes that.

Luca is equally impressed. He praises them warmly before kissing them both on the mouth. No one recoils, it just feels so natural to exchange physical affection like this.

Luca wants to ride the wave and keep them in their cocoon for as long as possible so he decides to film the following scenes as well. Timmy doesn't mind, he knows he won't be able to sleep right now anyway.

It's still early when they drive out to the lake, the streets deserted. There has been some mix up with the costumes and Timmy just continues wearing Luca's black jumper that's way too big for his lean frame. But it smells like Luca and somehow that works like a magic cloak. Another line that's blurring. He might end up wearing his own clothes on set or keeping Elio's on after wrapping.

While Sayombhu and the sound department set up, Luca, Armie and Timmy fool around. Timmy ends up in the lake, pushed in by his very own director while Armie watches and laughs so hard tears run down his cheeks. As he's soaked anyway, Timmy splashes around like a young puppy, trying to drench both the traitors but succeeding only with Armie, who eventually comes after him, dunking him profusely until Luca calls for action.

Armie's Oliver looks so hurt and lost when Timmy's Elio decides to distance himself it really makes it hard for Timmy to walk away. He simply has to turn around just once and look at Armie to make sure that this is just acting.

A totally different kind of hard he gets when Armie fakes the blow job back at the Villa. Armie on his knees, his face just inches away from Timmy's swelling cock ('slug' Armie had called it a few nights back) as he sucks two fingers in his mouth, making obscene wet noises, has Timmy's dick twitch but by now he doesn't care. He's just human, after all, and the night has been tough, so he just grins and looks away.

All too quick, the blow job is aborted. For now.
When they eventually wrap, everyone is both bone-deep tired but also exhilarated because all went smooth and well in the end. While the crew packs up, Armie pulls Timmy into the Perlman's master bedroom and finishes what he's begun, sucking Timmy off quick and dirty.

Timmy has just enough time to admire what the set designers have done to the place before a car horn honks, calling for them to be driven back to Crema.

During the ride they have time to calm down. Timmy feels heavy and a little fuzzy, but in a good way as he rests his head on Armie's shoulder and almost dozes off.

Whatever has happened between them over the last day – their connection proofs to be deeper than their rift. Timmy had been angry at Armie but he doesn't want to hurt him. Playing their story somehow on fast-forward during the night has taught him at least that much. It's not all well and forgotten by now but Timm'y sure they made profound progress towards a more balanced relationship.

Luca invites them over for breakfast but they both decline.

“Your place or mine.” Timmy asks as they stand in the Piazza del Duomo around ten in the morning, shoppers and tourists bustling around them, unaware of the seismic shift between them.

Armie's smile is brighter than the morning sun.

“Yours.”

Chapter End Notes

I really struggled with this but it's as good as it will ever be.
Tempus fugit

Chapter Summary

The peach scene

They barely make it out of their clothes before falling naked into bed – sleeping for eight hours straight. Armie's so exhausted – physically and mentally – that he doesn't even dream.

He wakes up in the early evening with his head on Tim's flat stomach, the sharp ridge of his lower costal arch digging into Armie's sweaty temple. Tim's right hand rests lightly on Armie's back as he snores peacefully above him, mouth hanging open, a cowlick in his dark hair. He looks about twelve and Armie is shocked by the sight for about three seconds.

He turns his face, nuzzling at the base of Tim's half-hard cock (god, Armie doesn't know if he should fear or admire his libido), inhaling his scent clinging to the short trimmed pubes before sticking the tip of his tongue into Tim's belly button.

The boy above him yelps and startles awake, already halfway sitting up but then the effort seems too much and he just falls back against the pillows.

“Ey,” Tim huffs out softly, almost surrendering, raking his hand through Armie's blonde hair. It's just a trick, though, to lull Armie in because suddenly Tim's fingers tighten and pull until Armie raises his face.

“Ouch! Morning, sleeping beauty.”

Tim laughs with his whole face, his eyes still a bit dreamy as he removes his hand to stretch, wriggling his pelvis enticingly. Armie lowers his mouth in the vicinity where Tim evidently needs it but instead of sucking his by now fully engorged cock he blows a raspberry onto Tim's stomach. Tim shrieks and tries to kick him before they both resolve into a heap of entangled limbs and giggles.

Eventually, Armie allows Tim to flip him over and lie on top of him.

“I'm really not sure I want to do anything about it.” Tim sighs, rolling his hips. Their hard cocks slide against each other.

“We don't have to.” Armie replies and means it. Tim leans down to kiss him and that's when his stomach rumbles.

They shower together, still just kissing (well, a little bit of groping comes into it but neither of them gets off). It's a bit tricky to will away the boner and dress but Armie succeeds. Tim has more trouble and eventually opts for sweat pants and a large hoodie to hide his traitorous crotch. Before they leave he fastens his bracelet around his wrist, fumbling a little with the clasp.

“Need a hand, man?” Armie can't stop himself from asking. Tim just grins and shakes his head.

“I'm good.”

“I know you are.”
Tim rolls his eyes and Armie knows he does deserve it.

It's too late for breakfast and too early for dinner so they go for coffee and pastry. Armie's aware that Tim eyes him somewhat suspiciously but he pretends not to care as he makes short work of his sfogliatella. 'Look, I'm eating'.

"We'll need the sugar." Tim says as he bites into his third croissant al cioccolato.

"You definitely do." Armie grins, sipping his espresso.

Tim smiles around a mouthful of puff pastry and shakes his head, munching happily. He's got a smear of chocolate in the corner of his mouth and Armie wants to lick it away.

"You really think Luca will go through with it?" Armie asks.

"We talked a few days back when we filmed the scene with your red bathing trunks." 'Your trunks', Armie realizes, not 'Oliver's'. "He said he wants to try. If it doesn't work out, we skip it and shoot the scene where we both talk."

"You mean I might not get the chance to lick peach juice off your body?" Armie tries to sound offended but it just comes out horny. Maybe they should have fucked earlier?

"You seem really keen." Tim's eyes go dark suddenly.

Armie shrugs but doesn't deny it. Tim bites his lip, stuffs the last piece of pastry into his mouth and gets up.

"Up for a rehearsal?"

There's a fruit cart opposite the cafe. Armie quickly settles the tab and walks over, buying a bag of peaches. Tim stands next to him, blushing furiously as he has to translate while selecting large yet firm peaches from the basket.

Armie feels very smug when they reenter Tim's apartment carrying their booty straight over into the bedroom.

"Okay, go on. Show me how it's done, babe."

Tim's erection springs out already pitifully hard when he sheds his hoodie and sweat pants. He lies on his back, looking up at Armie, extending his right hand. The bracelet glows as it slides up his wiry forearm, blue veins visible beneath his milky skin, the dark beads a beautiful contrast to his pale flesh.

Armie has to swallow hard before he remembers to dig out one plump, ripe fruit, already a little squishy to the touch. Its skin is smooth, the color a bright pink with a tint of darker red to it; marching the flush creeping down Tim's torso.

"You have to... remove the pit." Tim is already breathing heavily, his chest rising and falling rapidly while the fingertips of his left hand stroke idly up and down his concave belly - never quite touching his weeping cock.

Thick sweet juice runs over Armie's fingers as he digs his thumbs into the rich orange pulp, tearing it almost in half to get to the pit. The room is filled with the rich scent of fresh peaches.

He just throws the stone onto the floor as he hands Tim the fruit, gaping wide open, exposing its
bright magenta core. It reminds Armie of a wet open cunt and he's not sure if he fancies the sight or is repelled by it. How can an innocent peach look this obscene?

Tim suggestively sucks at its crack before rubbing the torn fruit all over his chest and stomach, moving down, leaving a glutinous trail behind. His nipples are so hard Armie's sure he could have cut the peach open by just grating it over those peaked nubs.

“Oh god.” Tim moans as the peach reaches its destination, pressing the oozing halves around his swollen shaft. His cockhead peaks out, endearingly red and weeping, precome mixing with the peach juice, creating an obscene varnish. The only noises audible are the lewd squelch of the fruit around Tim's cock, his shallow breathing and the rattling of the beads around his arm.

They are both watching the movement of Tim's hand, small yet precise jerks of the wrist. Tim is biting his lower lip again as he works his cock, if in concentration or arousal Armie can't say. It's definitely too much for him, though. Armie's knees give out and he sinks down onto the mattress, grabbing Tim's thigh to pull his legs further apart.

His fingers trail up, up... until Tim grunts and shakes his head. “That's cheating. Don't touch me. I want to... want to... come... just from...”

He can't finish his sentence. His hand tightens, squashing the poor fruit. It dissolves into a dark-yellow mash Tim's bucking up into erratically, sticky sweetness seeping out between his fingers.

Armie doesn't care if he cheats by now, all he wants is to touch and taste. He grabs Tim's delicate yet tacky wrist and pulls his hand away, replacing it with his own. After a few tugs he already feels Tim twitch and pulse. When he shouts “Fuck!” Armie just buries his face in the mess between Tim's legs and sucks.

It tastes sweet and salty at the same time. The remnants of the peach feel wet and soft against his lips, reminding him of eating his wife's pussy. But Tim's massive erection is impossible to ignore and as he swallows him down Armie briefly experiences the sensation of best of both worlds – Tim, man and woman at the same time, impossible ambiguity, a truly androgynous lover squirming beneath him, spilling all his juices in Armie's mouth for him to savor.

He can hear Tim cry out again and even his voice oscillates in between, too high for a man, too deep for a woman. Armie swallows and licks, lost to the sensation, rutting against the mattress until Tim whimpers with over-sensitivity.

Only then does Armie sit up, frees his own erection and comes all over Tim's glistening torso after just two strokes, his thick, hot stripes adding a creamy finish to the fruit mush covering the beautiful, spent creature beneath him.

Sweet agony indeed.

Armie can't stop himself, he has to smear the mess all over Tim before bending down and licking it off his salty skin. He feels dizzy, floating, high on the scent of musk, sweat and peach. Tim hums with pleasure, his lean body arching into Armie's touch and kisses.

“You're amazing. So gorgeous. I love your taste.” Armie mumbles over and over while dragging his tongue through the salacious mix of cum and peach, unable to detach his mouth from Tim's soiled silky skin.

The boy stares up at him with wide, hazy eyes. “Say you love me.”

Armie doesn't hesitate. “I love you. God, Tim, I love you. I'll never let you go. You're mine.”
Filming the actual peach scene is nothing compared to ‘rehearsing’ it before with Armie. First, because he doesn't really masturbate with the fruit. Second, because he's alone while mimicking to do so - well, apart from Luca, the boom operator (a dark-haired guy in his twenties named Ramon) and Sayombhu.

Armie waits somewhere outside while Timmy has to lie on that old, mildewy mattress – today he’s been the most diva-like he’s ever dared during this film, demanding a towel and sheets before getting onto that dirty piece of bedding – faking a wank.

The greatest challenges are to remove the pit from the fruit and not to open his trousers too far to expose his dick.

They ruin four peaches before they find one soft enough yet not too soft. Timmy sets to work, forcing himself not to fantasize about what they did earlier. That would make it too real.

But the smell takes him back. Peach juice runs down his chest. His nipples get hard. He gets hard. As he has no idea how he looks when he masturbates it’s surprisingly difficult to pretend doing it. Is it too much? Or not enough? He should have watched himself in a mirror. Or filmed himself.

Armie would have liked that, he’s sure.

Don’t think of Armie while rubbing your skin with an oozing peach!

Timmy’s only aware he’s touching his neck the way Armie likes to do it when his fingers are already wrapping around his throat.

“Fuck.” He exhales.

Luckily, Luca calls cut.

Everyone tries to be professional about it but Timmy can't suppress a giggle when the props operator fills a new fruit with a mixture of plain yogurt, frosting sugar and coconut milk.

He has to admit it looks surprisingly real.

They break to set up for Armie’s entrance.

“Hey.” Armie greets him as he wanders outside, a shit-eating on his face. “How was it for you?”

Timmy playfully punches his biceps and steals the cigarette from Armie’s mouth. “You are just jealous, Armie Hammer.”

“I might be.” He leans in and kisses Timmy just below his ear, making him shiver all over.

“You cold?” Armie croons and Timmy jumps him, arms around his neck, legs around his waist, his fists hammering onto Armie's strong back. Armie turns and tries to shake him off but Timmy clings to him until both make-up and costume department intervene.

“Come on, ragazzi, get it out of your system.” Luca shouts but he sounds fond in his exasperation.

Only, when they go over the scene, the mood does suddenly change. Gone is their playful ease. Timmy is suddenly reminded of their talk on Sunday... because in this scene Elio realizes that their time together will irrevocably end.
“I’m the one who came after you...,” he says, suddenly again full of regret for the emotional turmoil he’s caused for Armie.

When Armie answers: “Nonsense, I wanted you from day one,” Timmy wants to believe it so badly it’s outright pathetic. Then he hears Armie hiss: “Don’t ever say you didn’t know” - and his carefully established poise comes crashing down like a house of cards.

Because, of course, he knows. And Armie knows as well. But as for Elio and Oliver - being aware of their feelings doesn’t change a thing. Their love is all they have but it leads nowhere, it’s a stillbirth, even as they are now both able to acknowledge it.

Oliver’s line already implies a future in which they won’t be together anymore; a future where Oliver won’t be able to tell and show Elio he loves him. Their worlds just collided over this one summer. And Oliver knew, knows...

Like Armie knows.

Timmy can’t bear it. Not after last night.

Yet he tries to pull himself together. But Armie seems to notice that something’s seriously wrong and looks at him full of worries. Even Luca asks if he needs a moment.

A moment? What is he to do with a fucking moment? Or an hour? A month, a year? It would never be enough. He wants forever, eternity. He never wants to let Armie go! He wants to be with him, always, everywhere, until death will part them. And if Armie goes first he’d kill himself right after.

The realization hits him like a punch to the gut. He sacks forward crashing into Armie’s naked chest still smelling of his own shower gel.

He just wants to get over with this fucking scene!

When they roll he’s not really there, lacking in concentration, missing cues. Timmy sees Armie suppress a grin when he reaches over for the prepared peach and tries to smile back but his face feels stiff. He’s suddenly very tired.

Armie carries on and even succeeds to take a bite from the peach before Timmy calls for a stop.

“Sorry,” he mumbles and Luca comes over and hugs him. Timmy can see Armie munching away on the fruit and feels his stomach turn.

“Tesoro, I know it’s hard. But you’ve done a fantastic job so far.”

“I don’t know what’s happening, Luca. I just... ugh, I feel so empty.” Timmy confesses, his voice low and a little shaky.

“It’ll come to you. Just let Armie lead. It’s okay for Elio to be confused in this scene, to just react. You don’t have to carry it. Remember how Armie gave himself over yesterday? That was beautiful. Look at him now, he’s free, open. No inhibitions. You can do that too. Just trust him.”

Timmy nods weakly. They try again.

“You okay, babe?” Armie asks just before Luca calls action. Timmy can only blink and shrug.

He can’t remember his lines, drawing a blank. All he hears is a pounding in his head like a ticking clock and isn’t that crazy? Is he going crazy? Or is it his heartbeat he’s listening to, reminding him
that he’s alive and as long as he’s alive there’s hope?

When Armie sticks to the script Timmy stays silent, just gazing at him. Armie seems to get his confusion and goes on until he’s about to bite the peach but this time Timmy reacts faster, suddenly pushing into him, fighting him in earnest. He can feel Armie's fingers dig into his skin and hopes they’ll leave a mark.

He wants a bruise as a perfectly fitting, physical proof of their painfully doomed union. Liz has her ring and the stretch marks of her pregnancy, Armie has the tattoo – and Timmy? All Timmy has are scars from his loneliness...

“You're hurting me.” It’s a confession, a plea – for more. ‘*Hurt me all you want*’, Timmy thinks. If pain is all Armie can give him he’ll take it and wear his marks with pride.

There are tears in his voice. His eyes spill over.

Armie hears him, puts the peach down and reaches for him, pulling him close, kissing his hair, his cheeks. Timmy can hear him whisper “You're so beautiful” in his curls, reminding him of what he'd said earlier in the bedroom, taking him back there, to Armie worshiping his body.

Armie telling him he loves him.

Now, Timmy can only cling to him, sobbing, desperately trying to keep him close.

But he feels their connection slipping. Everything ends, they are just on borrowed time.

Loneliness and despair spread through his body like a narcotic, paralyzing him. He can't move. He just wants to stay here, like this, forever, held by Armie, who's caressing him and tells him he's precious. He doesn't need anything else in his life. This will be enough.

“I don't want you to go.” He chokes out, finally telling Armie in all honesty. The truth frees him, makes him bold. He kisses Armie with open mouth and tongue. Armie seems so surprised that he can't even reciprocate.

Not until Luca calls cut.

Only then does he lean in and Timmy willingly yields, welcoming him. He'll take anything he can get, ignoring that they're on set. Someone wraps a robe around his naked shoulders but he still doesn't let go of Armie.

He has no idea how long they stay like this but eventually he hears Luca voice, soft and close: “Timothèe?”

He rests his forehead on Armie's shoulder, eyes closed, and nods.

“There you are, caro mio. We'll finish for tonight, okay. We can film Elio and Oliver talk tomorrow night, after your scene with Esther up here.”

Timmy had totally forgotten about that. He'll have to go down on Esther once again. But he can't face that right now.

“Yeah, whatever.”

“Armie, take care of him, yes.” Luca tentatively pats Timmy's shoulder before getting up, leaving them alone to talk to the crew.
“Hey, babe,” Armie raises his head with two fingers below his chin. “Let me take you home.”
“Hey, Tim, come on, we're home. Let's get you to bed.” Armie gently nudges Tim who's slumped against his shoulder in the rear seat of the car that has taken them back to Crema.

“What?” Tim jerks awake, disheveled and endearingly disoriented. He blinks a few times as he tries to focus. They are in front of his building.

“Babe, it's late.” Armie helps him exit the car, holding his door open, extending a hand to pull Tim to his feet. They quietly shuffle up the stairs and Tim takes ages to find his key. Armie waits patiently, smiling fondly as Tim searches through his pockets.

Inside prevails the usual chaos: clothes, mugs, candy wrappers, half-empty cans of Coke, towels litter every available surface.

Armie's by now used to it and keeps his mouth shut as he steers Tim over to the bedroom. The bag of peaches still sits on the nightstand “Let's get you tugged in, babe.” Tim is pliant, trudging along.

Five minutes later they are both snuggled under the covers. Armie's phone tells him that it's past midnight.

“Shall I set an alarm? When are you scheduled tomorrow?”

“Two in the afternoon.” Tim sighs, already drifting off again.

Armie sets his alarm for eleven and hugs Tim from behind. He's already breathing evenly. Armie presses a kiss to his nape, inhaling his smell.

Tim breaking down tonight had shown him how fragile he really is. His honesty had been disarming. Armie hadn't been able to deal with it. For it had been Tim begging him not to leave... not Elio.

Armie doesn't want to leave either. Not Tim, not Luca, not Italy. He often falls in love with the places he films but this time it's special. Europe always casts a mesmerizing spell on Armie – the culture, the history, his family roots. Yet this movie is deeply changing him. Over the last weeks he has felt free, liberated, as if he'd broken his chains and stepped into a new life, taken a great leap forward.

Chains? Does he really feel chained, trapped in his marriage? Armie remembers when he'd met Liz almost ten years ago. They'd been friends first, good friends. Armie had dated the odd girl back then
but had also had anonymous encounters in the LA gay scene. Not many, thank god. He hadn't been famous, was just embarking on being an actor and hadn't taken it that serious anyway. Later, when Hollywood marketed him as the next big thing, gladly no one remembered him.

He thinks he got away because he'd mostly frequented dark rooms or used glory holes. No public cruising or Grindr or clubbing for him. It hadn't been about protecting his image – back in those days he didn't have a career or image to speak off – but because he'd felt... ashamed. Filthy. He believed for so long that what he wants is wrong that it's almost impossible for him to accept his needs. He isn't proud of the things he did – and still does - and hopes to keep them hidden from prying eyes. But despite the shame he can't suppress his urges. Which makes it even worse.

He'd been too broke to afford rentboys when younger but as soon as the money had started rolling in he'd chosen this path to satisfaction. It's discreet and paying for services guarantees that he gets what he wants. In his experience, those boys are quite reliable. If they receive the agreed fare and you treat them decent they have no intention to piss off a customer by breaking their trust and blackmailing them. Despite, Armie's always careful not to be photographed or filmed during his encounters, mostly choosing his car or deserted side streets for meetings. So far he's been lucky. Of course, there's always a residual risk. He doesn't dwell too much on it.

During their early years before they got together Armie had even thought about telling Liz, confessing to her as his best friend that he was into boys. But in the end he couldn't. He'd been glad about it when his career had taken off and he'd felt the need to sort out his private life by getting married. Who could've been a better spouse than the female friend he trusted and admired?

It had been so convenient. Liz had been fun, easy going. They'd known each other for quite some time by then. Marrying her had shut up both his mother and many fellow starlets and actresses hitting on him – as well as some male casting directors. When Hollywood had tried to mold him into leading man material a marriage had played along nicely, manifesting his heterosexuality while simultaneously taking him off the market. He'd become the epitome of the straight white man. With his looks, blockbuster stardom had been tangible. So he'd been told again and again.

Only, it hadn't worked out. Maybe because it was all a lie. It should have been his job to pretend – not his life. Now he starts to understand that the need to always wear a mask had drained him and sucked too much energy from him – energy he should have put into his acting, his roles. But before this movie he'd always held back, never went all in. It had become second nature to hide who he really is. Dropping the mask had simply felt too dangerous after a while. His fear of exposure had been amplified by that nagging worry of giving himself away.

But lying to all the people all the time is exhausting.

When his career hadn't worked out the way everyone had hoped – he isn't so sure if he himself belongs in that camp - he'd again thought about coming clean to Liz, maybe to even come out. He'd been promoting his latest film all over the world, being away from home for several weeks, hooking up with faceless men in London, Rome, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Rio...he'd almost gotten careless, especially as it became increasingly clear that this film would be another one in the string of box office disasters he'd starred in.

He'd come to wonder what he would loose if he told Liz, got a divorce and maybe dropped acting altogether and instead went into business with Nick. They'd already opened a real estate agency together. Leaving acting behind would have been a hard decision but Armie had secretly hoped to maybe gain a footing in indie films or theater after the first outrage had died down.

And then Liz had told him she was pregnant.
She'd been talking about a baby for quite some time to complete them as a family. But Armie hadn't really listened. He hadn't been adverse when it came to having kids but somehow the timing had never seemed right. Until Liz had taken matters into her own hands and had presented him with a fait accompli.

It had worked as a sign for Armie to stay in the closet. It had shown him that all his musings about telling Liz the truth had been daydreams. Because how could he ever leave his baby? He had been in no doubt that Liz would have fought tooth and nail to gain sole custody had Armie told her he was... what? Bisexual? Gay? Had cheated on her all those years?

It was not that Liz was homophobic, she'd be the first to declare that some of her best friends were gay men. Still, she would detest being married to one. She also would have been rightly hurt by Armie lying and lying and lying to her and for their marriage being exposed as a sham. He didn't dare to hope for neither forgiveness nor an amicable divorce. Liz would have been out for blood. His blood.

There had been two incidents during their marriage when she'd thought Armie had harbored interests into a female colleague. Liz had made it very clear both times that she'd skin Armie alive should he ever trespass with another woman. He believed her. She'd been very convincing.

He simply can't imagine what she'd say should she ever learn that he had had not one woman since their marriage besides her – but literally dozens of men.

She'd feel humiliated – and rightly so. Armie knows all this. He knows what he does is unforgivable. It's not that he doesn't like his wife or wants to hurt her. But as their marriage continued, he'd realized that they have increasingly less in common when it comes to things that matter: interests, outlook on life and the world in general, political stance, morals...

They are growing apart more and more with each year. He feels he's changed so much from the barely adult young man who'd fled into a marriage to find stability in an unfamiliar world and a predatory industry. He's turning thirty in a few weeks. His inner conflicts – despite torturing him – have also forced him to grow as a human being.

He catches himself more and more often thinking about what he wants from life. Tonight has once again shown him that time is limited. Postponing decisions, closing one's eyes for reality doesn't change a thing. It has him stuck. But is he brave enough to cut his ties?

Despite what he feels for Tim, this is still his reality: marriage, a kid, being a privileged white actor with a pregnant wife. For all the world he's straight as an arrow and correcting that assumption would surely leave scorched earth behind.

Yet the temptation lingers, rearing its head from time to time in wild, unguarded moments far away from home.

He has to admit that he cares less and less for the consequences.

And as if Liz could somehow sense that she's produced another baby. Well, that's probably unfair, it takes two to do so. He has to perform once in a while to keep her happy and unsuspecting. So he does. It's becoming more and more tedious though. He's started to fantasize about boys during intercourse with his wife a while back. Lately, he prefers to take her from behind with the lights switched off.

She hadn't asked why. Maybe because her priority had been another child.
Sometimes Armie can't believe that Liz doesn't suspect at least something.

And now there's suddenly another person to be taken into the equation. Tim. He's both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because he could be a strong enough motivation for Armie to come clear and gain a life. A curse because he could be a strong enough motivation for Armie to come clear and lose everything he holds dear.

Soon he and Liz will celebrate their sixth wedding anniversary. The seven years itch, he thinks, and smiles sadly against Tim's skin. If they could just separate for a while, giving him room to come to terms with how he really feels... Everything seems to change, it's like the ground falls out from underneath his feet while being trapped between a rock and a hard place and he can't think right now, with Tim in his bed and Liz in LA, another child growing in her belly.

Well, late at night has never been a good time to make life-changing decisions.

Armie sighs, breathing Tim in, holding him close.

He should sleep. Tomorrow, everything will look differently, brighter. He's just worked up from the filming and the sex and their characters bleeding over into reality and what this could mean and where this could lead to.

Sleep always helps.

Yet it takes him a long time to drift off.

When the alarm sounds and wakes him Timmy feels still woozy. He'd been reeling last night and doesn't really remember how he got home and into bed. But Armie's there with him so it's all fine,

Armie groans against his nape and turns around to switch off his phone. Timmy instantly misses the skin contact. Thank god there's a warm laugh against his shoulder blades a second later as Armie slides back into place where he belongs. He wraps his arms around Timmy's waist and Timmy sighs, content and happy.

“Good morning.” Armie mouths a kiss high on his spine.

“Hmmmm.” Timmy hums.

“Are you better?”

Timmy takes a deep breath. He's a bit embarrassed that he started to cry last night. But it had all been too intense for him to handle. That scene had been coming for him since filming started and maybe he’d put too much emotion into it? He knows this could happen to an actor but still... he had mixed up his feelings with Elio's and that was highly unprofessional. But maybe also unavoidable? Sometime he doesn't know anymore where Elio ends and Timmy begins.

It didn't just happen during the peach scene. He'd been hugely affected by the midnight scene as well. And the first kiss. And pretty much all of the filming. But especially by the love scenes.

“I'm sorry.” He whispers. “I just... got carried away. It won't happen again.”

Armie hugs him tighter. “No, that's not... It's okay. I was just worried.”

“You think I've ruined the scene?” Timmy's suddenly really anxious. He doesn't want to disappoint
Armie. Or Luca. Or anyone. He knows so much of this film depends on his ability to deliver and perform.

“No. No, of course not! You killed it... in a good way. That's not what I was worried about.”

“Then what...?”

“You, you goose.” Armie using Oliver's phrase makes Timmy giggle before he takes the meaning of his words in.

“Oh. Sorry, I really didn't want to... make things difficult.”

Armie sits up and turns Timmy on his back so they can look at each other. “That's not... you didn't... Actually, I was thinking. Last night. You got me thinking about... stuff.” Armie sounds serious.

“What were you thinking about?” Timmy leans up on his elbows, suddenly breathless, is heart trying to beat out of his chest. He feels tense with anticipation.

Armie is quiet for a moment, just looking at him. Timmy squirms under this scrutiny. When Armie speaks his voice is rough. “Last year, during promo for Guy's film, I had the feeling I was done with my marriage. I knew that film wouldn't do well either, despite having been great fun to shoot. But the studio postponed its release and that's usually not a good sign. Anyway.” He brushes a curl off Timmy's forehead. “So I was thinking, back then... if I laid low for a while and then maybe went indie, or theater, I could... maybe... live more open and see how I'd like it... but...”

“You're still married.” Timmy can't help it, the words leave his mouth before he's even aware saying them.

“Liz got pregnant.” Armie's says flatly.

Timmy nods. “Yeah.” He understands. He truly does.

“And now she's pregnant again, just when I met you.” Armie strokes his thumb over Timmy's cheekbone. He looks at him so tenderly that Timmy just wants to hug him and never let go. “But this time I'm kind of thinking about to actually... do something. I think I have to make some decisions... If I come out-”

“Armie, no, I don't want that! I'm not demanding-”

“-and ask her for divorce, I'll lose my kids. I couldn't deal with that.”

“Yeah.” Timmy had no idea one could simultaneously feel relieved and incredibly sad. Crushed.

“I don't care about the job that much, maybe I could take some time off and come back well-aged later? Or do something else. Direct, Write. Whatever. But the kids... I can't do that, Tim.”

Armie looks crestfallen but Timmy's glad that he's honest with him.

“So?” He asks tentatively because he senses there's something more to come.

“I can't let you go either. Last night showed me how much you mean to me. You asked for something more substantial than me apologizing all the time for my shortcomings so...,” Armie takes a deep breath.

That's when Timmy's phone chimes. He instinctively glances at the display.
“Shit!” He mutters.

“Who is it?” Armie sounds irritated.

“It's the doctor.”

Armie looks like Timmy’s talking Chinese.

“The HIV test, remember? They wanted to give me the results today.” He swipes over the display, suddenly anxious, holding Armie's gaze.

“Pronto.” A nurse asks if she's speaking with Signor Chalamet. “Si.”

She tells him that they have his results ready but never share them via telephone so could he please come into the practice?

“Adesso?” He asks.

“Si. Adesso.” She hangs up.

“I have to go see the doctor. Now.” He's suddenly uneasy. What if he has it? What if one of the boys he’d made out with hadn't been safe? What if he just got unlucky and had contracted it in an unusual way? God... what if he's given it to Armie?

Timmy's mouth is suddenly dry. His fingers play with the sheet, twisting it in his grip. He feels a little sick.

Armie asks: “Why?” He sounds suspicious. Does he worry the same?

Timmy shrugs, biding his time. As he tries to swallow, he coughs, a harsh bellowing sound in the warm, sunny bedroom. “Apparently they never give the results over the phone.” Timmy looks at the time again. “Shit, I’ll have to hurry to not run late.” He can't look at Armie when he asks: “Will you come with me?”

Armie hesitates a moment. Timmy feels himself blush and hurries to say: “It's okay if you don't want to. Really, I'll be fine...”

But Armie already rolls out of bed. “Come on then, lets get dressed and get it over with.”

Timmy exhales with relieve.

There's no time to shower so they just brush their teeth and get dressed. Timmy puts Armie's bracelet on to ground himself. This is real, a manifestation of Armie's feeling for him, a token of his love. Timmy feels in dire need of this reassurance just now.

Fifteen minutes later they sit together in the waiting area of a surgery near Piazza del Duomo.

Timmy's sweating. And fidgeting. He's so fucking nervous he fears he might throw up. His worries are steadily increasing. He already sees himself withering away in some impersonal nursing home, alone, his fair skin eaten up by Kaposi's sarcoma, his teeth falling as well as his hair, leaving him skinny and bald and ugly with metastases in his brain, blind, shitting in a nappy...

Armie sits next to him, stoically holding his hand, squeezing it from time to time.

There's an old man dozing in a chair in the corner and a young mother opposite them, unsuccessfully trying to keep her two kids under control. When they almost knock over a low table covered with magazines she smiles apologetically and a little tired over at them and Timmy watches as Armie just
nods, shrugs and grins. He's about to say something but then the receptionist calls Timmy's name – butchering it of course but this time he doesn't care.

As they're about to enter the doctor's office the receptionist points at Armie and enquires: “Chi è quello?”

Timmy swallows. He really doesn't want to be alone when he gets his results. So he straightens his back and tells the nurse: “Il mio compagno.” It's the first time he calls a man his partner in public and he's a bit sad that it's a white lie but it can't be helped.

The receptionist shrugs, nods, ushers them in and leaves.

“What did she want?” Armie asks.

“Something about the payment.” Timmy looks Armie straight in the eye. “I told her I already settled it the last time.”

Armie frowns but nods. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, of course. It's going to be negative, I know that.” He hopes he's not tempting faith.

Armie takes his hand and kisses his palm. “Yeah...”

Just then the dottore enters. He's a small, stout man in his fifties with black-rimmed glasses covering kind eyes. He's carrying a small folder and shakes both Timmy's and Armie's hands before taking his seat behind his huge rosewood desk.

“Preferiresti italiano o inglese, Signor Chalamet?”

Timmy swallows. “Inglese, per favore.”

Despite being sure that he has nothing to worry about Timmy braces himself. He knows it's not a death sentence anymore... his mom had told him how she'd watched colleagues die miserable deaths during the late eighties but now there's better medication available...

God, please, let it be negative.

Please!

“Your test results have come back negative.”

Timmy exhales audibly and can't suppress a broad grin. Armie throws an arm around his shoulder, pulling him close.


He gets up and clumsily shakes the doctor's hand. The small man hands him an envelop and smiles at them both as they leave.

“God, that was...,” Timmy sighs, unable to put his feelings into words. He's relieved, happy yet wonders why. He's known it, after all. Still...

“Yeah.” Armie looks at him with an unreadable gaze. “Yeah.” He repeats, nods and briefly takes Timmy into his arms again. “I knew it.”

“Me too.” Timmy mumbles against Armie's neck. They stay like this on the busy Piazza del Duomo in the center of Crema, embracing each other in broad daylight. Timmy needs a moment before his
heart rate slows down and he gets his breathing under control.

“Is there time for a quick coffee?” Timmy actually feels he needs something stronger but he can't get a drink before filming another intimate scene with Esther. That would be unfair and highly unprofessional.

Armie releases him and glances at his watch before shaking his head. “I'm afraid not. The car might already be waiting.” As they walk back over to the pick-up point at Timmy's apartment Armie suddenly grabs his wrist. The beads of the bracelet dig into his skin but it's not painful. It feels good. Like being claimed.

“Tim, I... what I wanted to say to you back in bed...”

“Yes?” Timmy had almost forgotten. Armie had come to a decision, or had an idea, a proposal of sorts or something? He shakes his head to clear his thoughts and come back to the here and now. He won't die. They might have a future.

“Can we talk about that tonight? Just you and me? No dinner at Luca?” Armie sounds urgent.

“Sure.” Timmy nods.

He wonders what Armie wants to tell him all the way out to the Villa.
It's Time That You Love

Chapter Summary

Finally, Armie tells Tim what he's decided.

Chapter Notes

Title taken from Time by Tom Waits

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Armie is almost glad when Tim's phone rings and cuts him off. Suddenly, Tim is preoccupied with thoughts about his test results.

Armie remembers himself sitting in a doctor's waiting room, anticipating a diagnose that might destroy his life. He'd been scared shitless. And alone. So when Tim asks if he'll come with him, of course he agrees.

He feels like everyone is staring at them in the surgery. But somehow he doesn't mind. Instead he's filled with a strange sense of pride. Yes, Tim's his... boyfriend, lover, SO, whatever. For a short while he loves to play make-believe to the world, pretending they are together for all the world to see.

He even grabs Tim's hand to assure him that all will be fine when the doctor enters with the file.

Only then, suddenly, what if hits Armie.

What if Tim's positive? Armie knows it doesn't mean certain, painful death any longer. Through some of Liz's charities he's met people who have lived with the virus for decades. But it means constant medication. It's expensive. For an actor there might be the question if he ever gets insurance again for shooting a movie – if not, no one will hire him.

Armie is reminded of Charlie Sheen. And Tim's not nearly that famous. Who wants to work with a talented nobody with HIV? Not many actors, directors and producers, that's for sure.

And how would Tim take it personally, psychologically? Armie has sensed by now that his family is really supportive and liberal... but – could they cope with a fatally ill son? Could Tim? He's so fragile. A severe physical illness might tip his already unbalanced scales into true mental disorder.

And what about himself? He'd wanted to talk to Tim just before this fateful call. He had a proposal for him. Could he still go through with that knowing Tim has the virus? He's aware that there are ways not to catch it, even in very intimate contact with an infected partner. But he can't believe those ways are 100% safe.

He also has Hops to consider? Would he still allow Tim near his daughter if there's even just the slightest risk for her to catch it?
He knows it's irrational but he can't help these unfiltered thoughts tumble around in his anxious brain. Armie hates himself for his fears – and is ashamed of some answers to his questions.

Because he doubts he could continue to carry on with Tim if he had it.

He just couldn't bear to watch this beautiful boy wither and die before him.

But thank god – Tim's negative! Even Tim seems to relax after hearing that. There had been a certain tightness to his posture, a rigid back, more fidgeting than usual – it all falls away from him now.

This tells Armie that Tim hadn't been absolutely certain either. He' harbored lingering doubts as well. Armie hates the spark of jealousy, distrust and sceptis that flashes through his mind. He needs to quieten these dark thoughts. They are futile and lead nowhere.

He has no right to blame Tim for whatever he's done before they met.

But hadn't Tim coaxed him into fucking him bare? Without being absolutely sure he's clean. Yet he'd promised... What is Armie to make of this?

And is he better? He thinks he has to tell Tim about the rentboys - eventually.

He doesn't want to have secrets any longer. They need to talk.

About their pasts – and their future.

Armie had wanted to propose to Tim some sort of arrangement.

What he thinks he needs is time.

He'd be away in India for most of the rest of the year. Liz usually visits him on sets – as she's done here in Crema – but India might actually be too much for a pregnant woman with Liz's standards. Too hot, too dirty, too alien.

So he and Liz could get used to being separate. For a limited time at first. That could be something he could propose to her: a temporary separation. He could say he needed a bit of change, life with two toddlers was too demanding for him, that he wanted diversification as an actor... he could try theater, for example.

Broadway?

And wouldn't it be better for Liz and the kids to stay in LA, in their usual surroundings, with their friends?

Tim lives in New York. They could meet casually on his turf, see how things worked out in real life. Or if.

That had been Armie's plan. He'd thought it reasonable.

But now the visit to the doctor has shook him. On the one hand, he has to admit that he still has doubts when it comes to Tim. He can't help it. The boy is young and the young are usually foolish and reckless in Armie's experience. Trust is hard to achieve for him. He once again had to realize that all he knows about Tim is what he's told him. Apart from Will he's never met any of his friends or family. He knows next to nothing about his circumstances.

On the other hand, watching Tim get the result, realizing that he's healthy and had a life ahead of him had made Armie reconsider for totally different reasons. Could he really ask Tim to wait for him as
he sorts out his life, his marriage, arriving with all the baggage of his almost 30 years on this earth, among them two kids, a privileged family background and a homophobic, religious mother – all the while only relying on Armie's promise that he would make it work? Was that fair?

Could he ask Tim to put his life on hold while Armie second-guessed his choices? How exclusive would they be? Would Tim agree to be faithful to someone who's for the world, the law and god still attached to another person?

How much strain would that impose on their relationship? Armie knows he's a jealous fucker. It's a challenge to trust Tim here in Crema where they are virtually together 24/7. How will he cope when he's in India and Tim's back in New York or wherever, living, working, making new friends, meeting all sorts of people?

Tim is young, talented, beautiful – maybe waiting for Armie will lessen his chances to find someone more suitable, someone his age, someone unattached, free like him in life and spirit? Can Armie really demand such a commitment from Tim? A few months can seem a lifetime for a twenty-year-old.

He'd been so sure back in bed with Tim that he knew what he wanted, that he'd found a way - but now reality has hit him full square. As they arrive on set, Tim is quickly whisked away – and Armie has time to kill before they shoot Elio and Oliver talking about their relationship.

Will Tim tell him next year that they as well have wasted so many days? Too many? Or will they be like the strangers that meet at the end of the book, barely acquaintances, trapped leading parallel lives because there's no way they could turn back the time to their Italian summer night's dream?

To wipe away these melancholic thoughts and get back into the here and now – and to think about something else than Tim rolling around on their mattress from last night, licking Esther's sweet pink cunt - Armie calls his wife.

“Hey, husband.” Liz sounds surprised and a little breathless.


“Well, considering it's four in the morning over here she's actually still asleep.”

“Oh, shit, sorry, I forgot. Those fucking timezones. Why are you awake?”

“Armie, language! I... I couldn't sleep.”

Liz sounds strange, as if she's trying to conceal something from Armie.

“Morning sickness?”

“No, no. Don't worry. It's just... I don't know. How's the movie going?”

“Good. Great.” He doesn't tell her about the sex scenes. He had given her the script to read but he doubts she did it. “We are on schedule. Everything's working out just fine.”

“That's good to know. And Tom?”

“Tom?” Armie's at a loss who she's talking about.

“That little Jewish boy in the supporting role.”

She definitely hasn't read the script.
“You mean Tim? Timothée.” He makes a point of pronouncing his name correctly. “You actually met him, Liz.”

“Yeah, but... you know, I can't keep track of every unknown up-and-coming actor you chose to work with on these small films.” Armie hears it all: the criticism, the frustration that he opted for indies instead of blockbusters, the lack of recognition for him and therefore for her that goes with his artistic choices, the smaller pay, resulting in a smaller house, a smaller car etc. than many of Liz's friends. Armie's heard it so many times until he started to play deaf to her.

“No, you can only remember the likes of Leo and Henry.” He can't stop himself from retorting. There's a short cold silence on the other side. When Liz speaks again, she sounds miffed. “Whatever. Someone has to take care of your career and your connections if you can't be bothered. I might make an effort to remember that boy's pretentious name when he's nominated for an Oscar. But as this will never happen I choose to engage my mental capacity with more important stuff. For example, I'd been to this event I told you about the other day and there I met...”

Armie zones out. He desperately wants a cigarette but Liz would hear him smoke over the phone. And she doesn't like him smoking. So he wanders into the garden under the peach trees, admiring the soft furry fruits, inhaling the sweet summer air, remembering yesterday's rehearsal...

After six years of marriage he knows well what Liz expects him to contribute to a conversation like this. So he hums and says yes and laughs when such a reaction seems appropriate without really taking in what she's saying.

If her mental capacity is not to be littered so his isn't either.

“Why did you call, husband? Was there anything important?” Her question brings Armie back. ‘I want to leave you to move in with my male lover in New York.’ Armie wants to tell her. That unknown up-and-coming Jewish boy who's name you don't care to remember, who's more than a decade younger than you, his flesh still firm, his skin still flawless without artificial help. Who's funny, intelligent, talented, who listens to me and cares for me and my opinions. To whom I could listen talking about the most mundane things all day. Whom I love – more than I ever loved you, perhaps.’

But he just says: “No, I just wanted to check in on you, hear if you are okay. Look, sorry, I didn't want to offend you. I know it's not easy for you, alone with Hops and the business and all the networking. You are truly amazing.” A little flattery never did any harm. And it's true, he is glad that she manages their life and Harper and everything. She's perfect at it. Maybe a little too perfect.

“Aww, no, it’s fine. Well, as I'm awake by now, I can do a bit of yoga for as long as Harper sleeps. And maybe a face mask. Take care, husband. See you soon. Bye!” She chirps and Armie says bye as well and hangs up.

Still, an uneasy feeling lingers with him. Something had been... off. He can't put his finger on it but he feels even worse after calling her than before. He plucks a ripe peach from a tree and bites it, the juice dripping over his finger, as he wanders back to the house to get into Oliver make-up and costume for his scene with Tim.

Rolling around with Esther on the same mattress he'd broken down crying just a few hours ago feels strange. Yet it’s even stranger to lie between her spread legs and pretend to eat her out. Timmy had
done it with other girls but it's been a while.

He has to know her boundaries in this scene. How far can he go? When he asks Esther he half expects her to mock him and roll her eyes at his inexperience.

But Esther doesn't laugh; she smiles and explains how she likes it, where he would put his mouth and his tongue and how that would feel to her. It's not designed to arouse him, she answers him rather matter-of-factly but that’s exactly what Timmy needs to get in the right headspace for the scene. He feels safe when they rehearse. They'll decide to make it obvious what's going on without exposing these two young people exploring each others bodies.

Timmy will have to touch Esther’s breasts, though. They are small and firm, much as he remembers his girlfriend's tits from a few years back, the nipples hard (due to the chill and their wet clothes clinging to their bodies, not because this is sexy), peaking out from a small mount of tanned flesh.

Timmy’s actually more excited about Esther's abs.

“Wow. You're ripped.”

She shrugs. “Entrainement.” She grins.

They get it over quickly, hugging briefly afterwards like good friends who have completed a tedious but necessary task.

Timmy finds Armie downstairs, already in costume, smoking. He seems a little uneasy, fiddling with his cigarette, bouncing his knee as he sits outside in one of those wrought-iron chairs, apparently deep in thought, staring out into the dusky garden. He doesn’t see Timmy, who watches him for a moment from the French windows to the kitchen.

Is Armie nervous? Or distressed? Because of his scene with Esther Timmy has almost forgotten about the morning. When he acts he dives into his character head first, leaving most of his real life issues behind. That’s the salvation acting offers him. But now he wonders if the visit to the doctor has made Armie somewhat angry? Maybe he doesn't like to be confronted with sickness, ugliness and death?

Timmy knows Armie thinks him beautiful. He himself can’t see it but he's aware that he triggers certain reactions in both men and women – he might not be everyone’s type but there are people who find him attractive. For example, he’s quite aware why Luca did cast him as Elio – because his boyish looks and lean, hairless body provides an erotically charged contrast to Armie’s virile classic maleness.

He’s come to believe that’s exactly what Armie likes about him, too: He’s not too much of a man yet. He’s still lingering in a place between child and adult: no beard, no chest hair, smaller than Armie (well, who isn’t?), fair complexion, smooth skin. There’s a reason Timmy has played mostly androgynous roles in high school and is still cast as a son or boyfriend, mistaken for much younger than his twenty years.

And isn't that what Armie’s used to? Timmy’s not outright feminine, he’s too tall, thin and bony for that (well, and he has a cock) but his features defy traditional male beauty. That must make it easier for Armie to give in to his urges, to dominate him, to admit that he wants Timmy.

But he suddenly wonders what will happen should he change? When he gets older... What if his beauty fades? What if he starts to develop muscle, body hair? What if he grows fat, loses his dark curls Armie likes to pull? What if he gets sick, has an accident? Would Armie stay?
When Timmy looks at Elizabeth he sees the perfect woman. So it’s obvious that Armie is enchanted by outward appearance. And now that Liz is in her mid-thirties he’s looking elsewhere, for someone younger. Will he discard Timmy as well in about ten years time?

Fuck, he doesn’t need these thoughts right now. What is happening? The negative test result should have wiped all thoughts about mortality and evanescence from his mind. He should be filled with joy that he’s healthy, alive. But instead he muses on the fugaciousness of beauty and youth. Not the best preparation for the important conversation between Elio and Oliver.

Timmy sighs, grabs a peach from a bowl in passing and quickly runs up the stairs to change into a dry bathing trunk and that blue sweater with the cut sleeves. After checking himself in a mirror he goes back down and sidles up to Armie, who’s still sitting on the terrace, motionless like a marble statue of a Greek god.

“Hey.” Timmy pecks him on the cheek to get Armie's attention.

“Hey. How was it?”

“Funny. I refreshed my memory of female anatomy.”

“Good for you.” Armie doesn't smile. He seems a thousand miles away.

“You okay?” Timmy asks, climbing in his lap, taking the cigarette from his fingers and putting it in his own mouth, inhaling deeply.

“Yeah, sure. I was just thinking about the scene, you know.”

Timmy nods. Yeah, the scene... It might actually hit pretty close to home, again.

“Are you nervous?”

Armie shrugs and rakes his fingers through Timmy’s hair. “Not sure. It’s just, our last scene’s together were pretty intense…”

“I promise I won’t cry again.” Timmy hurries to reassure Armie. God, he must think him such a wimp.

“No, that’s not… but this film, it’s kinda fucking with us, don’t you think?” There’s a somewhat dazed expression in Armie’s eyes. Timmy drops the cigarette and kisses him until it’s gone.

“I prefer to think about a different kind of fucking.” He mumbles against Armie’s mouth.

“That’s just awful, Tim.” But Armie giggles, pinching his ass.

“Hmmm.” Timmy hums. “Yeah, will you do that again when I continue to misbehave?”

To his immense satisfaction, Armie’s eyes glaze over.

“Later.”

Luckily, they are called over to sit on the love-seat made of limestone before things can get more heated between them.

Luca starts talking things through with them and Sayombhu as the sun slowly sets behind the orchard. “Are you better, Timothèe? Yes? Great. Listen, I want to do this in one shot. I want you to be affectionate, vulnerable... Timothèe, can you put a hand inside Armie's shirt and press your palm
over his heart? Good. Armie, can you put your thighs over Timothée’s?”

It’s nice. Timmy likes it.

But that changes when Armie says he’s thinking about going back to the states and his old life.

He has to swallow, hard, digging his fingers into Armie’s legs.

Oliver tells him he will think about Elio. And no one else.

Timmy desperately wants to believe that.

After a short silence he says: “In two weeks you’ll be back in Columbia. I don’t know what I’ll do then. At least you are somewhere else, where there aren’t any memories...” Will that be all he has? Fading, fleeting memories of their Italian summer together?

Because Armie will be back with his pregnant wife and kid, his family, in his house in LA and then off to work in India. With a new movie to make and a new baby to welcome into this world. He’ll be looking forward to that future, safe, secure, settled.

And Timmy? He’ll be in New York, sitting in his small apartment, waiting for the next project, a call, something coming up to fill the void inside him. Missing this, Armie, safety, closeness, warmth, trust, connection. Maybe all he’ll have will be a sharp blade he can use to at least feel something?

Thank god, Armie leans in at this point and kisses his throat, his cheeks, his mouth, long and deep. Timmy puts his hand over his heart just as Luca has suggested and can feel it beat steady, fast and hard.

When they wrap for the day Luca asks them all over to dinner to celebrate the end of the ‘week of debauchery’ as he calls it with a wink in Timmy’s and Armie’s direction. Timmy feels bad when he has to decline. Especially for Esther, who has been amazing today, a solid partner – but he did promise Armie to talk with him. It seemed important.

“Your place or mine?” He asks as they drive back.

“Yours.” Armie is unusually quiet. Normally he would talk about the day, the scene, the people, joke, share gossip – but apparently not tonight. Timmy decides not to press him but to wait until he’s ready to say what he has to say.

“So?” He starts as they are settled on his couch, each with a cold beer in hand.

“Yeah.” Armie begins and then stops, playing with his bottle, twisting it in his hands.

“You wanted to talk to me? It sounded important.” Timmy suddenly feels nervous. He starts to pick the label of his bottle, tearing it off in tiny shreds.

Armie takes a deep breath. “Well, I was just... worried, after last night.”

Timmy frowns. “I’m okay. It was just… a bit much. Happens, I guess.”

“Yeah. I just want to check in on you that you are still okay... with everything.”

Timmy hesitates for a moment. “Yes, I am.” He says eventually.

“Good. Great.” Armie nods and takes a sip of his beer.
Timmy waits for more but nothing’s coming.

“That’s it?” He knows he sounds a little disappointed. He’d actually expected something more substantial.

Armie stares at him intensely for almost a minute. A shadow creeps over his face but he stays eerily silent.

Timmy gets increasingly frustrated. “So you didn't want to talk again about some plans for the future or something? You said you had a proposal for me.” He persists, not backing off. Hell, why does he has to do the talking? This had been Armie’s idea.

But Armie just blinks a few times, as if resurfacing. By now Timmy can tell when he's making up a lie. “Oh, that. Yeah... I just wanted to ask if we could meet in New York... in Autumn. I think we'll be shooting there in October. My agent forwarded me the schedule the other day.”

Timmy arches an eyebrow. “Yeah, sure. If nothing comes up for me in between.” He's aware that he sounds pretty unenthusiastic.

“Of course.” Armie leans back and crosses his arms over his chest, seemingly wounded by Timmy's disinterest. Treats him right. What is this bullshit about meeting in New York?

“I told you, you know where I live, just drop by anytime.” Timmy smiles at Armie but it feels like a grimace. Something is going on here that he can't quite grasp, a perilous current undermining their whole conversation with subtle yet bitter disappointment.

“Yeah.” Armie's answering grin frightens Timmy. It seems insincere and hollow. They have to stop this or he'll freak out.

“If there’s nothing else, maybe we should go over to Luca after all? I mean, we need some food and as we had our talk...” Last chance, Armie.

Finally, he seems to get it.

“Well, actually… shit, Tim, this is hard.” Timmy holds his gaze, clasping his bottle so tight he fears he might crush it. “I’ll be away most of the rest of the year. From Liz. I want to ask her for some time... for me. I'll tell you that something changed, that I have to come to terms with. But...” he takes another gulp of his drink. Timmy’s heart is beating so fast he’s sure it must be audible in the shared space between them. “I can’t expect you to wait or anything. I know this is about me and my fucked up life. No use to drag you into all this shit.”

“Bit late for that.” Timmy says and instantly regrets it. Armie stares at him in a mixture of resignation and despair.

“Yeah, sorry, but still… I mean, I know it’s selfish but I feel I can’t… decide on anything with you or Liz so close-“

“So are we breaking up?” Timmy fears he might vomit if Armie doesn’t shut up right now.

“What? No! I mean, if you want… if you can’t see… god, sorry, I’m such an asshole, Tim. What I mean is…,” Armie puts his bottle down and takes Timmy’s hand as if proposing. It feels too good yet a little ridiculous. “I want to ask you to grant me some time to sort things out. In my life. With Liz, the marriage, the kids, the work. My… issues.” He drags his free hand over his ashen face. “There’s so much you don’t know about me.”
Timmy just squeezes his hand back to signal that he’s here, that it’s okay. He has no idea where this is going but seeing how hard it is for Armie to open up like this he appreciates that he’s trying.

“I can’t promise you anything.” Armie licks his lips. “I don’t know the outcome. But I feel I need this. And maybe, if you would… be there… for me…?”

“Of course.” Timmy leans forward and hugs Armie, pulls him tight against himself. He’s rigid, breathing fast and hot against Timmy’s neck. “Hey, of course. We are friends. You need time. This is all… pretty disturbing. I can see that.”

“For you as well?” Armie asks, his voice muffled by Timmy’s skin. Timmy rests his chin on top of Armie’s head, his soft blond hair tickling his throat.

“For me as well.”

They stay like this for some minutes, just holding each other, breathing.

“I’ll talk to Liz when I get home. I swear.” Armie’s voice is a little less shaky.

“What will you tell her?” Timmy whispers back.

“That this film made me question… that I have to get my life in order, rethink some choices I’ve made… I really want to keep you out of it, though. Okay?”

Timmy takes his face into both hands and stares into those blue eyes, now filled with a mixture of fear, hope and a sad yearning that hits Timmy where it hurts.

What they have distresses Armie. And still, he’s now prepared to face the consequences, even if they mean agony and trouble. Timmy feels the enormousness of his decision slowly sink in. He should be frightened but he isn’t.

“I don’t regret this. Any of this.” He tells Armie.

“Me neither.”

“Good.” Timmy kisses him so hard he tastes blood.

When they come apart Timmy's reeling and feels the need to get onto firm ground again. He scoots back into the corner of the couch, tearing his eyes off Armie – flushed, trembling, beautiful Armie – looking at his phone instead. It’s just past nine.

“I think Peter will have arrived by now. And maybe even André.” He says, worrying his swollen lip between thumb and forefinger.

Next week, they’ll film every day on different locations. New people are expected – among them the writer of the novel who'll play a minor part. Timmy is nervous. It's always strange to meet the creator of the character he inhabits. Maybe Aciman had someone totally different in mind writing his book than Timmy?

They had talked on the phone once, briefly, before he flew out to Italy. André had told him he’d seen him in Prodigal Son and believed he would be a formidable Elio. It had felt nice back then. But now, when he'll see him in action, Timmy still hopes he'll like what he'll see.

Armie seems somewhat relieved by the sudden change of subject.

“Yeah.” He gets up. “What you reckon, shall we join the others?”
Timmy needs to get out of here. The craving to be devoured by Armie is too strong for him to handle right now, the charged atmosphere palpable between them. The taste of blood in his mouth goes straight to Timmy’s lizard brain, filling his head with all kinds of depraved thoughts: Armie tying him up again, alternating between slapping his face and choking him until he passes out. Armie bending him over the back of the sofa, plowing into him without any preparation, making him scream in blissed-out agony. Timmy begging Armie to take a knife to his body and cut him, mark him, giving him permanent scars as a sign and token of their love. Timmy would let him, even ask him for more.

‘Slice me open, ravage me, take anything you want. Of course I’ll wait for you, as long as it takes. What else do I have in life but you, this, the exquisite pain you bring me?’

Instead of an answer Timmy just nods and grabs his beer.

They finish their drinks, then walk over to Luca’s. They are greeted with loud shouts and laughter and everyone budges up around the large table to make room for them. There's still plenty of food left but neither of them seems to have an appetite. They sit close to one another in the limited space, their thighs touching, and Timmy feels a little dizzy even before someone presses a glass of wine into his hand.

The evening turns into night and a party. All are there: Walter, Sayombhu, Esther, Victoire, Michael, Amira, Wanda and Antonio, many crew members, Peter Spears – one of the producers and the husband of Timmy’s agent – and even André arrives late in a taxi, accepting a glass of frizzante before settling down with Luca on a sofa to talk.

Peter briefly talks to Timmy, asking him how it's going, complementing him on the film so far. Luca has shown him some dailies.

“You and Armie Hammer... you really hit it off. I saw those scenes between you in bed. I knew you had it in you but I'd never thought Hammer could pull that off. Fantastic.”

“Maybe you should tell him?” Timmy beckons Armie over and introduces the two men.

When someone starts to DJ Timmy escapes Armie’s orbit to dance. From the corner of his eye he sees Armie stepping out on the balcony to smoke, followed by Peter, Esther and Amira. Later, he mixes drinks for anyone who asks. Sometimes, their eyes meet, and there's an unfathomable expression in Armie's blue gaze – a mixture of intense want, dark arousal and tender fondness that makes Timmy feel strangely unmoored.

He wonders what Armie will do to him, later. Maybe some of his secret fantasies will come true tonight…

He grabs another drink and downs it in one go. Armie arches an eyebrow and whacks his finger at him. Timmy grins, turns and walks back onto the improvised dance floor, giving Armie a good show there as he throws his head back and gyrates his hips while his hands travel down his torso.

He dances mostly with Esther and the boom operator – the young dark guy named Ramon. When he collapses on one of the sofas half an hour later, sweaty and happy, Armie flops down beside him and kisses his neck, briefly licking at his sweaty throat. Timmy laughs, puts his head against Armie’s shoulder and steals his glass from his hand to take a sip from his Martini.

“This tastes deadly.” He coughs.

“It is.” Armie grins.

“What do you want to do to me tonight?” He asks, brave from the alcohol searing through his veins.
Armie downs his drink and takes Timmy's chin between thumb and forefinger. “You are a nosy little bugger, Tim. You’ll find out soon enough.” His other hand clenches around Timmy’s thigh hard enough to bruise.

Armie stares into Timmy’s eyes until Timmy lowers his gaze.

“Good boy.”

Suddenly, ‘I Gotta Hurt You’ by Cardi B. blares from the speakers and Ramon stands in front of Timmy, pulling him up and into the middle of the room to jump around, grabbing him around the waist.

When Timmy turns back towards Armie, he just sees him shake his head and smile. Leaning into the cushions and watches them with an almost predatory gaze.

“Come on.” Timmy mouths but Armie doesn’t move.

“Sorry.” Timmy shouts into Ramon’s ear as he entangles himself from his grip and returns to the couch. Instead of sitting next to Armie, he slides onto his lap, knees either side of Armie’s hip, his whole body rolling and twitching to the beat, rubbing himself against Armie in an unmistakable invitation.

“Okay, okay.” Armie throws his hands up and follows Timmy onto the dancefloor. Timmy wraps himself around him, grinding against Armie’s accommodating body. It’s getting increasingly hard for him to not beg being taken right here in front of all the crew and their colleagues. He can feel Ramon stare daggers but he’s buzzed and doesn’t care.

Eventually, before it gets really wild, Luca throws them all out, calling them vagrants, drunkards and a decadent posse. Esther, Victoire and some others decide to move on and hit some bars but Timmy just wants to be alone with Armie.

“Take me home, okay?” He whispers into Armie's ear and Ramon gives them one last dirty look before following the girls.

“He wanted you.” Armie states, staring after the boom operator.

“Well, too bad I'm taken.” Timmy throws his arms around Armie and nuzzles his neck. “Just have me, will you. I need it.”

Chapter End Notes

I'll be on vacation for the next 2 weeks. But I'll try to update. Only, it might be a bit slower. I really want to post the next chapter, though, because it features spanking :) It might take me till Monday or Tuesday. Please, be patient.
Sensation

Chapter Summary

*The great art of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even in pain.* Lord Byron
This is smut. The highlight of their week. Finally, filming is over and they can go for it.
Armie fulfills one of Timmy's fantasies.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tim's not nearly as drunk as Armie had thought. Tipsy, maybe, yes – but that just makes him more playful.

They kiss on a street corner under one of the wrought-iron lamps, moths circling the bright light, burning their wings when getting too close. Armie presses Tim against a whitewashed wall until he opens up and sucks on Armie's tongue with a low moan as he wraps one long leg around Armie's hip to pull him closer, grinding against him.

Armie's pretty sure that they must look absolutely indecent. Fine! He almost hopes someone passing by will stare at them from the dark shadows of the small side street. He's so turned on he doesn't mind.

But then Tim reaches for his fly and Armie swats his hand away.

"I'm not taking you in public, no matter how much you rut against me." Armie whispers in Tim's ear and is rewarded with a throaty whine that makes him grin against Tim's neck.

He grabs his hand as they run along, skittering down the cobbled pavement.

They don't even put on the lights in Armie's apartment, just tumble into the bedroom, shedding their clothes on the way. Tim's skin is warm and silky and just a little sweaty and salty in the right places. Armie runs his hands down both sides of his ribcage, palms bumping over the prominent ridges of bone and muscle before sucking on Tim's left nipple.

He remembers that most of the nude scenes are over and bites down with vigor until Tim whimpers.

"You flirted with that guy, Tim. I saw you." He groans against Tim's chest before scraping his teeth over Tim's collar bone, leaving a red trail on his still so very fair skin.

In response Tim throws his head back, baring his throat to give Armie better access. "I'm a naughty boy sometimes, Armie. I might need a strict hand to teach me some discipline."

His rough, low voice goes straight to Armie's cock.

“Maybe you do.” Armie whispers before continuing his onslaught by sucking a mark into the junction of Tim's neck and shoulder. It quickly turns crimson. When Armie worries the marred skin between his fingers Tim shudders, rubbing his hardening cock against Armie's thigh. Armie watches for a moment as Tim's shiny cock head leaves a wet trail on his leg before he sits down onto the mattress and pulls the boy into his lap.
Tim sighs, loosely wrapping his long arms around Armie's neck, staring right into his eyes. Tim's are very green even in the dim light, almost emerald, bright and clear, not a trace of intoxication visible.

Armie's mesmerized. He's under this boy's spell.

His right hand curls around Tim's long neck, the pad of his thumb gently grazing his bopping Adam's apple as Tim swallows while the other rests at the small of Tim's back.

“That's why you flirted with that poor guy all evening? To make me chastise you?”

“I didn't...” Armie's finger tighten around Tim's throat and his pupils dilate.

“Don't give me shit, Tim.” After a moment, Armie loosens his grip again. An almost imperceptible smile plays on Tim's pink lips as he takes a deep breath.

“Okay, maybe I encouraged him... a little.”

“To provoke me?”

Tim just shrugs.

“No harm done.” He says, lowering his eyes, now staring at their hard cocks brushing against each other...

“You think so? He seemed pretty pissed when you left with me instead.”

“Tough luck.”

“You can't toy with people's feelings like this.” Armie’s not sure if they are still talking about Ramon.

“Feelings?” Tim snorts. “I'm not sure he had feelings. Well, at least not the way you mean it.”

“God, you are such a spoiled hussy sometimes.”

“Am I? Then I might need someone to teach me some manners.”

Armie pulls back a little and lifts Tim's chin with two fingers. “What is it you want, Tim?”

Tim bites his lower lip and smiles shyly. “You know what I want. I told you.”

“You told me many things. I want to hear you say it so we are both clear what's going on. Not like... you know, the other time.”

Tim gives a small nod. He blushes a little now, chewing the inside of his mouth.

“Are you still angry with me?” He asks in a small voice.

“Not angry, no. But it still bothers me.” He strokes his thumb down Tim's cheek, forcing him to meet his eyes, not allowing him to avert his gaze.

Tim stares back at him, unblinking, open. “But now that you know I'm clean, can we not, you know... forgo condoms?”

Armie shakes his head. “I didn't have a test done, Tim.”

“I told you I don't-”
“But I still do. Today, when we were sitting in that doctor's office, I thought about what would happen if he said you had it.” Armie has to close his eyes. He knows he owes Tim the truth but he can't quite bring himself to tell him. It would lead to confessions he's not ready for yet. “I can't put you at risk. I can't. You are too... I don't know.”

“Say it.” Tim breathes, leaning in to nibble at Armie's yaw.

Armie swallows. “Fuck, you are too precious. I couldn't live with the thought of loosing you, not like that. I want to know that you're still somewhere in this world even when-”

He's glad when Tim cuts him off with an eager, searing kiss.

“Tie me up and spank me.” He sounds needy, almost desperate, murmuring his desire against Armie's lips. “Please. I want to feel it the whole weekend, every time you fuck me.”

“Oh god, yes.” This is much safer ground than admitting all the shit he's done in his life and how little he deserves holding this beautiful boy. The least he can do is give him what he wants.

^^^^^^

Timmy knows it's a bit not good but he has rather enjoyed flirting with Ramon during the evening. He'd been aware that Armie had been staring at them, but he'd seemed more amused than angry. Yet it had been enough for his possessive streak to become apparent. Timmy likes it so much despite knowing that it's such a cliche.

But fuck it, he loves it when Armie goes full alpha male, especially in bed. He doesn't dwell too much on what this says about him. What's the point? You like what you like.

And yes, he likes to fuck and choke Armie. But he also likes to be tied up and at his mercy, getting thoroughly wrecked.

That's why he just stretches out and sighs when Armie gets his rope and ties his wrists together before binding him to the headboard. Afterwards, Armie flips him on his stomach and tells him to pull his knees up under his stomach so his ass rests on his heels.

“Do I have to gag you or can you stay quiet for me?” Armie asks.

“I'll be quiet.” Timmy promises, already starting to drift although nothing has happened yet.

“Good.”

Timmy wonders what Armie will use. He has no idea what Armie has to his disposal in his arsenal.

He turns his face to one side, takes a deep breath and waits.

Armie starts by running his hands up and down Timmy's spine before cupping his ass cheeks in both his large hands. Timmy shivers in anticipation

“God, you are so sensitive, Tim. Beautiful.”

Timmy baths in Armie's praise.

When Armie pinches his ass Timmy hisses and closes his eyes.

He can hear Armie move and shift behind him.
The mattress dips. Then Armie's back, solid and warm, bracketing him.

“Ready?”

“Yeah.” Timmy sighs.

Armie presses a kiss to the small of his back.

“We'll start with ten.”

The first stroke makes Timmy yelp. Armie uses his belt, firmly lashing him on both cheeks. It burns.

Armie's fingers touch the hot skin afterwards, tenderly. Timmy hums.

The following blows come in fast succession, alternating between left and right cheek, laying a searing criss-cross pattern over the small mounts of Timmy's ass. It quickly starts to hurt quite badly. Timmy's breath hitches.

Armie stops again to run his hands over the marred flesh.

“God, you're gorgeous.” Timmy has lost count how many blows he's already received. But apparently they are not finished yet. Armie gives him two more strokes over the length of his back.

“That were ten. You okay?”

Timmy inhales and nods. His eyes are still shut.

“Talk to me.”

“I'm okay.” He murmurs.

Armie's hand massages his right ass cheek. “Remember to breathe. We go for another ten.”

Armie starts with his back this time, dealing tough whacks between his shoulder blades. Timmy arches as the leather licks his skin. After a few strokes just the hiss of the belt in the air makes him flinch.

Armie stops and presses kisses down his spine. Timmy knows it's not over yet.

“How are you?”

Timmy's not sure. His skin feels too tight but it's still on this side of bearable.

“Still okay.” He breathes.

As Armie caresses Timmy's back with the leather tongue of his belt he braces himself for the next round. But Armie just dips lower, dragging the soft leather through the crack of Timmy's ass. In an almost involuntary response Timmy moans and moves his knees wider apart.

“God, you're such a slut for this.”

Timmy nods, his face heating up, burning almost as much as his ass.

“I want to hear you, remember.” The belts hits Timmy between his buttocks and he screams both with surprise and pain.

“I love it.” He gasps.
“What?” Another blow, right onto his hole.

“Oh god...! You spanking me.”

“Then spread yourself open for me. Come on, show me how much you need it.”

Timmy wiggles a little but does comply, shamelessly exposing his cleft and pucker. His hard cock is pressed against the sheet, trapped between mattress and his quivering abdomen. God, he wants something inside his ass. Badly. He can feel his hole flutter at the thought and hears Armie chuckle.

“You're so fucking horny.”


“You still have four left.”

“God, yes, please. Give it to me!”

Armie uses his free hand to hold him wide open as his belt bruises Timmy's most sensitive spot. He bites the pillow to stay quiet, grunting into the downy softness while rhythmically clenching in anticipation, desperately wanting to be filled.

His cock is grinding against the bedding but it's not enough to make him come.

The last whack bites at his balls as well and Timmy jumps, howling, tears running down his face. Wow! That fucking hurt.

He can feel his whole pelvis pulse, the skin between his legs taut and sore, arousal spooling tight in his lower belly. His cock is oozing precome onto the mattress so he's lying in a sticky wet spot by now but can't help it, he ruts against the bedding like a bitch in heat, both shocked and delighted when the pad of Armie's thumb starts to rub his violated hole.

“Yes, please... yes.” He moans, unable to spread himself any further. He tries to push up and back against Armie's finger, his whole body begging to be taken, whimpering with need and ache. But Armie just pulls his hand back and smacks his ass instead of pushing in, hitting him so hard Timmy's feels it in his teeth.

A sob escapes his throat and his fingers grab the hemp rope to hold onto something, anything, the soft cord his Ariadne's thread to sanity.

“More?” Armie sounds wistful, almost as desperate as Timmy feels,

“Yeah, please...” Endorphins flood Timmy's system as he breathes the pain away.

“Let's see what you say after the next ten.”

Armie deals firm blow after blow over every part of Timmy's naked skin his belt can reach. The welts start to overlap by now, increasing the agony. As the leather touches already sore skin the sensation is heightened into almost unbearable white-hot pain. Timmy bites his lips to stay quiet until he tastes blood. He's sweating all over and the salt burns in his abrasions.

When Armie is finished he's panting as well. Timmy can feel his breath ghosting over his lower back before warm, wet lips press against his sacrum. Armie's tongue comes into play next, licking up Timmy's sweaty spine. As he moves, Armie's hard, leaking cock brushes between Timmy's ass cheeks, sliding up and down his chafed creek. Armie's stubble grazes the sensitive, burning skin
between Timmy's shoulder blades, making him gasp and shudder. The teasing sensation is almost too much to handle. After a moment, Armie trails downwards again, lower, lower, until he's kissing Timmy's flaming ass, his saliva cooling the throbbing welts.

“Don't stop.” Timmy begs, his voice hoarse and broken.

“You're amazing, Timmy. God, you look so pretty, all red, wrecked and debauched.” Armie whispers against his hot flesh before biting down onto his left buttock, not letting go even as Timmy grunts frantically. As he squirms Armie's teeth only dig deeper. He's sure Armie has broken his skin.

Timmy gasps and shudders but doesn't ask Armie to stop.

Eventually, he releases him. “Does it hurt?”

“Yeah.” Timmy rasps, losing his ability to form multi-syllabic words.

“I bet it does.” Armie drags his knuckles over Timmy's vertebrae until he reaches his cleft. Timmy writhes under the touch, whimpering softly.

The sensation of pain mixing with arousal is getting him high more efficiently than any drug ever did. He starts to fly, his mind going foggy at the margins.

“I want to touch you.” One of Armie's large hands sneaks between Timmy's legs, stroking his leaking, trapped cock. With his other hand, Armie starts to beat Timmy's ass with precise, determined vigor.

Left – right – left – right... on and on and on.

But Timmy doesn't scream. Instead, he moans, begging for more, harder as he pushes into Armie’s fist with abandon. He's sobbing but he doesn't care, his tears dampening the pillow he's pressing his burning face into.

“Talk to me.” Armie groans, his voice tight as his palms work Timmy’s cock and ass in a deliciously devious rhythm.

It takes a huge effort for Timmy to string words together. His blood roars in his ears while the sharp ache experienced by his body is transformed into pure lust by his perverted brain. “More... god, yes, Armie... please, more. I need it. I deserve it.”

“Why?” Armie's voice is so deep Timmy feels it resonate in his solar plexus.

“Because I'm such a slut... I wanted that boy to fuck me... Really hard... I wanted you to watch us and tell us what to do... Oh god!... I wanted you to tell him to put his fingers inside me. Argh... oh, fuck!... I wanted you to tell me to suck him off and show you my mouth full of his cum. Ouch! Please... I'd do it, you know? I'd do anything you want me to. You are so good to me... so good...”

Timmy is babbling. He's not even fully aware what he's saying anymore but Armie doesn't cease to rain blow after blow on his abused ass and god... it feels incredible. He wants it. He deserves it. He needs it. And Armie gives it to him.


“You are such a wicked boy sometimes, Tim. I should stuff your filthy little mouth with my cock.”

But instead, Armie pinches his blazing ass cheek hard before his fingers slide in between, pressing insistently at his hole once more.

“Oh god.” Timmy moans, arching into the touch. He should be ashamed how badly he wants those fingers inside him but he's too far gone to care if he debases himself. He's sobbing, begging, rutting but Armie's not doing him the favor: He just circles the tight ring of muscle, teasing Timmy until he's nearly unconscious with desire.

He's so close, he just needs a few more tugs... but suddenly Armie pulls his hand away from his cock. Timmy's whole body thrashes in protest. “No! Please... No!”

But instead of breaching his sphincter Armie's fingers press inside his mouth, silencing him. He can taste himself as he sucks. His cock swells beneath him and his balls tingle. He's so hard it hurts.

“Yeah, baby, you're doing so fine. You think your tight hole is ready for me?”

Timmy can only moan around Armie's hand, licking his own sticky tang from his fingers. Armie's holding down his hip with his free hand, his short fingernails digging into Timmy's soft skin.

Timmy tries to nod, opening wider to take Armie's fingers deeper until he gags.

Armie keeps him pinned down like this until Timmy grunts, running out of oxygen.

“You sure?” Armie pulls his hand from Timmy's mouth and he splutters, saliva dripping down his chin. God, he must look completely destroyed.

“Please, fuck me.” Timmy doesn't recognize his own voice. It seems to come from somewhere far away, desperate, broken, raw.


He can't answer, he's beyond words by now. Armie grabs a fistful of hair, pulling his head up from the pillow and Timmy feels himself grin wide, happy, as if totally baked. This is better than weed, even better than E. He's never experienced anything like this before.

Somehow Armie seems satisfied that Timmy is still with him because he releases his curls and rakes his fingernails down his aching back, scraping the throbbing welts he's put there.

“Breathe.” Timmy draws a few shaky breaths. His head is swimming, his vision blurred, his body on fire but it doesn't matter. Armie's there for him, taking care of him, allowing him to ride this wave, high on his body's own opioids.

“Up.” Armie orders, swatting Timmy lightly on the ass and Timmy struggles a little as he raises himself back up on his knees again, his weight only balanced on his shoulders and bent, bound arms.

His knees are already wide apart. His cock hangs heavy between his legs, dripping onto the sheets. As Timmy looks down his body he sees that his glans are swollen and purple, glistening, his shaft curving up against his flat stomach.

Timmy senses Armie move and shuffle behind him but he doesn't make the connection until cold, slick lube drizzles onto his needy hole. He braces himself for the intrusion and waits.

Finally, Armie pushes in in one long, languid slide. He's bare, Timmy notices, and smiles while moaning with pleasure. No smell of latex, no boundary, just Armie's cock rubbing Timmy's pink, sensitive insides before filling him up with his seed.
Armie's hips start to slap against Timmy's raw ass and it's glorious despite the ache. Timmy feels used and stretched and stuffed full and somehow this all comes together and mixes up in his brain and he hears himself make strange noises – sobs? Moans? Screams? - but it doesn't matter, he's past caring, beyond pain, he just wants this, a hard cock, Armie. He's chanting his name; it's the only word he has left and it means surrender and acceptance and trust and I love you more than anything, never stop, don't leave me.

*You'd kill me if you stop.*

Suddenly, Armie grips Timmy's hips even harder, huffs and stills before picking up speed again, just slamming into him brutally, without restraint. He's just chasing his own pleasure and Timmy's fine with it. That's what he's good for, after all, serving Armie and his needs. Because it serves his own as well. A perfect circle.

But just when he thinks Armie will climax inside him – he's already swelling, pulsing – he pulls out. Timmy whines and kicks, the sudden emptiness threatening to crush him when thick stripes of spunk shoot all over his aching back and ass. Armie groans, holding Timmy in position with one hand, and as he gazes back over his shoulder he sees Armie working his cock to completion with the other, eyes wide, staring at Timmy's wrecked body. Timmy turns and looks down again, head bowed, spine arched, taking it.

When he's done, Armie starts to rub his cum into Timmy's sore skin like lotion, all over his sacrum, buttocks and in between. Timmy feels claimed, marked and doesn't bother that he hasn't come yet. He blinks lazily, dizzy from everything he has endured.

Maybe Armie won't allow him to come at all? The idea makes him twitch and tremble. What a punishment for his naughty misbehavior.

Faintly, Timmy registers that Armie moves again. Flashes of light force him to close his eyes again. He needs a moment to understand that Armie's taking pictures of him on his phone.

“Hey, Tim? Tim?” Armie's voice is so gentle, so caring. Timmy opens his eyes and meets Armie's very blue and bright ones, full of love. “There you are. You want to come now?”

“Yes, please.” Timmy fumbles for words, drowning in Armie's tender gaze.

Carefully, Armie turns him onto his back, spreading his legs, placing his feet on his shoulders to kneel between Timmy's thighs. He leans down and presses hot kisses to Timmy's torso, throat and face, his own fury chest and stomach rubbing against Timmy's erection. He's so sensitive by now he can only gasp in shock.

Armie seems to sense how close he is. He presses down on Timmy, licking his nipple, mumbling encouragement: “Come on, babe, show me how much you like it. Come on!”

Timmy closes his eyes and gives himself over. He bucks up against sweaty skin and comes almost immediately, making a mess between them.

Armie stays on top of him for a long time, holding Timmy, showering him with praise and kisses. Timmy can't move, almost can't breathe, he's so spend his head hurts, his eyes sliding shut again when he tries to focus on Armie's face.

Eventually, Armie unties him before cradling his skull with his hands.

“I love you. God, Tim, I love you. You are everything.”
Timmy smiles. His back hurts even more now, pressed into the mattress, chafing against the sheets. His ass burns. Cum is drying on his skin. This is sick, depraved, filthy. Yet Armie's face is glowing with pride, beaming down at him with warmth and open adoration.

He wonders if Armie ever looks at Liz like this.

As if he can read his thoughts, Armie says: “What you're giving me, Tim... thank you, just thank you. I can't believe this is happening to me. I'm so lucky. I want you all the time.”

“Well, I guess it's good we have the weekend off then.” Timmy mumbles, still feeling woozy. Armie kisses him as an answer, brushing his hair back from his forehead, his gaze way more serious than Timmy has ever seen him before it dissolves into a watery smile.

“Never forget. You're the most precious thing to me.” Armie whispers. He briefly rubs the indentations the rope has left before climbing out of bed and walking over into the bathroom, only to return a moment later with a warm flannel and some soothing lotion he massages into Timmy's abused skin.

“You look like a battlefield.” Armie tells him, but his tone is full of admiration.

“Let life be short, else shame will be too long.”

Upon his questioning look Timmy explains: “Shakespeare, Henry V.”

“I love to have a thespian in my bed.”

Timmy giggles but is too tired to do anything else.

Chapter End Notes

I'm on vacation so the next update might not happen before the end of the week, sorry.
Chapter Summary

I'm sorry.

Chapter Notes

The title is taken from a song by Carter USM, one of my all time favourite bands.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When they wake up the next morning Armie has Tim in his arms, spooning him from behind. His nose is buried in Tim's nape and as he breathes him in he savors his distinct smell, a unique mixture of sweat, shampoo, sun and sex.

As he presses an open mouthed kiss over his prominent third vertebrae Tim stirs, stretches - and winces.

"Ouch. Fuck!"

Armie moves back a little and stares in a mixture of shock and fascination as he accesses the damage. Tim's body looks as if he got run over: pale red welts criss-crossing all over his skin, his buttocks bruised and purple, a dark red bite mark blooming on his left ass cheek. When Tim turns onto his stomach and rests his chin on his folded hands Armie sees his grazed wrists. There's also a hickey on Tim shoulder just above his collar bone.

"Jesus, sorry... wow, I was totally gone. Fuck me, Tim, you look... destroyed. Ruined."

Tim just grins. "I liked it."

"I know you did but, man, you will feel this for days."

"I hope so." Tim gets up on his hands and knees and crawls slowly over Armie's body, kissing his way up his sternum and neck until his lips find Armie's mouth. "God, you took me really hard." He sighs.

"Have you any idea how beautiful you are like this?" Armie circles the mark on Tim's shoulder with the tip of his index finger before covering it with his mouth, sucking lightly.

Tim gasps and turns his head a bit to take a peak at Armie's nether regions where his cock is already tenting the sheet.

"You are really not subtle, Armie." Tim says, scrunching his nose.

They both chuckle.

"I want you again." Tim whispers against Armie's ear, already angling for the lube they left on the
nightstand. He quickly slicks two of his own fingers and then treats Armie to a show of opening himself up for him, balancing his weight on his knees and one arm, his head hanging low.

Armie watches as Tim's long fingers slowly get swallowed by his pretty pink hole. It's still a little swollen and tender and Tim makes the most endearing noises fingering himself. Armie has difficulty breathing. He fears he might start drooling. Just listening to Tim could get him off: he pants softly, his mouth slightly open, eyes closed, a dreamy expression on his face despite obviously being sore.

Armie has to give his own twitching cock to a few rough strokes at the sight of Tim pleasuring himself or he might go mad.

“You're a terrible beauty, do you know that? Almost cruel.” Armie murmurs, reaching out to touch Tim's taut rim, pressing the tip of his index finger in alongside Tim's two fingers.

In answer to this new intrusion, Tim yelps, the muscles in his back contracting under the abused skin. Armie makes sure Tim has a good view of him fisting his own cock in rhythm with their joint fingers up Tim's ass.

“You want that?” He asks. Tim just nods, his eyes glazing over. “Then let's get you ready.”

It takes a while until Armie can push a second finger in, stretching Tim to the max, the red ring of muscle almost white by now. He feels soft and hot inside as Armie scissors his fingers, stroking his prostate. His skin is glistening with sweat, his breath is labored. His cock is again curving up against his stomach, a bead of precome dripping onto the sheet.

“I think I'm ready for your cock.” Tim sighs, getting up, throwing one leg over Armie's thighs to straddle him as Armie's fingers slide out.

“Careful.” Armie tries to remind him as Tim lowers himself. Of course, the boy ignores him. Armie's cockhead breaches him easily but he pulls a face as he takes him deeper. Armie grabs his hips to hold him still, to slow him down, but Tim is determined and so it doesn't take long before he sits flush in Armie lap, lazily circling his hips.

“Oh, fuck.” He gasps when he's found the right angle.

Armie sighs, removes his hands from Tim's body and puts them behind his head to enjoy. Tim riding him is a sight to behold. His slender body undulates and the muscles in his stomach and long legs ripple as he fucks himself on Armie's shaft. Soon, his fingers start to play with Armie's nipples, pulling at his chest hair.

Armie lets him do all the work, watching mesmerized. The tip of Tim's pink tongue is resting on his lower lip, peaking out. Armie wants it on his nipples, up his hole, pressing into his slit. Later, he tells himself, they have the whole weekend to themselves. They can play for hours.

But for now he's aware how close Tim already is. The muscles in his ass are fluttering, deliciously massaging Armie's dick.

“Touch yourself.”

One of Tim's hands finds his own nipple and starts to play with it. The other drops to his cock, stroking his leaking shaft rough and fast. He's making little needy noises as his breathing speeds up and his eyes slide close.

“Oh god...” he moans, biting his lower lip just before shooting all over Armie's chest, the contracting muscles in his anus simultaneously wringing an orgasm from Armie that surprises him both in its
suddenness and intensity. It feels like he's flooding Tim's insides with his seed, almost barking out his name as he bucks up into the lithe, frail nymph on top of him.

When Tim slumps down like a puppet with its strings cut he gathers him up in his arms but refrains from caressing his bruised back. Instead, he tousles his hair, lifting him up and off, sliding from his used hole with a wet slurp before draping him over his own spunk-covered torso so that they can kiss again.

“Good morning, baby.” He whispers against Tim's sweaty temple and Tim giggles.

“I like it when you call me that.”

“You don't say.” Armie gently bites his earlobe, making Tim's spent body shudder all over.

“May I get a shower now, please?” He asks, blinking owlishly.

“Soon. Just let me take a look.”

“You are a dirty pervert, Armie Hammer.”

“And you love it. Up on all four, babe, present yourself. Let me see your dripping boycunt.”

Tim giggles once again and blushes but kneels up, turns and spreads his legs as he bends over, exposing himself.

God! It's gorgeous. Tim's rim is once more bright red, pearly white cum oozing out of it, running down his taint, sac and inner thighs. Armie just watches for a moment, licking his lips before diving in, gently pressing his mouth to Tim's used entrance, kissing it tenderly as if it were his mouth.

Tim makes a sound between a moan and a sob and spreads his knees wider while Armie slowly, purposefully eats him out.

“I'll come again if you keep doing that.” He sighs eventually. Armie moves back a little, smiling.

“If you come without permission I might have to discipline you again. I think there are some nice, long wooden spoons in the kitchen.” He touches the bitemark on Tim's buttock before wiping his sticky lips with the back of his hand. His own taste mixed with Tim's fills his mouth, their mingled smell flooding his nostrils. He briefly thinks about using the dildo on Tim until he begs him to stop, fucked raw. It might take hours. But his stomach apparently has other plans. “We need breakfast first. Hop into the shower, I'll join you there in a minute.”

Tim sighs, and it sounds both satisfied and disappointed as he gets up to stumble over into the bathroom. When Armie hears the shower running, he takes his phone out and sends a message to his Liz.

'Happy anniversary, wife! Wish you were here.'

His phone pings just a second later as if Liz had just been waiting for his text. Strange, as it must be in the middle of the night in LA.

'Sometimes wishes do come true, husband.' He reads.

There's barely a knock on the apartment door and then he hears the familiar cickety-clack of woman's high heels on the tiled floor of his lounge.

“Surprise!” A bright voice with the still audible southern lilt chirps enthusiastically and Armie knows
that he is really, truly fucked.

Timmy's tightly wound muscles slowly start to relax under the spray of the shower as he washes the remnants of last night and this morning away: lube, cum, sweat and spit all run down the drain. His welts are still sensitive, though, and it takes him some time to find the right temperature, oscillating between too hot and too cold until he settles for tepid, carefully rinsing his abused skin.

When he shampoos his hair he's still alone in the cubicle. The air is getting foggy. What's taking Armie so long?

Looking back on this moment as he waited for Armie, who never came, Timmy likes to think he must have sensed that something was wrong. But that might just be the retroactive effect of nostalgic bedazzlement. In all honesty, he'd probably been way too shagged out to register much of the things going on around him. Most likely he'd just wondered where the fuck Armie was. Had he fallen asleep? Was he preparing a surprise?

Eventually, Timmy turns the shower off and steps out, grabbing a towel, feeling sodden and a little irritated.

It's then that he hears voices: A quiet, deep one and a louder, higher one.

A female voice.

He's sure it's neither Victoire, Esther or Amira... the accent is wrong as well as the timbre... yet he knows that voice...

When realization dawns on Timmy he topples over and has to grab the sink to not crash onto the floor. Bile rises in his throat and he bites his fist to stay quiet.

Fuck!

It's Liz.

But... but that's impossible. What is she doing here? She's in LA! She has to be.

True, there have been plans made for her to come over before filming ends – but they still have a few weeks left. She's not due till mid-June and now it's only end of May.

The room starts spinning. Breathe! He splashes cold water into his face before staring up at himself in the mirror above the sink: eyes huge, skin pale and freckled, mouth still kiss-swollen, a hickey on his neck... he groans. It's pretty obvious that he's been fucked all night. No way is he getting out of this unscathed.

Don't panic! He tries to calm himself down. One step after another. Maybe there is a way. First, he needs to get dressed.

he counts from ten backwards, wraps the towel around his waist and peers through the door into the bedroom. It's empty. Good.

Is there another way out than through Armie's lounge where the voices come from? Will Armie be able to steer his wife away for long enough for Timmy to escape.

He suddenly feels like he's landed himself in one of the lesser known 1940s screwball comedies his
gran starred in. Should he hide in the closet until he can slip away later, creeping out like a dirty little secret? When did his life become a farce?

Timmy quickly dries off and tiptoes into the bedroom where at least some of his clothes are strewn around: his boxers and his jeans. As he puts them on the voices in the lounge are getting louder.

“What the hell... Armie... I can't... all the way...and you had...”

Armie seems to be placating Liz who sounds agitated and angry. Timmy can hear her heels nearing the door.

Shit!

“What is going on here?” Liz demands to know, and her voice is so clear that she's now presumably standing right in front of the door.

Timmy turns the key just in time as the handle is pressed down on the other side.

“Who's in there?” The question is followed by a sharp knock.

Timmy freezes for a moment but suddenly he feels bold. His only chance might be flight forward. When there's no way he'll get out of this unnoticed it might be best to hide in plain sight.

He takes a deep breath and opens the door to the lounge, coming face to face with Elizabeth Chambers just as Armie says: “Liz, babe, it's not what you think.”

Armie's wearing a fresh t-shirt and gray sweat pants but his hair is still tousled and there's white, flaky... stuff on his chin. Timmy is reminded that just about fifteen minutes ago Armie had been sucking his own cum out of his hole and almost loses it but then he takes courage and walks past Liz into the lounge.

“Hey, Liz, what a surprise. Armie, have you seen my t-shirt?”

Both stare at him – Armie with an unreadable pokerface, Liz with shocked disbelief.

“Timothy.” She says blankly but Timmy doesn't pay her much attention as he locks eyes with Armie. Something flickers across his face – remorse, pain, shame? - but then he jerks his head towards the sideboard over which Timmy's t-shirt is draped.

“Oh, yeah, thanks. Got a bit wild last night.”

Neither of them says anything. Liz's eyes narrow as she shifts her weight from one long, slim, tanned leg to the other. Armie crosses his arms over his chest and straightens his spine. His joints crack. It's an oddly loud noise in the silent room.

“As I said, it's all a bit of a blur.” Armie's voice is eerily calm.

“We had a quite a few...” Timmy forces a grin onto his face. 'Come on, Armie, we can do this, give me something to work with...'

Armie stares at his bare feet. “Yeah. It turned into a kind of... party. Esther, Victoire...”

“... you and myself.” Timmy sighs inwardly. This could work. “Have you met Victoire, Liz? God, she's a hot piece of ass.” Timmy winks at Armie who shakes his head and throws his hands up.

“You should know.” He retorts jolly – bros being bros and all that shit - but Timmy clearly hears the
insincere undertone.

Well, for what it's worth, they are actors. If that's the chosen line of approach Timmy will follow it.

Liz's plugged eyebrows shoot up almost to her taught hairline, uncharacteristically wrinkling her unnaturally smooth forehead.

“Should he?” She asks, arms akimbo.

“Well...,” Timmy scratches his head and shrugs sheepishly. “I don't kiss and tell.” He gives Armie's wife a lopsided smile that used to work wonders with his female teachers when he'd handed in an assignment late.

“Going by the state of your back they gave it to you good and not at all proper.” Liz states, staring at Timmy before turning to her husband.

“That bad, ugh?” Timmy feels himself blush and it's only partly acting.

“Yes.” Armie nods. His eyes are fathomless, two dark-blue pools in the frozen mask of his face. Timmy knows that if he kisses him now he'd still taste himself there. How does Liz not notice?

“Well, I better get going then. I had no idea that you were coming, Liz, otherwise I would've fucked off last night. But as things turned out... I'm sorry.” He looks at Armie speaking these last words.

When Armie doesn't react but just keeps gazing at the floor Timmy shrugs again, pulls on his t-shirt and his shoes, checks if he has his phone and keys, turns once again back to the quiet couple, tries to convey a secret message of 'what the fuck?!' to Armie before waving shyly and leaving.

Neither of them says good-bye.

He's proud that he refrains from being sick until he's downstairs where he throws up in the doorway of a boarded up building site a few houses down from Armie's, not bothering if passers by see him.

He has no recollection how he reaches his flat. Only later, as he lies on his bed, knife in hand, does he become aware that he must have somehow made it home.

His hand holding the knife is shaking.

For a long time Timmy just looks at it, like the limb doesn't belong to his body. He could just end it all, now. Two to four cuts and it would soon be over. Bit of a mess, though...

Would Armie blame himself? Or would he think Timmy had finally lost it completely? Maybe he would even be glad that Timmy had chosen this way to go, taking their secret to the grave?

Timmy is torn between setting Armie free and wishing to watch Armie guilt-ridden, breaking down, confessing what has been going on between them to Liz.

Only, if he follows through with his plan, he won't be around to witness this.

Yet a part of him wants his blood on Armie's hands, becoming his Nemesis, haunting him forever. They would be inseparable, finally becoming one. Armie could never forget him, would carry his memory with him...

But another part fears that Armie could be tempted to follow him. And even at his most melodramatic Timmy doesn't really want this for his children.
That thought reminds him of his own parents...

He has no idea how much time passes before he slowly gets up. It's like walking through surf when he goes over into the small kitchen and puts the blade away, closing the drawer with determination.

Cutting won't help right now.

And if he’s honest with himself, as much as the thought of being dead appeals to him at the moment - he doesn't want to die.

Instead, he pours himself a glass of water, then another. Takes a deep breath. It's like waking from a nightmare...

As he sits down at his kitchen table he groans. Pain shoots through his body. He'd wanted that, didn't he? A physical reminder of his and Armie's connection.

God, it only feels pathetic now. Like his whole existance.

He puts his head in his hands and closes his eyes yet he's unable to cry. He's falling, but this time there's no one to catch him, just the hard ground of reality waiting for him to shatter his bones and crush his soul.

In the end he returns to his bed. Armie's bracelet sits on his nightstand and he lets the opaque beads run through his fingers for a while before taking his phone in the other hand, calling a familiar number.

“Hey, mom.” He succeeds to say before he bursts into tears. “Mom, I'm really fucked this time.”

Chapter End Notes

I'll be in Italy the next week - yes, including Crema - so I can't promise an update. Maybe you'll have to wait till next weekend. Thank you all for your patience!
Chapter Summary

What happened on the other side of the door while Timmy was in the shower.
And Timmy talking to his mom.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, Italy was magnificent, Crema was an experience, I stood in that
doorframe where Armie said to Timmy 'I would kiss you if I could' and it just made me
so happy. It was all a little surreal. But now I'm back and regular updates should
continue.

Armie just had time to pull on his boxers and a t-shirt before Liz opened the bedroom door and put
her head around the doorframe.

Her hair was pulled back in a tight ponytail, crowned by her Versace sunglasses. She had gone for
casual-chic, Armie registered: mat-orange lipstick, earthy eye-shadow, just a hint of pink rouge.

“Armie?” Liz wrinkled her nose while assessing the state of the room. Armie saw it through her
eyes: sheets crumpled, clothes strewn all over the floor, the air suffused with the unmistakable,
animalistic smell of sex.

“Wow, Liz, babe, wow.” Armie babbled, raking his fingers through his disheveled hair while
striding towards her to usher her out, away.

He positively reeked of Tim.

“What happened here? An orgy?” Liz smiled but the expression didn't reach her eyes.

“Ugh...uhm... let's just... give me a minute, okay? God, what a surprise.” ‘Keep it the fuck together,
Armie!’ Was all he could think.

Liz opened the door wider, threatening to walk in so Armie had to step in her way.

She still smiled as she leaned in to kiss him but pulled back just before their lips touched. “Jesus,
Armie... what did you have last night?” She scrunched her little nose again – a nose Armie had paid
a lot of money for a few years back.

“Sorry, I'm gross. Let's just... let me make you a coffee, yeah? Real Italian coffee.”

He took her elbow and steered her back into the lounge to walk over into the kitchenette.

Liz let him but crossed her arms over her chest (Armie had paid for that as well after Harper's birth).
She wore a short, white summer dress (Versace as well? Armie wasn't sure) and matching white
high-heeled sandals (definitely Manolo Blahnik), her finger and toe nails painted orange, matching
her lipstick. She looked perfect as always, tanned, slim, a real American beauty... it was rather intimidating. Armie felt extra scruffy in his state, with Tim's taste still in his mouth and their mixed sweat and cum all over his skin.

“Do you have decaf?” Liz asked, reminding him of the task at hand.

“I'm afraid not.” Armie had his back turned to her as he fumbled with the moka pot.

“Then you don't have fat-free milk and sweetener either, I presume.”

He turned and shrugged. “Sorry, babe, that's really not how it's done here.”

“How is it done here?” There was a sudden sharpness to her voice. Liz wasn't stupid and this wasn't about coffee.

He took his time to put the espresso maker on the stove before facing his wife. “Listen, last night... it's all a bit of a blur. We were all at Luca's and then, well, you know, I wish I could explain but-”

“Armie, what are you talking about?” Liz stilled, tilted her head, listened. Armie could hear the water run as well. “Is that your shower? Who the fuck is in your shower? What... Oh my god! I can't believe it! How cliche can you be, husband? On the eve of our anniversary! Really?!”

“Liz, no. Just please, stop talking. What are you doing here, anyway? I called you yesterday and you were in LA.” Armie could feel the headache coming, an iron cord wrapping around his head, slowly tightening.

“I was in fact getting ready to drive to the airport. What did you think why I was awake at such a godforsaken hour?”

“But you said-?”

“It doesn't matter right now what I said yesterday, Armie, because there's obviously someone in your shower right now you presumably spend the night with. Let's talk about that, shall we?”

The coffee was ready by then, gargling and spluttering in the silver pot, and Armie poured a cup. Liz just shook her head as he offered it to her, tight-lipped, turning on her heels and teetering back into the lounge. “Please, I need a moment. It's all a bit much.” He knocked back his hot espresso, burned his tongue, and followed her.

When he'd imagined a moment like this over the previous years, he'd always been on the verge of a nervous breakdown, panicking. But now he just felt numb. There was no use to lie and pretend anymore. In fact, he didn't want to lie and pretend anymore. This was his chance to be honest with his wife. Maybe her surprising arrival today, almost catching them in the act, was a sign? Anyway, how could he possibly escape from this situation? So he'd be forced to finally tell the truth...

But he wanted to explain it to her. Tim. That he wasn't a cheap fling. That wasn't a nameless, unimportant hook-up in his shower – it was the man he loved. For a brief moment Armie was almost glad he'd been thrown in this situation without time to think, to waver, to make plans and form strategies, come up with lies and excuses. It was his chance to show his true colors. And see what happened...

Meanwhile, Liz was starting to work herself up into a state. It always made her exceptionally unattractive in Armie's eyes: “What the hell, Armie! While I was making plans for our family back home, you let your dick run free? I can't believe this is happening. I came all the way to surprise you on our wedding anniversary and you had nothing better to do than get a leg over some Italian slut.”
Accusations – blame – self-pity – Saint Elizabeth and her douchebag of a husband – 'Why do I put up with him?' screaming from her posture, her scornful gaze, her tone of voice. Armie had been through the circles of Liz Chambers telling-off Armie Hammer often enough to know what was coming for him. Now she was in her element, the poor, neglected, long-suffering wife – and she would be damned if she didn't make the most of it.

"Don't talk like that, please." It was futile yet he tried. It hurt to listen to her.

"Then tell me what is going on here!" Liz accentuated every word with a precise sharpness Armie admired. She seemed filled with an almost holy rage.

When Armie remained silent she threw her head back, strode over to the bedroom door and pressed its handle down.

Armie held his breath.

The door stayed closed.

"Who's in there?" She knocked, her fingers on the handle turning white, her rigid back telling Armie just how angry she was.

He swallowed, licked his dry lips. "Liz, babe, it's not what you think it is."

That was when the bedroom door opened and Tim walked out, still half-naked, his back lined with red welts Armie put there the night before, a hickey blooming on his neck. He looked fucked out and debauched. Liz's eyes went wide.

During their little charade Tim's gaze was almost entirely fixed on Armie, who played along as best he could, dazed, overwhelmed by all of it, sorry and embarrassed that his younger lover had to save the day. He didn't know if Liz believed one word but it wasn't important, all that mattered was that Armie wanted Tim out of here when the other shoe dropped and the bomb exploded. There would be enough collateral damage – Tim didn't deserve to be another victim in this.

When the door closes and he's gone, Liz slumps down onto the sofa. Armie braces himself for what's to come.

"That little wimp had sex with two girls last night who tied him up and whipped him? Here, at your apartment?" It gets worse because she starts to giggle. “Oh sweet Jesus, what did you take?"

"Liz..."

"Did you join them? I know this is the shit you were into, Armie, but I thought you left that behind when you became a husband and father? My husband. When you grew up into the man I love and respect." Her light tone has taken on a bitter lilt.

"Liz..."

"Actually, I thought he was gay. Wasn't he with that other pretty boy the last time? Or does he, you know, swing both ways?" Another high-pitched giggle, not amused but full of disdain. “Is that why he was offered this role, at his age, without any credentials to his name? Because he already lives the part. Did he suck off your director – I can't spell his name... or even that old queen who wrote the screenplay? I mean, he's not my type but I guess there are men out there – and women apparently – who like his... boyish charms, can we call it that? To me he looks about twelve, Armie-"

"Liz, I love him." There, he said it. He's not a coward. He's not denying what's going on. He said it
to his wife's face that he's in love with another man. He can't take it back. He won't take it back.

At least it shuts her up for a moment.

Liz is quiet for a whole minute before standing up and walking over to him, reaching out to touch his cheek, still covered with the remnants of his cum that he sucked from Tim's ass about half an hour ago – when his life had still been intact, not this fragmented parallel universe from his worst nightmares.

No, that's not true. His life hasn't been intact for a long while now. It's not imploding right now – it's actually the opposite, starting to sort itself out, pieces falling into place while Armie watches, terrified. You have to break some eggs to make an omelet.

But why is Liz looking at him rather fondly after his confession? He feared this moment for so long and now she just smiles at him, sympathy in her eyes? Maybe he snapped and lost it completely...

“Of course, you do.” Her tone is so soft that Armie closes his eyes and leans into her touch, remembering the woman he once knew and thought he loved, relieve washing over him. “He must have become like a little brother to you. He's still a kid and you're a father. But you can't protect him. If he's wild and promiscuous and does all sorts of shit, don't let him drag you into it. You don't owe him. You don't have to lie for him or protect him. Armie, I actually thought you were cheating on me because you wanted to hide what he did... with those girls. I told you before, you are too good for this world. There are so many people who want to milk you for your kindness. Believe me, I know the type – young, obsessed with their careers, for all the world oh so innocent as if butter couldn't melt in their mouths but oh boy, if you happen to look closer they are sly old dogs!”

“Liz, please...,” Armie jerks his head back. He thinks he has to throw up or break something if she continues to talk. His wife just voiced all of his prejudices, all the mean things Armie had accused Tim off just a few days ago. He suddenly hates himself and her for perpetuating such false believes and derogatory attitudes. As if they were any better...

Even worse, until a few weeks back Armie had been, thought and felt like Liz and that's why their marriage had still worked despite everything – because he had made her biases and trepidations a part of himself and allowed them to rule his life, ever enhancing his guilt, self-loathing and shame. But not anymore!

Tim had broken this circle and had shown him another world. A better, brighter, more accepting world.

Liz's hand hovers in mid-air before she drops it with a sigh.

“Armie, I know it's hard to face the facts, you always struggle to look reality-”

“Liz, there were no girls. He just made that up.” Time stands still. Armie's heart is pounding too loud in his ears. But he has to make her understand. Now or never. “Liz, I love him. We fucked. Last night, and many other nights before. It was me, I tied him up and beat him and he loved it. Because he's into that kinky shit as well. You want more details or is it enough for you?”

Outside, a car honks, a dog barks, someone shouts, a baby cries... the world keeps turning.

But in this room that has seen so much of Tim and him over the past few weeks, time slows down. Liz just stares at him, her mouth hanging unattractively open. He feels actually sorry that he has to break it to her like this. But apart from a nagging pity there's... nothing. No dread, no panic. He can breathe. He's okay.
Until Liz starts to laugh, a rich, high, pearly sound that he remembers loving when they first met.

“Oh, Armie, you had me here for a moment...”

Fuck! How can she still not believe him?

“Liz, please, listen... this is no joke, do I have to show you the sheets until you believe that-”

“Armie!” Her voice is suddenly sharp, merciless, adamant. “Stop that. It's not funny anymore, just disgusting and a bit juvenile. I never liked your dick jokes.”

“Well, Liz, I'm sorry.” He feels drained. For a moment, he had been free, liberated, but now everything is just dull, sordid and heavy again.

“Of course you are.” She says, voice hard as iron. “I won't hear anything of that ever again. Now, make yourself presentable. I'm staying at the same hotel as before with your daughter and the nanny. We'll expect you in an hour to take us out to lunch. And no more nonsense.”

Armie frowns. “You brought Harper?”

“Of course I brought Harper. She's your daughter, remember?” Liz turns and walks towards the door. “One hour, husband.”

And then she's gone.

What a mad house has his life become?

Okay, he has an hour.

First things first: he calls Tim. But the line is engaged and he's relegated to voicemail. Shit. He has to say something before he runs out of time. Tim needs to hear what happened.

“He, Tim, I'm... I'm so fucking sorry. I didn't know... I didn't know she was coming. It's our wedding anniversary this weekend but I had no idea... yeah, sorry. She brought Harper as well, you know? But... I told her. Listen, I told her. Only, she doesn't seem to understand... to listen. I don't know... she thinks I'm actually joking. I... I have no idea what's happening next. I... We need to talk. Please. I have to have lunch with her today but please, let me call you tonight, we have to sort this out. Oh, and thanks for having my back earlier but... I'm tired of lying. You deserve better. So... please... I don't know... just let me talk to you, okay. I love you.”

He disconnects, takes a deep breath, showers quickly, dresses and takes a cab over to the hotel his wife is staying with his daughter.

What else could he do?

^^^^^^

“Timothée, darling, please... breathe. What's going on, sweety? Is it because of the movie?”

“No, mom... yes. I... oh fuck!” He's sobbing hard. Just hearing his mother's voice throws him. He imagines her sitting down on the couch in their flat in Hell's Kitchen where he still has his room full of football trophies and 50 Cent posters, his hand-painted xBox controllers sitting next to his stuffed Babar the Elephant. He desperately wants to be there now, getting a hug from his mom, eating still warm chocolate cookies from the bakery round the corner, enveloped by the familiar voices and smells that give him security and a sense of belonging somewhere. At least on some days.
“Tim, I'm here. It's okay. It will be okay. Can you talk to me?” He can hear the worry in his mom's tone and tries to calm down enough to be able to talk.

“Mom, I... I met someone.”

There's a short pause. “I'd be happy for you if you weren't crying your eyes out right now, love.”

Timmy sniffs and wipes his nose with the back of his hand. “It's complicated. Shit, mom, he's married and... today his wife turned up out of the blue and he called her babe and... and... mom!” He can't continue. He feels so alone, humiliated, shaken, overwhelmed. Putting all of it into words is too hard.

But he doesn't have to. His mom understands.

“Oh, dear, what a mess. Did you know about the wife?”


“Did she... excuse me, but did she walk in on you two or...?”

“Almost. I don't know if she suspects something. I tried to get away as soon as possible.”

“I'm so sorry for you, Timothée. I would love to say something to reassure you that it will all end well but in my experience these things tend to get very ugly. Sorry, darling.”

Timmy is somehow glad that his mom doesn't placate him with false hope. “I know.” He whispers.

“I know that you know. You are a very smart young man. And a very kind one. That man can be really proud and happy that he met you.”

“I didn't want to mess this up, mom. I don't want to ruin his life...”

“I know, darling, but you can't sort out his life for him. That's for him to do. You have to look after yourself now. Is he in the movie with you?”

“Yes.”

“So you'll see him every day and can't avoid him?”

“No, and I don't want to!”

“You don't have to. It's okay. I'm sorry, but I don't think you can actually do much right now in terms of fixing the situation. All there is for you is to wait and see. It's out of your hands. Just try to be okay.”

Timmy nods. His mom can't see him but she somehow gets his reaction anyway.

“I know this hurts so very much, baby. If I could I would take this pain away from you. If there'd be anything I could do I would. But in those matters we are all so helpless, so alone. Does he know how you feel about him?”

“Yes.”

“You are in love?”

“Yes.” The tears start to well up again.
“And what about him?”

“He said he loves me.” Timmy’s voice breaks.

“If it helps you, try to cling to that, darling. He loves you. Doesn't mean he can be with you. You have to decide if that's enough.”

Timmy sighs. “But maybe…,” he can't say it.

“Yes, Timothée, maybe. If maybe is enough, you choose maybe. I could tell you about my experiences but that were other times and circumstances. This is your life. I love you and support you, whatever you do. If you need to talk, call me, anytime. Do you hear me? Anytime. I know this isn't easy for you, your first lead, being away from New York for so long... I'm so proud of you. I'm so happy you fell in love. I just wish it will end well for you.”

“Thanks, mom.” Timmy somehow feels a little better. The pain is still there but instead of feeling like a sharp blade stabbing his heart it's now reduced to a dull throb inside his ribcage.

“Just wait and see, darling. Love him. You are smart enough to make your own decisions. It's not for me to tell you what to do. I trust you that you know what's best for you.”

“But this isn't just about me, mom. I know that he's unhappy—”

“You don't know that, Timothée. Just because he says so... I'm sorry. I shouldn't intervene. I'm sure you chose a fine man, a nice man, someone who's good to you and honest. You deserve someone who treats you right.”

Timmy bites his lip. “He's just so... I think he's afraid.”

“You can't live someone else's life, Tim. You can't make his decisions. He has to do that. If he stands by you, cherish him. If he can't he'll have his reasons and all you can do is accept them.”

“But mom, it hurts so much.” Timmy sobs again.

“I know, darling, I know. I love you so much, baby.” His mom's voice is soft, a little raw. “Just let it all out.”

Timmy breaks down completely. He can't form words any longer, just cries into his phone while his mom murmurs soothing words to him, telling him that she loves him, that she's there for him, that he's her precious darling.

It takes him about five minutes to cry his heart out. He feels weak afterwards but somehow better. Relieved. He has told someone that things are really shit right now. His mom didn't try to cheer him up. Instead, she accepted his grieve and took him serious. He's still sad, of course, heartbroken, but also lighter, unburdened.

“Try to eat something, dear. Get yourself something sweet. Do you have the day off? Sleep. And call me tomorrow, please. Maybe you hear from him in the meantime. Maybe it doesn't look so bleak tomorrow.”

“Yeah, okay.”

“I'm sure they have those chocolate croissants over there you love so much.” He can hear the smile in his mom's voice and has to grin as well.
“Yeah, they do.”

“Get yourself some. Treat yourself to something nice. Oh sweetheart, I love you.”

“I know, mom. Thank you, mom.”

“Will you be okay?”

“Yeah. I will.”


“Bye, mom.”

When he hangs up he sees there’s a voicemail. His thumb hovers above the icon for a moment before he presses down. Armie’s voice fills the room, stammering at first, then with fervent urgency. Timmy lies back on his bed and listens to it again and again.


He can't cry again. He's empty.

Eventually, he picks himself up and goes out in search for some pastry. He gets a bottle of Vodka and some cigarettes as well, just in case. He has some time to kill, after all.
Chapter Summary

Armie talks to Liz. Timmy gets really drunk.

Lunch drags on and on. Liz talks and talks. About mutual acquaintances, the bakery, the house in LA, his mum, his dad, her mum, her dad, Hops kindergarten, her charity...

Armie knows he should at least try to fake interest but he can't. All he wants to do is hold his daughter, roll around on the carpet with her, play hide and seek in the hotel suite, hear her laugh and squeal with joy....

But Hops has to sit in one of the hotel restaurant's high chairs in a fluffy white dress with an overlarge white bow in her blond baby hair and because of her dainty attire is not allowed to play with her food. Armie would just want for her to be in a t-shirt and some rompers and be allowed to eat with her hands but Liz insists on immaculate table manners – even for a toddler – so she feeds Hops herself between moving her own food around on her plate. Armie has no idea why they meet at restaurants when she's never really eating.

He doesn't have any appetite himself either, despite missing breakfast, and feels low-key nauseous during the whole farce of a meal. Afterwards, the nanny comes to fetch Hops for her afternoon nap. His babygirl is knackered and jet-lagged and therefore getting 'difficult' and 'demanding' as Liz calls it. Armie feels the urge to follow, sing his daughter to sleep and guard her peaceful slumber but apparently his fatherly duties have been outsourced to paid help.

“So, what have you been up to here while I was away?” Liz asks when their daughter's gone.

“I've been working, Liz, shooting a movie.”

“Yes, I know, darling, but apart from that? Didn't you do anything exciting apart from work?”

He wants to tell her that the work has been pretty exciting to begin with. And that apart from that he's done Tim.

“It's pretty demanding stuff, Liz.” He says instead.

She sighs and plays with the bangle around her wrist. It looks faintly familiar to Armie.

“So, just work.” She takes a sip of her water, obviously starting to get frustrated. He knows he should appease her now or this will end badly.

But Armie can't think of anything to say.

“Anyone interesting on set? Anyone I might know?”

“You met them all, Liz, at Luca's.”

“Yeah, a bunch of kids and some middle-aged theater folks... how come you aren't bored rigid already, Armie?”
He wants to scream. Why does she have to talk like this about people he loves and admires, who have become friends, family even?

“I told you why.” He can't help it, he doesn't have the patience to spare her.

“Oh, yes. Timothy.” She takes a sip of her water. “But he's just a boy, Armie. What do you have in common?”

‘What do we have in common apart from our daughter?’ He wants to ask her.

“Being actors, for a start. It's so exciting. He's smart and funny and so fucking talented-”

“Language, husband!”

He ignores her and her attempts to lecture him. “-and beautiful and sensitive, so free and open...”

“God, you really sound smitten.” Liz chuckles. She's making fun of him.

Armie realizes he's blushing and hates himself for it. “I am. More than smitten.”

Now Liz looks at him for the first time. “Armie,” she reaches out for his hand and he lets her take it. “Darling, I know making a movie can be pretty intense.”

“Do you?” Armie pulls his hand back to take up the menu and look at it, pretending to skim the wine card.

“I've been married to you long enough, yes. You are very committed. But also rather volatile. I don't know what you see in this boy-” she holds up her hand when he tries to interject “-but I know you. You'll be fascinated for about three weeks. Then you'll get tired of it. Him. For now, you are swept away by Italy and all of this...” she makes a vague gesture all around her. “But I've seen this often enough. You always want to move to the place where you shot your latest movie. You always dream about quitting acting to become a bar pianist, or open a bodega, or start a diving school, or some other silly thing.”

“This is different.”

“Is it?”

“Liz, I'm not sure you understood what I said back at the apartment.”

Her smile fades. She suddenly looks her age, all her put-on joviality swiped away. It leaves her tired, worried and a bit confused.

“I'm not an idiot, Armie. I'm your wife. I'm pregnant. That is our life, your life. If you wanted to live a little fantasy, if you wanted to explore things – fine. You had your fun. But now it's back to reality. I don't even want to know what happened. I won't waste time or energy on one of your flights of fancy. I have our future to plan as a family. Whatever it was with you and... him - is over now.”

She holds his gaze with a determination that frightens Armie. It doesn't even sound like a threat. She has made a decision already. For both of them.

“And if not?”

Liz stares at him as if he's grown a second head. “There's no 'if', Armie. I'm here now. We might have had a bit of a rough patch after Hops was born but many couples go through such a phase. It will bring us closer together in the end.”
Armie has a bitter taste in his mouth. When the waiter passes by he orders a scotch. Liz raises her eyebrows but says nothing, just continues sipping her water. They stay silent until his drink arrives. He downs it in one go.

“So, how do we celebrate tonight? Shall we go to Milan? Lilly can take care of Hops.” His wife smiles at him but Armie knows it's not really a question she expects an answer to. As with everything in his life, she's arranged it all. Everything apart from Tim.

“I'm... listen, Liz, I'm really not in the mood for anything celebratory right now. Your arrival here has been quite a shock. I have to talk to Tim a-”

“Oh, for god's sake, Armie!” Liz raises her voice and throws her napkin onto the table. Armie sits up straighter because she never looses her composure like this. “Didn't you listen to what I just said?”

“Didn't you listen to what I said? I'm in love with him!”

“Keep your fucking voice down, Armie!” Liz hisses.

Something dawns on Armie. “Oh. Oh my god! It's not that I might discover something new about me and my sexuality. It's not even about me cheating on you. It's other people knowing. Am I embarrassing you, Liz?”

His wife blinks a few times, a deep crease forming between her plugged eyebrows. “Don't be ridiculous, Armie. How can you cheat on me with that kid? I'm your wife, the pregnant mother of your daughter. He's some little tart, nothing more. And does having some cock really compare to this?” She takes his hand and puts it on her breast, in full view of some of the guests. She's not even blushing.

Armie yanks his hand away as if burned.

Liz smiles triumphantly. “Whatever you are, Armie, you're not gay. Just look at you. You're a real man. My man. This movie and some of the others you did before might have messed you up, twisted your perception of yourself. You know what your mother said-”

Armie pushes his chair back and gets up. “Don't you dare bring her into this.”

“Sit.Down.” Liz stares at him with blazing eyes.

“I have to look after our daughter.” He turns and walks out of the restaurant towards the lifts without looking back. Once inside the elevator, however, he leans against one of its mirrored walls and fights for air. God, he wishes he's had another drink.

Lilly opens when he knocks and signals him to be quiet as Harper is sleeping. She's not lying in the cot but on the large double bed, thumb sucked into her tiny mouth, covered with a small soft blanket that has ducks printed on it. She looks so peaceful it almost breaks Armie's heart.

“I'll stay with her for a while.” He tells Lilly. She just nods and leaves.

Armie takes off his shoes before sidling up to his daughter on the bed, pulling her against his chest. She sighs and smacks her lips before cuddling up against him. She smells of chamomile soap and laundry starch and baby. Armie falls asleep, still holding her close.

He wakes up about an hour later when his daughter starts to climb on top of him. She smiles and babbles and plugs at the buttons of his shirt until he starts to tickle her.
“Do you remember daddy?” He asks her, grabbing her under her chubby little arms and throwing her into the air until she shrieks with pleasure. They fool around a bit more, Hops showing him all her stuffed animals which he appropriately admires until the door opens and Lilly walks in.

“Oh, hello, young lady.” She snatches Hops up from the floor and smells her nappy. “I think someone needs changing.”

“I do it. Have you seen my wife.”

“She rang me to say she went to the spa.”

Of course, Armie thinks.

“And I should tell you that she texted you the address of the restaurant in Milan where she made a reservation for tonight.”

Armie has a hard time not to roll his eyes.

He gets his phone out which he'd switched off during lunch and swipes it into life again.

No message from Tim.

But a text from Liz. It reads: 'Nobu Milan, 8pm. Car booked for 7:30.'

Didn't he tell her he doesn't want to go out tonight? This all seems so surreal. He'd been afraid so long to tell his wife how he really felt, confess to her that he likes men – and now that he has done, she just refuses to take it seriously!

Maybe he should tell her everything? About all those rentboys he'd fucked during their marriage? Even when she was pregnant. Maybe that'll shock her enough to get through to her?

He carries his daughter over into the bathroom and quickly changes her. Back in the bedroom he goes through her luggage in search of something comfortable but finds only frilly dresses. He puts her in the one with the least ruffles – a simple pink cotton sundress – sets a hat on her head and even remembers to apply sun tan lotion before strapping her into her buggy to take her out into town.

They have ice cream at Tim's favorite Gelateria – vanilla for her, pistachio for Armie - before visiting the park. There's just a tiny playground but at least they have a sandbox where they sit for hours. Hops borrows a shovel and some molds from other kids and bakes Armie cakes which he dutifully mimics to eat. Quickly, he's surrounded by a swarm of little children, feeding him their baked goods. The mothers on the benches smile and nod and he even manages some simple conversations – How old? Boy or girl? Name? - in Italian with them.

Around six Hops is dirty, tired and hungry so they head back to the hotel. He buys her a chocolate bun on the way, adding dark smears to the mess. She seems to especially enjoy working sticky chocolate bits into her hair and all over her face. Armie's not sure if she actually eats anything.

Liz is in the suite when they return, looking rosy and radiant. Hops wants to run up to her but Lilly snatches her away to put her in the bath first.

“Come on, young lady, you look like you had fun.”

“Where have you been?” Liz asks after the bathroom door is closed. Armie hears his daughter laugh behind it.
“In town. At the playground.”

“And visited a bakery, apparently. You know she shouldn't eat too much sugar and carbs, especially not white flour. And chocolate!”

“She's not even two, Liz. You really want to put her on a diet?”

“That's not a diet. She just needs to eat healthy. Gluten-free, macrobiotic. I've been experimenting with Ayurvedic food recently.”

“A chocolate bun won't kill her, I suppose.”

“No, it might only trigger allergies and make her accumulate more baby fat she'll has to get rid off later in life but hey... no harm done, husband. I'm sure getting in her good books by spoiling her was worth it. It's up to mummy to get her back on track and deal with her tantrums the next time she's denied sweets.”

Armie just sighs, shakes his head and raises his hands in apology. “Mea culpa.” He doesn't have the energy to fight her on baby nutrition right now.

Liz looks demonstratively at her watch – a present for their first wedding anniversary. She's also wearing the earrings Armie had given her after he fucked that one rentboy bare. They make him think of Tim. It all gets muddled in his brain and he just wants to sit down somewhere quiet and think for a second.

“Don't you think you should shower and change as well?” His wife asks.

“I told you I'm not in the mood.”

“I don't care. It's our anniversary. We go out.”

“Liz, please, stop this.” He slumps down into an armchair and closes his eyes.

“Why?”

“I can't do that. I... need time.”

“What for?”

“I told you what for.”

“You want to go to your... boy... at the evening of our anniversary? You can't be serious.”

“Can we try to deal with this like adults, please.”

“I don't know, can we, Armie? As far as I know you are married to me and belong at my side, especially now that I'm pregnant. I really don't know what's gotten into you.”

'Tim’, he wants to say, but that wouldn't sound grown up at all so he stays silent.

Liz takes her phone out and starts to play around with it, holding it up to take a selfie. “For IG.” She tells him as if he cared. “Come on, lets take one together. For the fans. And the family.”

He just stares at her in her perfect make-up and her perfect dress with her perfect hair and teeth, her narrow waist and her firm breasts, her long legs and huge eyes – and feels nothing.
“Sorry, I can’t do this.” He mumbles, getting up. “Give Hops a good night kiss from me.” He walks towards the door.

“Armie!” Liz suddenly sounds upset. It might be the first sincere emotion he gets from her all day. But he doesn’t turn around. He knows where he wants to be so that’s where he’s going now.

Timmy stares at the beads of his bracelet, letting the cool, smooth stones again and again run through his fingers. The repetitive gesture somehow calms him while looking at the gems makes him feel close to Armie. It’s his private rosary, a token of their bond, a reminder of their connection. Timmy’s tried to fasten it around his wrist a few times but somehow his clumsy fingers won’t obey him.

With a sigh, he leans back into the cushions of his couch, closing his eyes, reveling in the sensation that he can still feel his bruised skin throb.

When Timmy’s phone rings he’s already halfway through the bottle of Vodka and therefore has some difficulty to take the call. Realizing that the caller ID says AH he almost drops his mobile onto the floor.

“Armie?” Breathless hope runs through his body like a live wire.

“Hey, Tim. Sorry... I'm so sorry. Are you home?”

“Yeah.. I'm... ho-ome.” He giggles. His voice audibly slurs even for his own ears. He's just not used to heavy drinking.

A short silence.

“Are you drunk?”

“M-maybe. A tiny liiiittle bit.”

“Wait for me. Don’t finish it off. I really need a drink.”

“Where are you?” Timmy sits up straighter on the couch and the room starts to spin. He closes his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose with his free hand.

“On my way to you actually. I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

“Okay.” Timmy ends the call and lights up a cigarette, only to discover that one is already burning up in the ashtray. “Ups.”

He smokes both and ends up with a coughing fit that almost has him bring up the Vodka-pastry-mix sloshing around in his stomach.

When he hears a knock he has trouble finding the door.

“Fuck, Tim, you’re totally shitfaced.” Armie grins, takes him in his arms and pulls him along back into the lounge. It feels so good Timmy doesn't want to be anywhere else, ever.

“Armiiiiie.” He sighs. He knows somewhere in his intoxicated brain that maybe Armie shouldn't be here with him, that he should tell him to leave – but he can’t.

They land back on the couch. Armie eyes the bottle suspiciously before taking a sip. He shakes
himself afterwards, his whole body convulsing.

“God, what is this?”

“Vodka.”

“You got that from the supermarket, right? Why did you chose this one?”

“It was cheap.”

“That's how it tastes.” Yet Armie takes another sip so it can't be that bad.

“It serves its pur-pur-purpose.” Timmy slurs.

“And what would that be?”

“Getting drunk reeeaaaaallly fast.” He throws his arms out and almost falls off the sofa.

“Yeah.” Armie pulls Timmy to safety with an arm thrown around his shoulder. “I can see that.” He looks serious. “God, I'm so sorry, babe.” Armie's palm cradles Timmy's face.

Timmy blinks, swallows, reaches for the bottle. “That's what you called 'lizbeth... called her as well. Babe. I thou'... I thought it was for me. Just me.” He knows he sounds winy as he buries his face in Armie's chest. God, he smells amazing – sun, sweat, tobacco, chocolate, a hint of chamomile...

Timmy is grateful when Armie hugs him tighter. “I... fuck Tim, sorry, I’m not used to... calling people pet names. Liz is pretty much the only person I ever... but, yeah, you're right. God, I'm shit at this. It's been so long since I-”

“Shhh.” Timmy presses his index finger to Armie's lips. Well, he tries to but it's a little difficult with Armie's face constantly shifting and swimming in front of him. He almost pokes him in the eye as his hand lands on his cheek. His caress is sloppy but Armie doesn't seem to mind. He grins.

“So-sorry. Can't you sit still?” He remembers watching The Social Network, convinced that there were actually Hammer twins.

“I'm not moving, Tim. How drunk are you?”

Timmy just shrugs but the sudden movement has the room tilt to the left. Oh, no, it's actually him sliding to the right as he slumps face down into Armie's lap. Well, as he landed there it seems a good idea to make the best of it so he reaches for Armie's zip.

“Tim...”

“Shut up. Just lemme... I missed you.” He succeeds in pulling the zip down but has forgotten to open Armie's belt so it takes another minute of awkward fumbling before he can drag Armie's slacks and boxers down. Above him, Armie chuckles and sighs.

'Does she do that to you the way I do it?’ Timmy thinks as he swallows the head of Armie's cock. He relaxes his throat to take Armie deeper and deeper, his right hand curling around the fury root, so thick that his fingers hardly touch. Fuck, Armie's so big! But he tastes so good! Timmy can't get enough.

Until he feels Armie getting close. His hips twitch upwards. The sudden motion takes Timmy by surprise, triggering his gag reflex.
He retches and pulls off instinctively. The whole room spins. A sour taste floods his mouth.

"Fu-uck." He gasps, stumbling to his feet. He doesn't find the way to the bathroom but thankfully the kitchen sink floats into view. Next thing Timmy's aware of, he's grabbing the counter, holding on for dear life as he throws up and just hopes he's not missing the basin. His eyes water when the sharp smell of barely digested alcohol mixed with bile fills his nostrils.

"Urgh." Is all he manages to cough up. But to his surprise there's a hand on his shoulder, then an arm around his middle as his body shudders and cramps, fervently forcing itself to expel more liquor. It's pure agony: his stomach clenches, his throat burns and tears run down his face.

"Tim?" Armie sounds worried.

"Shit, sorry, man." Timmy groans, spits out and searches blindly for the faucet to wash away the embarrassing remnants of his pathetic body's failure.

A glass of water materializes in his linen of vision and Timmy takes it, downing it too quickly to only bring it up a second later.

"Fuck!" He splutters, his knees giving out but gladly Armie's there to catch him.

"Easy." He murmurs against Timmy's temple.

Timmy can only choke out a sob in reply. He wants to die.

"No, you won't."

Did he say it out loud?

"Yes, you did. Do you think you're done here?"

Timmy listens to his heart hammering in his chest. His guts are still churning but somehow he doubts he can bring up any more stomach content. He's shivering by now and his mouth tastes like he's licked the floor of a bar at three in the morning but as he raises his head the room has stopped spinning so he might actually be better.

He nods carefully.

"Okay, lets get you to bed."

"But I was only half-way through..." Timmy makes a weak gesture towards Armie's groin and registers that he's pulled up his pants.

"It's okay." Armie smiles softly and Timmy blushes furiously, burying his face in Armie's broad shoulder to hide his embarrassment.

"Come on."

"I want to brush my teeth."

"I'm not sure that's a good idea."

It isn't. As soon as he tastes the peppermint toothpaste Timmy's body rebels. He dry-heaves and has to give up his feeble attempt at personal care. Armie, who's been sitting on the closed toilet seat, gently steers him over into the bedroom.
“You’ll be better tomorrow.”

“Will you stay?” Timmy knows he sounds small and helpless but that’s exactly how he feels.

“Of course.” Armie says without hesitation. He pulls Timmy’s trousers off and lifts his legs into bed, tugging the sheet around him. Then he gets in behind Timmy and hugs him.

“Okay?”

Timmy has to close his eyes. “The bed is rocking. Is the bed rocking?” He giggles until he groans because the mattress doesn’t stop moving.

“It'll stop. Shall I get a bucket?”

Timmy nods, mortified but thankful.

Armie presses a kiss to his nape and gets up again.

“Back in a minute.” He mumbles and is gone.

Timmy has lost consciousness before he returns.
Armie wakes early next morning. For a moment, he has no idea where he is. He had a weird dream in which Liz, Timmy and a young blond woman – apparently his daughter – were sitting amicably together at the table on the Perlman's terrace, chatting and eating Nutella crepes but he got only glimpses of them through the windows as he was pacing the corridors, trying to find the exit, a way out.

As he jerks awake he's not sure if the dark-haired figure next to him is Liz or Tim.

He fumbles blindly for his phone. He'd switched it off yesterday after calling Tim. God, the boy hit it hard last night. He'll feel that today.

As soon as he swipes his phone to life it starts ringing. He sees that he has some unanswered calls and a few text messages.

“Yeah.” Armie's voice is still hoarse from sleep. He hadn't checked who called and expects to hear his wife's voice so he's surprised when it's Luca.

“Armie. Good morning. Where are you?”

“At Tim's.” No need to lie to Luca.

“Ah. Okay. Stay there. I'll be there in fifteen minutes with coffee.”

He hangs up. Armie stares at the display and sees that it's seven o'clock sharp.

He shakes Tim gently but the boy doesn't as much as grunt. Armie lets him sleep and drags himself into the shower before donning last day's clothes again. Somehow, he never got around to bring some of his own stuff to Tim's apartment.

Exactly a quarter past seven it knocks on the apartment door. Armie opens, hair still wet. Luca is carrying a small cardboard tablet stocked with three paper cups. It smells like heaven.

“Oh god, you're an angel.” Armie groans and takes a cup before slumping down onto the couch. Luca sits next to him, close as always.

“Buon giorno.” Luca smiles, his eyes wandering over to the almost empty bottle of Vodka and the overflowing ashtray, only adding to the usual chaos in Tim's lounge. “You had a bad night?”

“Mostly Tim. He... had quite a few.”

Luca nods.

Armie wonders what Luca might want this early. Nothing good, that's for sure. Armie waits like the wolf to the slaughter.
To fill the prevailing silence he says: “Tim's still asleep.”

Luca nods again but stays quiet.

Now Armie starts to get really nervous. He takes a sip of his scalding coffee and burns his mouth but swallows bravely.

Eventually, Luca coughs and touches Armie's knee.

“Armie, I had a very strange evening.” He begins. Armie stares down at his hand, his thumb drawing circles on his skin. A few weeks ago another man touching him like this would have freaked him out. Not anymore. “Your wife came around to talk to me.”

“Oh god.” Armie groans. “Listen, Luca, I'm so sorry...”

Luca removes his hand. “Tesoro, let me talk. You listen. Your wife came to me and told me it was you anniversary but that you left her at the hotel. She told me that you told her you are in love with Timothée.”

Armie groans again. “Luca, please-”

“Armie, quiet! Let me speak!” Armie's mouth snaps shut. Luca rarely gets loud. “She was upset. She was agitated. Angry. She wanted to know what had happened.”

Armie sinks deeper into the cushions but stays silent.

“I explained to her that I don't snoop around after my actors. That all that matters to me is that you and Timothée are on set on time, know your lines and that we have a good and trusted collaboration.” Luca gives Armie a serious look.

Armie's not sure if he's allowed to speak now or what to say to this. So he just shrugs.

“I mean it. What you two do in your free time is none of my business. You are adults. I'm not your father. But, please forgive me if I might sound like him.” Armie has to suppress a bitter grin. Luca and his father have nothing in common – and that's a good thing.

“Do I have to remind you, Armie, that you are a married man? Your wife is pregnant. And now she's here. That is for you to sort out. I won't tolerate anything jeopardizing this movie. You understand? My priority is the film. I don't like interruptions.”

Armie stares back at Luca, the coffee in his hand forgotten.

“But what am I supposed to do?” He asks in a low voice, feeling out of his depth. He could never have asked his real father such a question.

Luca sighs. “I don't know, Armie. You have started to be honest, that is a good thing. But all in due time. We are shooting a movie. You and Timothée are working together. Maybe you should leave it at that - for now.”

Armie feels suddenly cold all over. “I can't be without him. And I can't be with her anymore, Luca.” He murmurs, turning the paper cup in his hand.

“You don't have to. Explain to her that you have to finish the movie and can sort out your private life afterwards. It's only a couple of weeks.”

“But she won't accept me being with Tim. She just doesn't understand...”
“Oh, she understands. She knows you very well, Armie. She is hurt and sad, shocked, but she understands. But do you understand her? Her whole world is coming down. You ditching her on your anniversary didn't help. Armie, that's just not a proper thing to do.”

“I know, but... I just couldn’t...”

“You are a grown man, a father, you can't just run away when things get difficult. I'm not giving you any advise, I'm not getting between you and your wife or you and Timothée. All I do is remind you of your responsibilities. This film is one of them.”

Armie sits up. “But, fuck, Luca, I'm so confused, I'm... afraid. I don't know what to do, this is all new...”

“Then you feel exactly like your wife. Maybe you could start there.”

Armie freezes. Luca's words feel like a bucket of ice water emptied over his head.

“Come here, tesoro.” Luca pulls him into a hug and Armie goes willingly, burying his face in Luca's soft jumper.

God, it feels good to be held like this. Safe. Luca's voice is soothing.

“Let me tell you, Armie, Ferdinando and I are together for many years. And over and over I fall for other men. I fell for Timothée, I fell for you. I have crushes. But Ferdinando and I have a bond that's... more, stronger. You and your wife go back a long time. You have a daughter. You really want to leave all this for someone you just met? I understand crushes, I really do. But you have to make sure it's more. You owe that to your wife. And to Timothée as well.”

Armie nods. His face is wet. He sniffs. “I know.” He whispers hoarsely. “Sorry.”

“It's okay. Cry. Let it out.” Luca strokes his back and allows Armie this moment while tears and snot soak his Gucci sweater. Armie doesn't want to let go of him. He feels small, torn, but here's someone who listens to him, hugs him, comforts him when he's weak.

“Luca. This film, you...,” Armie chokes out between gulps for air. “I learned so much. I don't want this to end. I need Tim.”

“Yes, but what does Timothée need?”

The question unsettles Armie. He pulls back and wipes his eyes, his nose. “What?”

“Does Timothée need to be drawn into your private drama with your wife? Do you think he likes to be the disruptive element? Don't you think he has enough on his plate with this film, being away from home so long at his age? Don't you think all he needs is support, not additional trouble?”

Armie nods. “Yeah. I... I want to protect him.”

“Then you should do what's best for him. You know that already.”

“You mean I need to leave him alone? To sort out my affairs and keep him out of it.” Armie stares at the bottle of hard booze. He remembers Tim last night, totally drunk, still trying to give him a blow job and then apologizing when it all went pear-shaped.

*He* apologized. Not Armie.

Despite all this shit being Armie's fault!
But he will do better! He can do better.

Can you?

He won't listen to these voices. They just keep him down and stop him from doing the things that need to be done.

There is a right time for everything. Now is definitely not the time to upset Tim. Luca doesn't know half of it and still saw how fragile he is. How could Armie not have seen it?

Or did he see it and used it to his advantage?

“I'll keep my distance.” He promises.

“Take your time. Wait until the film is over. This is an intense experience. You have to be sure. For the sake of all involved. Explain that to both of them.” Luca pats Armie's knee.

“What shall he explain?” Tim leans in the doorway to the bedroom, clad only in boxers and a crumpled t-shirt. His eyes are bloodshot, his hair's a wild mess.


Tim doesn't answer. He just stares at Armie. He's paler than usual, white as a sheet.

“I see you tomorrow.” Luca silently leaves without another word.

“What were you talking about?”

“What did Luca mean. What do you have to explain.” Tim doesn't move.

Armie takes a deep breath. What he's about to say breaks his heart. But it has to be. “Look, Tim, I think we shouldn't see each other for a while-”

“What? Fuck you!” Tim turns and slams the bedroom door shut behind him.

Timmy hears voices as he comes around. It's just a rumbling at first, but bit by bit he gets snippets. One voice is Armie's and the other's... Luca's?

Timmy clamber out of bed. His head is pounding. He still feels ill. He's swaying a little but manages to reach the door and opens it.

“I'll keep my distance.” Armie says. He looks shattered. Has he been crying?

“Take your time. Wait until the film is over. This is an intense experience. You have to be sure. For the sake of all involved. Explain that to both of them.” Luca sounds serious.

Shit! What is going on here?

Despite feeling half-dead Timmy has to know what hurt Armie so much he's in such a state of distress.

When they are alone, Armie seems to brace himself before he deals the blow: “Look, Tim, I think we
shouldn't see each other for a while-”

Timmy fears his knees might give out. This can't be happening! So Liz turns up and Armie just leaves him and runs back to her?

That's it?

Fuck him!

He slams the door shut and throws himself onto the bed. Bad idea. Very bad idea. His head threatens to explode. His stomach churns.

In his hung-over fog he almost doesn't realize that Armie comes after him a moment later. He sits down on the mattress but doesn't touch him.

“T’im not leaving you, Tim.” Armie's voice is deep, soothing.

“Fuck off!” Timmy winces. Shit, he's crying. His mouth is too dry, he can't even swallow properly. He buries his face in the crook of his arm.

“Tim, no... I'm not leaving you. I don't go back to Liz. But Luca explained to me that I have to sort this all out before we can be together. You mustn't get in the middle of this.”

“I'm already there.” He hates how his voice breaks.

“Yes, and I'm sorry for this. Listen, Liz spoke to Luca last night-”

“Did she accuse me of something? Did she threaten you?” Timmy raises his aching head, regretting it immediately as he blinks against the sudden light.

“No... Tim, that's no the point. We are here to make a film. Everything else needs to be done after that. Please, we have to work together. We're such a good team, I trust you, you're a marvelous actor, this movie will show it to the world. This story is so important. We have to do it justice, Tim. Remember, we talked about that. We can't mess this up. I can't mess this up with my troubles and issues and all the chaos I brought into this.” Armie gestures between them.

“This is not your fault...”

“Tim, Liz is here. This is very distracting for me...”

“You don't say!” The irony of it fills his mouth with a bad taste. Or is he still tasting his own sick? He lowers his face again. There's nothing here he wants to see.

“Don’t do that. I have to sort this all out. You, my wife, my daughter, my family, my career. This is for me to do. You said yourself that I shouldn't promise something that I couldn't keep.”

It's true, he said that. Why couldn't he keep his mouth shut? “Armie, I-” He's not allowed to finish.

“No, you're absolutely right. You deserve me being sure. Not this mess. But I need time. I want to do this right, okay. Liz deserves that, too. I know you understand that. You're not the asshole I am, apparently.”

“Armie, you're not-” Timmy groans. Why does he always have to put himself down?

“Please, let me get this out. I've been so fucking selfish, Tim. I was just thinking about what I needed. I wasn't thinking off you, what this did to you. I'm so fucking sorry. You know, I wanted to
keep you on the side, fuck you behind Liz's back, my little secret, until I was sure this would work. But that's not how it should be, between us. I have to make my decision and stand by it. I can't always take the path of least resistance, do what's just best for me. Because that's hurting you. I don't want to treat you like I treated Liz. Please, give me the time. I love you. But I love my daughter as well. I... I think I lied for so long I don't even really know what's true anymore.”

Timmy stares up at him, pain forgotten. Or rather, replaced by a different kind of agony. He doesn't want to hear these things. He doesn't want to let Armie go. But Armie's begging him. And somehow Timmy knows that he should give Armie the space he asks for.

“I love you, Armie.” His voice is small. That's all he has to offer.

“I love you too. That's why I want to do this right. Not a sordid little affair on set.”

“I don't care, Armie.” Timmy sits up and almost blacks out. He grabs Armie's biceps but has to close his eyes as the room flips sideways. “Fuck.” He gasps.

“Poor thing.” Armie touches his cheek and Timmy arches into it, desperate for connection. He feels Armie's breath on his face as he leans in and kisses him tenderly on the mouth.

Timmy pulls back. “Don't, I'm gross.” His mouth feels outright furry.

“I don't care.” Armie pulls him close.

Timmy smiles lopsided.

“I want to be good.” Armie mumbles into his hair. “For you. For us.”

“Fuck good.” Timmy says against his chest.

“You don't mean that.”

“I do mean that.”

Armie holds him some more before slowly pulling back.

“It doesn't mean we can't see each other. I mean, off set. But no touching. No kissing. Outside a scene. I have to examine my choices without... distractions. I need to see what's there between us apart from that undeniable pull. And I'll have to meet Liz to see my family but I want you to know about it. Can you deal with that?”

“As long as I don't have to like it.”

“No. you don't. But if this is to work in the future you'll have to come to terms with it. With Liz. The kids.”

A future. Their future. He can accept a lot of things to have that with Armie.

Timmy can still not believe that Armie has told Liz the truth about him. Them. They somehow didn't find the time to talk about it yesterday. Maybe because Timmy had been too busy in his ill-fated attempt to swallow Armie's cock. But Timmy really wants to tell him how proud he is. Armie needs to hear it.

“I'm still in awe that you told her.” He's almost sitting in Armie's lap by now and hopes he doesn't realize it. So much for keeping his distance.
“Me too.” Armie chuckles

“How are you?” Timmy brushes Armie's fringe back to look him properly in the face. He could drown in those eyes.


Timmy smiles. That's exactly how he feels. “And... how's Liz?” Timmy forces himself to say her name.

“I thought she was in denial. That she thought I was joking. But turns out she seems to be simply overwhelmed. I've trouble believing that. That's not how she usually reacts. She's always been tough, in control...” He shakes his head.

“Is she... angry? Out for revenge?” Timmy is a little afraid of the answer.

“I don't know... I don't think she had reached that point when I saw her yesterday. She was still... in shock, maybe. She might be angry today. Very angry. And hell hath no fury apparently.”

“You'll go and talk to her today?” His headache returns with a massive wave of pain.

“I think I have to.”

Timmy folds his hand beneath his chin and nods. He feels suddenly cold, lost.

“Can you call me afterwards?”

“I promise to call you tonight, okay.”

Timmy nods again. “What am I supposed to do?” He asks meekly. He's still not fully getting what Armie expects from him now.


As if.

“Just don't shut me out, okay?” He couldn't bear that.

“I won't.” Armie says.

Timmy can only hope it's the truth.
Armie knows he should meet Liz rather sooner than later, before his decision crumbles to dust, but first he goes over to his apartment, showers again and changes. Then he gets some breakfast. It’s his way of steeling himself for what’s to come.

It's almost noon when he arrives at the hotel. Harper is taking a nap. Liz is sipping something green and flaky from a glass while browsing through a magazine when he enters her suite. She looks her age today despite having carefully applied her 'natural' make-up.

“Oh, wow, what an honor in our small abode.” She greets him with mocking disdain but there's real hurt underneath. Armie can read it in the sharp wrinkles visible around her eyes, the creases either side of her carefully painted mouth. “Didn't think I'd see you so soon, husband.” She returns to the article she'd apparently been reading.

“Liz... Luca came to talk to me.”

“Did he?” She doesn't look up.

“Listen, I'm sorry. Can we talk please?”

“Don't you have to hold your little toyboy’s hand or something?”

“Liz, this is serious, please.”

She drops the magazine in her lap. “I am serious. Yesterday you told me you're in love with someone else. So, what do you expect from me now, Armie? Wish you luck and set you free? Just like that? As if six years of marriage and two kids mean nothing?” She puts a hand on her belly and tries to make it look unintentionally but Armie's sure that it's a deliberate move to make him feel guilty.

It works.

“No, I hoped we could talk about it. Not you running to my director, complaining, washing our dirty linen in public.”

“Your dirty linen, Armie, not mine. And I didn't run to Luca to complain. You just stormed out and switched your phone off on our anniversary and I had no idea where you'd gone, so what was I
supposed to do? Sit here and patiently wait for your return, the lonely, ditched wife? Really? I simply had to talk to someone. I would’ve preferred it to be you, honestly.”

Armie swallows his anger. He has to stay calm if this is to go down somehow civilized.

“I'm here now.” He states.

“Always your way, Armie, isn't it?” Liz sighs but puts her magazine on the small table next to her. “Go on, then. I give you five minutes.”

Armie swallows. His mouth is suddenly dry. He doesn't really have a plan what to say. He’d hoped the right words would just come. Well, it doesn't seem that easy. Should he tell it like it is? What did Luca say? That they need time. Yeah, that sounds sensible.

“Liz... I'm sorry this is all happening right now. But, this film... it does things to me. And Tim... he's-”

“I really don't need to hear this, Armie.” Liz voice is hard as steel.

“Yeah... apology. But, what I'm trying to say is... I need time. We need time. You and me. Don't you think?”

She laughs. It sounds hollow. “Time? What for? So you can fuck him a little while longer, see if you really like it? God, Armie, just the idea of you being with him... like that... it makes me shudder!” Her face contorts in disgust. She quickly reins it in but it had been there. He'd seen it. It makes his calm resolve shatter.

“Don't you dare!” He's suddenly towering over her, his hands balled into fists.

“Or what?” She stares up at him without any sign of fear. Instead, there's mocking amusement and fierce determination in her eyes.

It dawns on Armie that this is all deliberate, that she wants to make him angry. If he allows for it he's lost.

He takes a deep breath, steps back. “Nothing. Just, please, don't say things like that.”

“Why not? Isn't it true? You suddenly like fucking a skinny boy up the ass and do god knows what with him but god forbid I call you out on that?”

“It just makes you sound mean and common, Liz. You are not such a person.”

“Don't tell me how to behave!” She jumps to her feet, a long, well-manicured finger pointing at Armie. Her sharp, orange nail reminds him of a claw. In her heels she's almost as tall as he is. “I have every right to be mean. You took that boy to bed while I was looking after our daughter, believing that you were in search for a new artistic challenge! God, I was so stupid! You searched for something entirely different down his pants.”

Armie is tempted to tell her that Tim wasn't the first but might very well be the last; that it's not a sudden change in him, brought on by the film he's shooting, but that he's been like that all his life; that he's been fucking boys up the ass as she'd put it since before their marriage and continued during it on a regular basis. But disclosing it all wouldn't be very helpful right now. If he wants her to accept his proposal he can't throw the truth at her like this. She needs to be served the facts bit by bit to be able to digest them.
Time. They need time. He needs time. So he needs to appease her. Take the blame. Apologize.

“Yes, you’re right. I behaved like an asshole. But if you feel angry and upset, can you imagine how I feel?” It's only partly a lie. Yes, he’d been fucking boys for ages but what he has with Tim is new. And yes, it scares the shit out of him.

But apparently that was the wrong way to go about it. “How you feel? Frankly, no! You are having fun here while Harper and I get left behind. I care about our family and the children.” She strokes her belly again. Armie feels slightly sick.

“Me too, Liz. That's why I need... time. I need time. This is all new and frightening for me. I didn't want this to happen. I have no idea what I'm doing... I... god!” He's sinks into an armchair, hiding his face in his hands. Fuck! He doesn't want to cry in front of her right now.

They are both silent. Armie tries to breathe deeply. When he raises his head again after a minute Liz has sat down as well. She looks pale and drained, worried and a little lost.

“Time.” She echoes, her voice flat.

“Please. We can't just continue as if nothing happened. I have to finish this film. I owe it to Luca and to Tim and to everyone.”

“What do you propose?” She doesn't look at him but stares out of the window into the bright Italian Spring.

“Just that. Let me finish this movie. I've talked to Tim. I won’t spend time alone with him anymore. At least... not like... you know.”

Liz scoffs. “And what about us?”

“I stay at my apartment. You stay here with Hops – if that's what you want. I'll see you two every day if my schedule allows. You or Tim is the choice I have to make. Right now, I can't leave either of you for the other. That's the way it is, sorry.”

Liz nods. “And you expect me to sit here and wait until you’ve made a choice?” Armie hears tears in her voice but he can't help it.

“I don't know what to expect, Liz. I'm really at a loss here.”

“Have you talked to someone else about this? Your friends? Family? A therapist?”

“I'm not sick, Liz, I'm in love.”

“You are married and were happily heterosexual last time I looked so excuse me if I beg to differ.”

And there is the impulse again to tell her everything: that their marriage is a farce and a lie; that he has to close his eyes when he's having sex with her and not because he's overwhelmed by passion; that she's a concession he made for his family, for the sake of normality; that he'd hoped marrying a good friend would make it easier to live with her; that he only stayed because of Harper but that that might not be enough anymore, not worth to sacrifice his own happiness, especially not now when he's found someone who feels like truly completing him.

But he stays quiet. Yet he knows he has to get out of here quickly because he's not sure how long he'll be able to control himself.
“As I said, I'm confused as well. So, will you grant me the two weeks it'll take to finish this?”

“Do I have a choice?” She has, Armie knows, but it might turn very ugly.

“I'd rather you wouldn't see it like this.”

“Fuck you, Armie!” She gets up and walks over to the door. “I'll stay here as long as necessary. But don't you think I'll just watch from the sideline how you carry on with that minx. If you aren't willing to fight for this marriage – I am.”

“Of course. Thanks, I guess, anyway.” He gets up as well and tries to hug her but she turns away.

“Maybe you want to look at your daughter before you leave.” She says.

He steps back. “Sorry.”

He sits next to a sleeping Harper for almost fifteen minutes, not daring to touch her as she naps peaceful, oblivious to the storm raging around her.

Despite his inner turmoil, Timmy fell asleep soon after Armie had left. When he awakes in the afternoon, his rampant hang-over is still torturing him. He feels like shit. All he wishes for is to stay unconscious so he doesn't have to think, can just drift off into sweet dreams, but his body demands FOOD and a PISS and he desperately wants to brush his teeth to get rid of that foul taste in his mouth so he drags his sorry carcass out of bed and does what needs to be done. At least there's Coke in the fridge - and an apple. Both stays down which feels like a huge victory.

Sadly, Timmy's head doesn't like the rest of his body moving around. It still hurts like hell so he swallows a handful of painkillers before stepping into the shower. He stays there until the water runs cold. He doesn't feel much better afterwards.

He's just... empty. Numb. What is he supposed to do now?

He remembers to call his mom.

“Hey, how are you, sweetie?” She asks.

“I don't know...”

“Well, you're not crying, that's some progress.”

“Not sure. I just... don't feel very good, to be honest.”

“Did you eat? Sleep?”

“Yes, mom.” Timmy can't suppress an annoyed chuckle.

“I know that sounds boring and like what every mom would say but it's important, Timothée. Sometimes it's the little things that help.”

“It's okay, mom... it's just... we talked. And it didn't left me feeling any better.”

“But at least you talked, darling. Can you tell me about it.”

Timmy sighs. “He said we need time.”
His mom's silent for a moment. “And what do you make of that?”

“I don't know. Maybe he's right. It's all rather... intense. Overwhelming.”

“For you?”

He wants to curl up in her lap and never leave.

“Yeah. It's... I mean, it's all so serious, so important, suddenly. It's fucking complicated.”

“Yes, darling.” His mom sighs. “Listen, to take your time might actually be a very good idea for you to sort things out. What do you want?”

“If I only knew, mom. Him?”

“Peter is down there with you, isn't he? Can you talk to him?”

“I'd rather not.” Timmy says reluctantly.

“May I ask why?”

“I really don't know what Brian would make of all of this...”

“Oh, sweetie, I'm so sorry that this is all so much harder for you. You know that we love you and support you no matter what, right?”

“Does Papa know?” Timmy’s nervously rubbing his knee with his free hand. It's sweaty.

“I told him that you rang, yes. And that you were upset about a man.”

Timmy did never properly come out to his parents – or anyone. There simply had been no need. He told his mom when he snogged a girl at a party just the same way he told her when it had been a boy. It just seemed natural. She never disapproved, just told him to be careful and use condoms, the same way Timmy had overheard her talk to Pauline a few years prior.

Boys, girls - it had never been an issue. He'd just somehow assumed that his Papa did know as well. As he'd been traveling a lot during Timmy's teenage years they'd never seen much of each other anyway. It had been his mother who’d had to deal with his day-to-day-shit – the trouble at junior high, bad grades, teenage frustration, his first hang-over, finding out that he'd smoked weed with a friend before recording silly hip hop tracks...

It's not that Timmy isn't close to his father but somehow Timmy's sexual preferences never came up between them. Until now it hadn't been really important to him to breach that subject to his Papa. As Timmy lived alone and there hadn't been anyone serious over the past years he'd felt the need to introduce to his parents as his significant other such a talk had seemed obsolete.

But now, after what he'd learned from Armie about his family's attitude he's suddenly not sure why his Papa had never even asked.

“And?” He inquires carefully. Could he live with his dad treating him differently from now on, knowing who he loved?

“And what?” His mother sounds confused.

“What... what did Papa say?”
“He said he wished he could be there for you, help you, give you a hug. Oh, and _amour veut tout sans nombre, amour n’a point de loi._” His mom laughs fondly. “You didn’t expect him to judge you for falling in love with a married man, did you, Timothée?”

Timmy bites his lip. “I love you, mom.”

“I love you too, darling.”

He swallows, hard. “Tell Papa I love him, yes.”

“I will. Take care, Chérie. Call us.”

Timmy grins when he hangs up. He suddenly, urgently wants Armie to meet his parents.

But these daydreams hurt too much right now.

To take his mind off things he settles onto the couch and starts to flip through the channels, finding a documentary about English castles that mildly interests him. Listening to stories about long forgotten battles, inbred nobility and torture dungeons pleasantly distracts him from the very real drama surrounding him. In a few years it will all be history as well. Time can be gracious, full of mercy. Time is a great healer.

Will Armie be back right now, Timmy wonders? Or is he still with his wife, maybe reminiscing about the time they had together. The good times. Will those memories drive him back to her? It’s nerve-wrecking that Timmy can’t do anything. Just sit and wait.

About an hour into his series it knocks on his door. For a split second he hopes it’s Armie and the longing sears through him like a hot bolt of lightning. But it’s Ferdinando, holding an actual basket like they do in fairy tales.

“Hey, Luca told me you were not feeling well.” He looks like his father would have done, amused yet a little concerned. “Had a bit of a party last night?”

“No, exactly a party, no, but I got pretty wasted with Armie.” He steps back to bid Ferdinando inside.

“Ah, yes, of course... anyway.” Something passes over Ferdinando’s face. It’s not pity. It’s more badly suppressed rage. “I brought you something. You bright young things don’t look properly after yourselves.” As if he wasn’t just about ten years older than Timmy.

He walks over into Timmy's kitchenette and takes a Tupperware canister from the basket. “I made you soup. _Brodo di Pollo._” Ferdinando looks around for bowls, realizes that he has to wash two, sighs and sets to work. After five minutes the microwave pings and he walks back over into the lounge with two steaming bowls of soup. Timmy's mouth waters.

He ends up eating it all, watching his documentary with Ferdinando in companionable silence. He doesn’t demand conversation, he doesn’t ask questions, they just savor the delicious stew, huddled up on the couch.

“Thank you.” Timmy means it when he says goodbye.

“Just go to bed, now. Luca needs you tomorrow. Good night.” A firm hug, a kiss on the cheek, and then he’s gone.

Timmy's so tired that he just drops into bed. He's glad he doesn't need to learn much text for
tomorrow as the morning will belong to two Italian actors who come over to film the lunch scene. They are friends of Luca. He and Armie will just have to sit at the table, watching, listening as the grown-ups talk.

Oh, and play footsie. But hey, that shouldn't be a problem...

Just as he's about to drift off his phone rings. It's Armie. Finally.

Timmy stretches under the sheet and closes his eyes.

“Hey.” He murmurs.

“Hey, Tim. How are you.” Armie sounds a little tense.

“Fine. Ferdinando came over and fed me chicken soup.”

“Oh.”

“Yep.”

“So you've been taken care of?”

Timmy giggles. It's good to hear Armie's voice. “Do you know what an angstloch is?”

“What are we talking about here?” Armie sounds amused if a little irritated.

“Nothing. I just watched a series about English castles. It's fascinating. The wars of the roses, all that bloodshed...”

“Sounds nice.”

“Speaking of...”

“Oh, it wasn't that bad. She didn't put the thumbscrews on me.”

“Okay... may I ask what you agreed?” Timmy swallows and snuggles deeper into his cushions.

“She said she's okay with giving me time to finish this film and sort things out. My feelings, stuff...”

“Stuff.” Timmy echoes.

“Listen, Tim. I really want this to work between us. But we have to be realistic.”

Timmy snorts.

“I know it's not fair but there's nothing gained by making my wife angry. Believe me.”

“I do.” What else can he say?

Armie is silent for a moment. Then: “Tim?”

“Yes?”

“Can I ask you something?”

Timmy feels a strange tingle in his stomach. “Of course.”
“What are you wearing?”

He bursts into giggles. “Seriously? Like, didn't you tell me no touching?”

“I'm not touching you right now, am I?”

“No, but...” Timmy laughs again but simultaneously pushes his hand down his boxer shorts.

“Are you touching yourself?” Armie sounds a little breathless.

“Yeah...”

“Good. Tell me what you're doing.”

“I'm... God, I can't do this, Armie.”

“You can, Tim. For me. Please. I miss you. I miss you so fucking much.” Timmy can hear a soft gasp.

“Okay... I’m just wearing boxer briefs. Gray boxer briefs.” He gives himself a squeeze, feels his shaft swell, harden. Bites his lip. Does it again. “I'm getting hard, Armie. I have my hand around my cock but I’m imagining it’s yours...”

“Are you wet?” Armie’s voice has dropped an octave. “Boy.”

Oh god! “Yes... daddy...,” he can’t believe he actually said that but his cock seems to like it, going by the way it twitches in his grip. “I’m already wet.” He kicks the sheet away, looks down between his legs. There’s a dark, damp spot showing where his cockhead brushes against the cotton. “I think I’ve soiled my pants. My fingers are getting sticky.” He massages just the head with the pad of his thumb, pressing it against his slit, smearing precome all over his glans, his ridge. It feels delicious.

“Oh, boy... my, beautiful, beautiful boy.” Timmy starts to float. “You want me to put you over my knee for being naughty, for touching yourself without permission? For making a mess in your pants?”

Timmy imagines he wasn’t wearing boxers but little satin panties instead, slowly soaking them. Armie would surprise him playing with himself in the frilly underwear. He would scold him, ask him what he thought he was doing... before punishing him for being such a sissy.

Jesus! He has to pinch the base of his cock as not to come on the spot.

“Please, don’t, daddy.” He whispers, trying to sound frightened which isn’t easy as he just feels horny. “I can still feel it from the last time.” It’s not a lie. With his back pressed against the mattress there’s still the slight sting of the welts, reminding him of the spanking he received. It really turns him on.

Armie seems to be in a similar state. He groans. This is apparently working for him as well. “Then you should really try to make daddy happy, don’t you think?”

“Yes, daddy.” The answer just rolls off Timmy’s tongue. He’s getting the hang of this. “What do you want me to do?”

“Take your pants off.” Timmy has to put the mobile aside and switches to speakerphone. “Are you naked?”

“Yes, daddy.”
Are you touching yourself?"

“Yes, daddy.”

“Good. I want you to send me a pic. Of you, like this. Naked, stroking your cock.”

Timmy fumbles for a moment, eventually deciding to lean his phone against a pile of books on his nightstand. He sets the self-timer, then starts to stroke himself with his left hand, his right caressing his flat stomach. After a few seconds, the flash lights up in the gloomy room.

He quickly mails the image to Armie, fondling his balls in the meantime.

“Do you like me like that, daddy? Am I a good boy?” His fingers sneak further back as he spreads his legs, rubbing his hole. The fingers of his other hand play with his nipple. His vision starts to blur. “God, daddy, please, I need you inside me. Fill me up with your big cock.”

He’s already close.

“Very nice.” There’s a tremor in Armie’s voice. “You think you’re ready for daddy’s cock?”

Timmy’s doesn’t think anything anymore. His spine arches off the bed. His stomach flutters. He can hear himself moan. “Yes, daddy, please, take me.”

“You have to suck daddy’s cock first, you know that. Come on, open up.” The hand between Timmy’s legs flies to his lips and he greedily sucks two fingers into his mouth, pressing them against his tongue the way Armie had once done. “Hmm, do you like that? My cock in your mouth?”

Timmy just hums in answer. After a moment, Armie pants: “Now daddy’s going to fuck you.”

Timmy pulls his fingers from his mouth, lets his knees fall onto each side, bending them as far as possible before pushing his wet fingers in. They slide up his tight passage to the second knuckle. He yelps and has to stop, scissoring them, trying to find his prostate.

“Can you feel daddy inside you, baby boy?”

“Ye-es, daddy. God, yes. It hurts so good.”

“Come on, fuck yourself on daddy’s big cock if that’s what you need.”

Timmy starts to thrust into himself. It burns but he doesn’t mind because Armie’s voice fills his head, cheering him on. “That’s it, baby. Come on, ride daddy’s cock. God, you’re so tight. Am I hurting you? You like daddy hurting you?”

Timmy can only gasp and moan as he fucks himself on his two fingers, watching his cock leak onto his stomach.

“I’m so close, Armie.” He whimpers. “Please…”

“You wanna come for daddy?” Armie’s voice is hoarse as well, filled with an urgent need.

“Ye-es, please, daddy, fuck me harder, make me come…”

“Okay, baby, okay.”

Timmy’s free hand drops to his throbbing cock, his fist blurring on the shaft as he strokes himself to completion, burying his fingers as deep as possible inside himself.
When he finds the little hard nub of nerves and presses down he blacks out, shouting something like “Daddy, please, fuck me, daddy” or something equally embarrassing but he doesn’t care as his hot cum shoots from his cock, hitting him on the chest and even at his chin.

Far away, he can hear Armie grunt his name as he comes as well.

For almost a minute the line is just filled with heavy breathing. Timmy feels boneless, unable to move, until eventually his left forearm starts to cramp and he has to pull his fingers out.

He winces.

“You… you okay?” Armie asks, voice rough.

Timmy takes a moment to answer. “Yeah.” He’s still drifting as he raises his cum-covered fingers in front of his face, turning his hand this way and that as he watches his spunk run down his palm, his wrist.

“God, you came so hard, daddy. You came all over me. Can I taste you, please?”

“Oh god, and you’re telling me that you never did this before?”

“No, daddy, not with anyone but you. I’m your good little boy, no one else’s.” Timmy smiles.

“Fuck, Tim, I think I’m getting hard again.”

Timmy’s grin widens before he starts to suck on his fingers. “You taste so good, daddy. Thank you for feeding me.” He sighs, deeply satisfied.

“Jesus, babe, you’re killing me here.”

“I hope not.” Timmy’s slowly coming down.

After another quiet moment Armie asks: “Was that okay for you?”

Timmy laughs, softly. “Okay? It was fucking amazing, didn’t you figure?”

“No, I mean…,” Armie sounds suddenly shy. “The role-play thing. The daddy stuff.”

‘Does she play those games with you? Do you call her your good little girl, asks her to sit in daddy’s lap, pull her pigtails?’

But aloud he says: “No-o. It was… hot. I never knew I was into this kind of thing but apparently you can teach me a thing or two.”

Armie snorts a laugh. “If you insist.”

“I do. In fact… would you like it if I… wore… you know… lingerie. Like, you know, for girls?”

Despite what they just did Timmy feels himself blush at his question.

Armie coughs as if he just choked on something.

“Are you serious? ‘Fuck, now he’ll take a rise out of me. Great!’ He should have kept his mouth shut. ‘You are just embarrassing yourself here, Chalamet!’ He rolls over onto his stomach, burying his flaming face in his pillows even if Armie can’t see him.
“Under one condition.”

Timmy’s head jerks back up. Armie doesn’t sound as if he’s taking the piss.

“Yeah?” He asks tentatively, hope blooming in his chest.

“I want you to talk French to me while wearing them. And I want to watch you get them really, really wet. Soaking, dripping wet.”

Timmy gasps. Despite his sore hole he feels himself stiffen again and rocks against the mattress.

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“Your kink is showing there, Tim.”

Timmy just giggles softly in reply.

“Good night, Armie.”

“Good night, my sweet little boy.”

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The incredible @stmonkeys did art for this fic! I still can’t believe it! Thank you so much.

This is the image Timmy sends Armie:
Timmy's Papa quotes Pierre de Ronsard.
Cheating

Chapter Summary

Well, let's say Armie is a little inconsistent...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After their little playtime last night Armie sleeps like a bay and is surprisingly well rested on Monday morning when he arrives at the villa. The emotional turmoil of the weekend had finally taken its toll and he'd crawled under the covers after hanging up. He's glad he only had one beer before calling Tim. He's still not sure if he went too far with him but apparently he said he liked it. And Armie likes that Tim is nothing if not adventurous.

Though the boy still looks a little worse for wear today. But it's a vast improvement to yesterday morning. He's a little paler than usual and his eyes are slightly reddish but that fits with Elio having a nosebleed. When Armie has changed into costume they are already preparing the napkin with the fake blood bag in it. The make-up lady explains to Tim that she'll stick a capsule up his nose as well. It's made of wax that will melt at body temperature or that he can crush when his nosebleed has to start.

The actors will be mostly improvising around him.

Tim seems a little uncomfortable at the prospect to stuffing something up his nose and Armie smiles when he sits next to him.

"Hey, you'll be okay." He gently bumps Tim's upper arm.

It almost breaks his heart to see how Tim's face lights up at his words and the brief contact. He nods in this endearingly eager way of his.

"Everything okay? I collapsed into bed last night... afterwards." Tim asks in return, his cheeks tinted a faint pink.

Armie feels hot all over at the memory. Tim's voice, breaking as he climaxes. So fucking sexy. He quickly squeezes Tim's naked knee.

Today, Tim appears fragile. He's leaning close, almost sliding out of his chair, obviously wanting to be near Armie. And Armie wants nothing more than to touch him, hold him, just for a moment, but he can't allow himself. Not with everything hanging in suspense.

Now that Liz is here he has to be more discreet. He knows how fast news travel on film sets – especially saucy news. He's sure by now everyone knows that his wife has arrived. He can't make out with Tim in public. It would humiliate Liz in a way she doesn't deserve.

They'd agreed on giving each other space. Right. Armie has to think and having Tim nuzzling his shoulder or climb into his lap, straddling him, won't help.

God, but the thought alone makes Armie shift in his seat as he starts to get hard.
Tim's eyes drop quickly to his groin and there's a knowing smirk forming on his face when Ramon - of all people - walks by, ignoring Armie completely as he tells Tim he's needed for some light and sound check. The day is overcast so they might have to reset but the actors playing the visitors are only free today so it's all a bit of hurry.

Armie watches both men leave – two tall, slim, dark-haired guys – and wonders if this is the future he should want for Tim. But just the thought hurts. No! He shakes his head and lets the make-up lady do her job on him as well, brushing his hair, applying bronzer.

It only occurs to him that he never answered Tim's question when he steps out on the terrace. Is everything okay?

The two Italian actors are talking to Luca and Amira, all four of them smoking, gesturing and laughing. Tim stands in the shade under a tree with Michael – and Ramon. Armie feels alien, left out – like the foreign guest he's playing, just passing through, not really catching on what's happening.

Until Tim sees him, waves and walks over to him – but not without briefly touching Ramon's shoulder, whispering something in his ear. The boom operator turns and gives Armie a strange look that Tim can't see because he's already coming over. It's quickly replaced by a blank expression as Ramon slowly turns back, says a few words to Michael and wanders off, presumably to search their sound mixer.

“So, did you stick it up your nose?” Armie teases.

“Not yet, no. God, that sounds weird.”

“I haven't really been aware of him until Friday. But you two seem close.” Armie nods in the direction where Ramon disappears between the peach trees.

“He's nice. We talked a few times. He likes Kid Cudi.”

“Who?”

“Never mind, old man.” Tim boxes him in the chest.

“God, I should put you over my knee, boy. I want to touch you so badly. I-”

“Can we not do this now, please.” Tim interrupts, pointing in the direction of the Italian actors. “I'm anxious enough with them over there. They're really famous over here, true thespians. I always feel like a fraud when I meet real actors.”

Armie swallows. He understands Tim way better than he might think.

“Yeah, I know what you mean. Sorry.” Armie seeks Tim's gaze.

They look at each other for a moment, a silent understanding passing between them.

Suddenly, Luca shouts: “Timothée! Armie, come over, meet Elena and Marco.”

Luca introduces them and Tim is quickly involved in a trilingual discussion while Armie stammers his way through the few Italian words he picked up. But Tim is in his element, trying to make up for his nervousness with lively chatter, gestures and laughs, switching mid-sentence from one language to the other. Everyone beams at this adorable bundle of nerves and artistic energy and Armie doesn't mind feeling once again as the odd one out because watching Tim making everyone grin fondly while talking in French is something he could do all day.
The shoot goes well. Elena and Marco are used to improvisation and just carry on and on, shrieking, sighing, yelling. The hardest thing to do is to keep a straight face – especially as they film the scene more than once to capture what's happening below the table as well.

According to the script, Oliver puts his foot onto Elio's and caresses him. It's nice.

No, it's more than nice. Armie is surprised how much this simple touch turns him on. It's been 48 hours since Tim has ridden him but it might have been 48 months for how starved of intimate touch Armie feels. He remembers the red welts all over Tim's back and has to swallow, his mouth suddenly flooded with saliva. He's just in those fucking shorts that won't hide a hard-on. God, he has to get a grip.

But as Tim's foot is returning his movements, keeping a cool face while raking his toes up the back of Armie's calve, it becomes increasingly difficult to focus. Armie looks over at him, searching for a visible reaction, but Tim just rests his face in the palm of his hand and looks for all the world as if butter couldn't melt in his mouth.

Yes, that boy is good.

The morning drags on and on after that and slowly turns into pure torture. Luca is worried about the light. So they shoot again. Luca wants to cut to Michael and Amira. So they shoot again. All the while, Tim is rubbing his foot all over Armie's, brushing his arch against Armie's leg, stroking his toes with his own long pale ones Armie so desperately wants to suck that he fears he'll start drooling onto the table if Tim doesn't stop.

It's hell but in such a delicious way that Armie never wants his torment to end.

Yet it eventually does. Tim's nose is prepared, Vanda brings the ice-cream and suddenly 'blood' shoots from Tim's nostrils, running down his mouth, his chin. Armie knows it's just food coloring but he's nevertheless shocked by the sight. Tim bleeding is something he doesn't want to see ever again. It makes him feel helpless and extremely uneasy.

Luckily, they wrap soon after for lunch. Armie finds Tim cleaning up in the kitchen.

He can only stare as Tim washes his face, snorting and spluttering.

“Fuck, this stuff tastes foul.” Tim spits into the sink. Armie watches the crimson rivulets wash down the drain and feels a little dizzy. He has to grab the counter.

“Hey, you okay?” Tim sounds a bit worried.

“Yeah, just you, and all that blood... sorry.”

Tim uses a tea-towel to dry his face. “It's not real.”

“I know. Still...”

“Sorry.”

“Do you have a moment?” Armie touches Tim's elbow. He knows he shouldn't but he can't help it, feeling suddenly overwhelmed by irrational fears. He needs... something, just a little, right now, like an addict craving for a fix.

They go up into the attic, Armie leading the way. Tim follows without asking questions.
Up there, Armie lights a cigarette. Tim reaches for it. Their fingers brush.

Tim takes a deep drag, exhaling a perfect circle. Armie is impressed.

“Wow.”

“I have many hidden talents.”

“Where did you learn that?”

“Back in France when I was fourteen.” Tim grins. “At football camp. One of the older boys taught me. You have to use your lips and tongue in a certain way.”

Tim looks at him all innocence. Armie feels his dick harden.

“I bet you were a quick study. Eager.” He steps up close and takes the cigarette from Tim's mouth, allowing his fingertips to linger a moment at his plump lower lip. It's like an electric current searing through his body.

“No. I was pretty shy.” Tim casts his eyes down. His voice is soft, low, subdued.

Armie wants him so badly it hurts in his bones. He grinds his teeth together in an effort to restrain himself from touching, taking, bending Tim over one of the old dressers covered in cob webs to fuck him until he screams his name.

He'd hold him, afterwards, stroke him, kiss his bruises, lick his scratches, make it all good.

“We should go back.” Armie's voice is rough as he stubs out the cigarette on the dirty window sill.

“Just... a moment.” Tim curls his fingers around Armie's wrist. The simple touch makes his heart rate speed up. Tim must feel his pulse hammering beneath his skin.

“I miss you. So fucking much.” Tim whispers, stepping up even closer. Their bodies are almost touching.

“I miss you too.” Armie croaks out. He can't move.

“When your foot touched mine under that table I got hard. Really hard.”

Armie can't look into those mesmerizing green eyes or he's lost. But as he averts his gaze he sees the mattress they filmed Tim fucking into a peach on. It doesn't help.

“Me too.” He breathes.

Tim leans in, inhales. “Why are we doing this, Armie? I'm not sure I can do this.”

“God, Tim, we can't...,” Armie knows he should step back, leave this gloomy attic, run down the stairs. They'll surely be missed at lunch. This is a mistake...

The collar of Tim's white t-shirt has shifted a bit around his neck. When Armie eventually looks at him there's the edge of the hickey he sucked into his skin on Friday night, now fading into a yellowish purple, just visible under the cotton.

They were happy then.

Tim seems to get what he's staring at. He tilts his head as if to give Armie an even better view.
“You wanna see more? I can still feel it.”

The creaking floorboards start shifting – or are Armie's knees giving out? Whatever, he's done for.

He has to see.

“Take your t-shirt off and turn around.”

Tim does without hesitation, balling the t-shirt in his fists so not to drop it down into the dust. The shutters are closed, allowing only thin stripes of hazy sunlight shining through. The effect plays tricks on Tim's pale skin, painting stripes across his back.

It adds to the welts Armie put there. When Armie touches them the skin feels slightly raised. Tim shudders.

“I can feel you all over me every time I move.” Tim sighs, rolling his shoulders before stretching a little. Armie wants to cover him with his whole body, rub himself against the sore flesh, make Tim remember so he never forgets what they shared. Burn this feeling into his memory, crawl under his skin, settle in his soul.

But instead he pulls his hand back, drinks Tim in with one last look and steps around to face him. Tim's eyes are dark, heavy lidded, pupils blown. He looks like a debauched cherub.

“When you're in bed tonight I want you to touch yourself again, remembering my belt biting your skin. I want you on all fours, fingering yourself until you come. I want you to lick it up afterwards and send me a pic of your mouth full of your cum. Can you do that for me, babe?”

Tim licks his lips and Armie wants to bite them until they are swollen, raw. Tim blinks a few times, but his gaze stays hazy, unfocused. “Yeah.” He breathes.

“Good boy. Now get dressed and lets go downstairs. You really need to put on some weight. You're just skin and bones.”

And doesn't he love it?

Armie flees down the stairs, hearing Tim bouncing behind him.

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Over lunch, Timmy is still so turned on he can only pick at his plate, popping an olive here or biting a bread stick in between. The sight of Armie sucking on a slice of orange almost has him come in his pants. He's pulled on his gray track suit bottoms against the chill of the overcast day – and to hide his excitement – but he's not sure it's working.

It's true what he's told Armie in the attic. He can still feel the welts on his back. He jerked off this morning in the shower as the hot spray rained down on his bruised skin but the relief he's felt was only temporary. He missed Armie's touch even more.

Playing footsie with him under the table the whole morning has been a delicious ordeal. It had allowed him to touch Armie's skin. Luca had even demanded it, so what could he do but oblige? The real ordeal has been that they'd been surrounded by people who'd watched them so they couldn't take it any further.
Timmy's sure Armie would have been up for it, regardless what he says about keeping his distance. Judging by the dark blue his eyes had turned as Timmy's toes had stroked his ankle he'd been at least as turned on as Timmy. There had been goosebumps on his forearms and thighs, his long golden hairs standing on end.

And up in the attic Timmy had been proven right.

God, what is it with them? He becomes more and more like the horny teenager he's playing despite already being twenty!

But he misses Armie so fucking much, even if it has just been a day or two. The time-out Armie has called for is already grating on his nerves – after barely 48 hours.

Well, and wasn't last night cheating anyway?

Thankfully, his hang-over has receded and he feels human again. But now doubts start to plague him. What if Armie is just biding his time? What if he's just stalling? What if this limbo drags on and on?

What if Armie chooses Liz?

When Timmy has time to think cold dread washes over him. So he tries to distract himself.

Ramon helps. They talk about music and he doesn't have to explain who the artists are he mentions. He has surprisingly good taste, meaning he like essentially what Timmy likes and that's cool. He's done an internship in New York back last winter and even watched Timmy's play.

It's just nice to have someone roughly his age he can just chat with. Without any emotional baggage.

It takes his mind off other, more complicated things.

Like now, for example, as he's sitting together with Armie in this little nook, crammed together, legs entwined as he presses a 'bloodied' handkerchief to his face. Armie had looked a little nauseous as it had been put into his hand.

'It's not real!' Timmy wants to scream. He hadn't known how much it affects Armie to see him bleed. It touches something deep inside Timmy and makes him feel worse for the times Armie's seen his cuts. Good thing he didn't succumb to it on Saturday. He also hopes it keeps Armie away from purging. It might have been an indecent proposal but the end justifies the means.

Now, Timmy's reaching over, touching Armie's slightly stubbly neck, the hollow of his throat, the skin silky soft there between beard and chest hair. It's almost too much and simply not enough.

When Armie looks at him it feels like he's devouring Timmy heart and soul, his gaze so intense Timmy has to bite the napkin.

At the end of one take, Armie even kisses the arch of his foot and Timmy has to stay seated after Luca called cut because he's undeniably hard. To make matters worse, Armie leans in and whispers: “I really want to suck your toes, babe.”

Timmy punches his chest and tries to straddle him but Armie pokes him in the ribs until he shrieks and then they both roll around on the floor of the tiny alcove until Timmy almost hits his head on the door of the ancient fridge. Sayombhu has to step in to prevent one of them ending up with a concussion.
But both can play this game. As Armie holds him down a second longer, Timmy dares to press his hard-on against his thigh. Armie's eyes literally rolling back in his head is immensely gratifying for Timmy, a small revenge. They both grin like idiots as they are told to change back in their own clothes.

As they are already on their way out Luca calls Armie over. Timmy stays back, waiting by the car. Ramon sidles up to him.

“Hey!”

“Hey.”

“Are you waiting for him?” Ramon nods in the direction of Armie and Luca.

Timmy shrugs. “We share the car.”

Ramon grins but says nothing. He lights a cigarette and offers another to Timmy who gratefully accepts.

“How was your weekend?”

Timmy sighs. “Haven't you heard?” He's caught some looks today, not outright pitying but a little sad, sympathetic, compassionate. He's sure everyone knows by now that Liz is in town.

To Timmy's relieve Ramon just shrugs. “If you are... bored... you can come with us to Milan tonight. Clubbing.”

“It's a Monday.” Timmy says tartly.

“So what?” Ramon laughs. “There's a club you might like.”

Timmy is silent for a moment. What is there for him in Crema apart from a lonely apartment, Netflix and thoughts of Armie? “Who's us?”

“Me and a few friends.”

Why not, Timmy thinks. Sounds more fun than what otherwise awaits him “Okay.”

“Great. Fine. I come and get you at about nine, okay?” He flicks his cigarette away and retreats as Armie comes over.

“What did Luca want?” Timmy asks as they get into the car.

“Just something about the scene tomorrow.” They'll be filming in Crema the next day, the scene where Elio gives Oliver a copy of Armance. Timmy has read the book in preparation for the film and he knows Armie owns a copy as well. He'd thrown it at him just before he'd summoned all his courage and reached into Armie's boxers for the first time. The thought alone makes him shiver.

“And what did your groupie want?” Armie grins wickedly

Timmy swats Armie's biceps. “Groupie? Who still says shit like that? Shut up. He's nice. He asked me out tonight.”

Armie arches an eyebrow.

“To go clubbing in Milan.”
Armie nods, putting on his shades. “And?”

“And what? I said yes. We'll go out. No big deal. You said I should have fun.”

“Just remember the last time.”

That's a low blow. Timmy hates that he can't see Armie's eyes.

“Fuck you! I don't... listen, I was upset back then, high, drunk. Everything between us was all wrong. It's totally different now. I'm just going out and have some fun to... take my mind of other things.”

Armie lip twitches. “Sorry. It's stupid.”

“It is.” Timmy nods with vehemence, feeling a little calmer. “You are.”

“I want you so bad it hurts in my teeth.” Armie pushes his sunglasses up into his hair and grabs Timmy's wrist, squeezing so hard he can feel his bones grind together. “I know this is all shit. I know I have no right to... fuck, Tim, just please give me what I asked for. Please. I might go mad otherwise.”

Timmy doesn't flinch or pull his arm back. “Of course.” He promises, touching Armie's cheek with his free hand.

Back at his apartment, Timmy showers and then searches through the pile on his floor for some fresh clothes. He decides on his black jeans, baggy black t-shirt, his A$AP mob hoodie and his beloved Golf Wang Vans.

But before he dresses, he remembers what Armie had wanted to see. He also remembers his deep voice telling him what to do back in the attic and that's enough to make him half-hard already.

Timmy's still naked as he crawls on the bed, getting on all fours, arching his back. He feels his sore skin stretch deliciously, the burn reminding him of Armie's belt licking his sensitive flesh. He whimpers softly as he squeezes some lube into his palm and starts to stroke himself to full hardness, supporting himself on just one arm.

God, this feels good! He tugs his balls and rolls them in his slippery grip, biting his lip while canting his hips. He thinks of their phone sex, how hard he came and wishes he had one of Armie's boxers to bury his face in.

But all he has is his hoodie Armie had worn. It will have to do. He almost jumps off the bed to pull it from the chair Armie had draped it over.

It still smells of him. Timmy spreads it over his pillows and presses his nose into its folds. He hears Armie in his head, telling him to finger himself.

He does. Reluctantly at first, with just one finger. The angle is strange and it doesn't do much for him.

He gets up again and searches for his belt.

He ends up with the hoodie over his head, kneeling in the middle of the mattress, two fingers up his ass as he whips himself with his own belt over his shoulders, alternating between left and right.

It hurts. It's not as good as when Armie did it but it's enough to remind him of that night, the ache,
Armie's words praising his endurance and his beauty, whispering all those filthy things he wanted to do to him.

Timmy's hips stutter as he remembers how he'd begged for it, how Armie had made him spread himself wider, welcoming each stroke, longing for it, yearning for the sharp twinge, both loving and hating the hiss of the belt in the air.

His own smacks get weaker as arousal overwhelms him. He bites the thick fabric of the hoodie to stifle his gasps as he aims for his prostate.

When he finds it he has to drop the belt, tears the jumper from his head and stares down at his throbbing, pulsing cock, jutting out wet and red, the slit dripping with precome. His balls feel full when he pinches them.

Next time he wants to do this in front of a mirror, a ball gag shoved between his teeth, drool dripping onto his chest – while Armie watches, sitting in an armchair, playing with himself.

Shooting all over Timmy's face but doesn't allow him to orgasm...

It's enough. Timmy shouts, coming all over the sheets and pillows, even hitting the wall. He feels his rim clench around his fingers. Yeah, that's it...

He knows what he has to do now. It's humiliating but that doesn't stop him. On the contrary...

He takes his phone with his clean hand and first takes a picture of the gooey puddle on the sheets. Then he bows down and starts licking it up. It's not easy to get the angle right but he does his best to get all of it in the picture without staring at the camera lens. When he's cleaned it all up he gargles, moving his tongue to make it look frothy and takes another pic.

He must look like a greedy slut.

Instead of swallowing, he spits it back into his palm and stares at the white foam. He remembers watching a snowballing video once that turned him on so much he came in his pants before he could even properly touch his cock.

So he films himself slurping his cum up again, capturing it with '#wish it was yours' before hitting send. With a grin, he takes a last picture of his spunk dripping down the wall. It might be juvenile but it makes him strangely proud.

He forces himself to look at all the pics afterwards. He's mortified of what he just did but to his surprise the embarrassment triggers an excited flutter in his stomach. Interesting.

He still feels buzzed and dismisses the thought of another shower. He wants to go out like this, smelling faintly of sex, with Armie's scent in his nostrils and the taste of his own cum in his mouth.

His phone pings just as he's finished dressing, fastening Armie's bracelet around his wrist. It's a text, just three words.

“I love you.”

Timmy grins from ear to ear but then Ramon rings and he speeds down the stairs and jumps onto his Vespa, hugging him tightly from behind as they cruise through the balmy Italian night in the direction of Milan.

Timmy feels the wind in his hair and smells the fumes, the pines, the sweet scent of flowers he
doesn't know the name of and to his own surprise he's content. Carefree.

He laughs out loud and when Ramon turns around and asks what's so funny he can't give an answer. He just feels happier than he's been for a long while.

Chapter End Notes

I'm Isitandwonder on tumblr.
When Tim arrives the next day on set and hides his eyes behind his dark Ray Ban’s Armie feels instantly uneasy. As it occurs to him that he hasn't seen Ramon either this morning his hunch almost becomes nauseating certainty.

“Hey!” He forces himself to walk over to Tim, greeting him more jovial than usual. “Had a good night last night?”

Tim just grabs a bottle of water from a cool bag, downs half of it in one go and yawns. “Pretty much.”

They are meeting in a quiet side street of Crema. It's still early, around eight, and the area is cordoned off for filming. The crew has already been setting everything up since six.

“Where's your admirer?”

Timmy scoffs. “No idea. He dropped me off when we got back around... four?”

Armie arches an eyebrow. “Did he?”

“Not sure about the time. It's all a bit blurry. But I'm quite sure I slept alone tonight if that's what you want to know. How about you?” Tim sounds acerbic. Armie doesn’t like it.

“Don’t be ridiculous.” As if he would spend the night with Liz!

“Same.” Tim takes off his shades. His eyes are a little small but clear. “So you liked my pics?” The boy has the nerve to show him a dirty smirk.

Armie feels himself blush. “Very much. They made my evening, in fact.” It's true. Armie had just received them after FaceTiming Harper good night. The wank he'd had over Tim slurping up his cum had been outright epic. Just thinking about it now threatens to make him hard again. “I especially liked the little bonus.”

“I bet you did.” Tim turns sideways and suddenly stands very close, tilting his head up to glance provocatively at Armie from under his lashes. He so desperately wants to kiss him it makes his skin prickle all over.

Last week he might just have done it without second thoughts.

They look at each other, sharing a secret that just belongs to the two of them, the air between them static with the need to touch.
“Armie, darling, there you are! Harper, look, there's your daddy.” Liz’s voice cuts through Armie’s wistful fantasies like a sharp knife. Tim steps back as if he'd been slapped, lowering his shades again in a mixture of shock and annoyance.

Armie wants to tell him that he's as surprised as Tim himself but in the next second Harper is thrust into his arms while Liz leans in to kiss him on the mouth. “You really have to talk to the security, husband. They didn't want to let me through. Luckily Luca walked by.” His wife shakes her perfectly coiffed head.

Armie presses his nose into his daughter’s fine blond hair and inhales deeply. The smell of chamomile and baby powder calms him down a little. But when he wants Harper to say hello to Tim he's gone. Irritated, Armie turns back to Liz who looks at him expectantly.

“What are you doing here?” He asks, shifting Harper on his right hip.

“I'm visiting my husband on set, like I always do.” Liz quips. She smiles but her eyes are hard as if daring him to object.

“Did you also bring some paparazzi, like you always do?” Armie smiles at her, equally false. He wonders if it deceives anyone.

“What can I do, they follow me.” Liz's eyes flash, but not with amusement.

“Is that so?” Armie feels a headache coming on. Hops wiggles in his arms and wants down.

“Won't you show us around?”

So Armie walks his wife and daughter down the cobbled street and explains that they’ll shoot an important scene today in which Elio gives Oliver a book inscribed with a very personal note that sums up their relationship perfectly yet sheds a very sad light on their future but he’s not sure Liz listens as she staggers along in her high-heels. Speaking of Elio and Oliver feels safe enough yet works also as a metaphor for him and Tim. Armie almost wishes she might sprain an ankle and doesn’t wait for her as he talks and points at various screw members.

Harper happily strolls around, trying to climb rigs and even the dolly. Sayombhu smiles and patiently let's her explore until her curiosity is peaked by a covey of doves flocking together in the small Piazza at the end of the street. She runs towards them, chasing the birds while laughing loudly. The whole crew watches and grins, cheering her on in Italian, French and English. She stops, cocks her head and listens with seriousness before running off again. Liz stands next to Armie who can't suppress a proud smile blooming on his face.

As his wife takes his arm she asks quietly: “Do they all know about you and Timothy?”

Armie smiles on and nods without looking at her. “Yes.”

Liz grips his biceps hard enough to bruise, her fingers like a vise. “You two have no shame at all.” She whispers, voice hoarse, head held high, back ramrod straight.

“Nothing to be ashamed off.” Armie counters. His eyes search the street for Tim but can't find him. Is he getting dressed or in make-up?

“You're a married man and think it's perfectly fine to make out with that scrawny kid for all the world to see? I think I'm about to be sick.” Liz shifts her weight from one foot to the other, tossing her head back so the morning sun catches the blond highlights in her long brown hair.
Armie turns towards her, as gently as possible dislodging her hand. "No one asked you to come out here. I'm not standing around while you insult Tim. Excuse me, I have a film to shoot." Liz still smiles, the grin a grimace frozen on her face. When he starts to walk away, however, Tim is suddenly on the Piazza. He has scooped up Harper who sits on his narrow shoulders as he plays plane with her, running in circles around the small square. His daughter shrieks with delight.

Armie stares, overwhelmed by warm fatherly happiness. This looks right. Good. Like a glimpse into their future.

Until Liz yells. "Harper, for god's sake! Armie, get her down, before the boy drops our daughter."

Tim stops, gazing at Armie, his chest heaving. He holds firmly onto Harper's plump short legs while her pudgy hands are entangled in his hair. Armie knows he would never let her fall but Liz is already staggering over towards them.

With a sheepish grin and a little blush Tim lowers Harper from her dizzy height. She screams in protest. Liz reaches for her with outreached arms as not to have to get too close to Tim but Harper squirms as she’s handed over, even kicks.

"Harper. Be a good girl!" Liz’s voice is strained, too loud. The crew is staring and Armie knows he has to intervene before his wife says or does something unforgivable.

He steps up towards them: "Come to daddy."

Harper throws herself into his chest while Liz gives him a condescending look before turning back to Tim: "You have to be careful with what you do." Her tone is sharp, outright contemptuous. Tim’s face flushes up to the tips of his ears. He opens his mouth to say something but Armie cuts in, addressing Harper to claim some neutral ground: "I think that's enough excitement for one day, young lady. How about you and your mother go get a nice ice-cream? Come on, Liz, there’s a delicious Gelateria round the corner. You’ll love it."

It's Tim's favorite place but Armie keeps that to himself. When he leaves the set he sees Ramon sidles up to Tim from the corner of his eyes, putting an arm around his shoulder. He's almost grateful for the other man’s presence, for someone standing by Tim’s side. Almost.

Liz's good-bye is icy but luckily today she doesn't seem to want to cause more of a scene than she already has. Just when Armie wants to tell Tim that he’s truly sorry for what happened Luca steps in, already annoyed at the delay.

"Armie, Timothée, over here. Where are your bikes? Yes. Here are your marks. You walk down from there and stop at the corner."

The atmosphere between them is so tense that they have to shoot this simple scene about five times. Their usual ease and levity are missing. Instead, their acting comes over stiff, the glances passing between them full of doubt and misgivings. By the end of it Luca is scratching his head.

"Okay, boys, next scene is Elio coming out of this shop and giving you the book. You read the inscription, Armie, as Timothée looks on. What you read touches you deeply but you don't fully understand it. Elio is curious if you get what he means. We'll need some close-ups so we have to do this at least twice. Good? Let's go."

It's a disaster.

When Armie opens the book he realizes that Tim has written the lines himself. 'Zwischen immer und nie. - For you in silence, somewhere in Italy'... he has to swallow hard. The words start to swim.
He promptly misses his cue. Luca gets a little irritated. “No, no, no. Armie, concentrate. This is important!”

They roll again. This time Armie manages to croak: “This is the best present I've received all year...”

Tim answers, but his voice is flat. “I'm glad then. I just wanted to... I know – no speeches. Ever.”

He looks as Armie as if he’s about to bolt, about to scream, reminding Armie of a wounded animal about to leash out against anyone, even the people who want to help.

They try it a few more times but it somehow doesn't work. The connection between them is gone. Luca runs out of ideas. So they shoot Elio and Oliver walking through the streets with their bikes some more before wrapping early.

Armie can’t wait to seize the opportunity to finally talk to Tim alone but just as he approaches him Tim’s phone rings. He answers it after a short glance at the display, pointedly turning away from Armie. “Peter! - Yeah, sure. - Finished, already. - Where? - Yeah, I know it. - Okay.” Tim ends the call, pockets his phone and walks away without giving Armie as much as a cursory glance.

Armie’s left feeling lost, bitter and more than a little stupid.

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The night out had been so much fun. The club Ramon took Timmy to was tiny but his friends were rad while the music was simply great. Timmy danced, downed the odd beer – giving shots and weed a wide berth – and was just having a good time.

It was way too noisy to talk inside but from time to time Ramon pulled him outside for a smoke. A group of girls smiled over but both ignored them and instead talked hip hop, movies, New York, shared some anecdotes of when they had been totally whacked and laughed about the shit they had come up with.

As it turned out, Ramon didn’t drink. “I smoke from time to time but not when I'm driving.” He explained, shrugging.

Timmy thought that kinda cool.

They left around three in the morning when the club started to empty and Ramon dropped him off at his apartment about an hour later.

“Thank you. That was... nice.” Timmy smiled after clambering off the Vespa. He stood in front of his door with his hands in his pockets, unsure of what to do.

“Yes.” Ramon grinned. “We should do this again. Sometime soon.”

“Yeah...” Timmy bit his lips. “So...,” he shrugged his shoulders.

“Get some sleep, movie star. I have to be up in... oh, fuck, about two hours. I better go.” Ramon kickstarted the scooter and was gone.

He didn't even try to kiss Timmy. He wasn’t sure if he should be relieved or disappointed.

Four hours of sleep are not much but better than nothing. He's still a little drowsy when he arrives on set. Armie asks about last night but before he can go full on jealous alpha male Liz, of all people, arrives.
What’s going on here? Timmy feels as if he got off at the wrong station.

He slips away, making himself invisible, and thankfully Ramon appears from under one of the black gazebos, handing him a large paper cup with strong coffee.

“Here, thought you might need it.” He nods over to where Armie stands with his wife and daughter. “Did you know she was coming?”

Timmy feels a little nauseous and takes a sip of coffee to hide his face. Maybe it’s just from the lack of sleep? “No.”

“Sorry.” Ramon touches his arm briefly. “This sucks. I once fell for a married man. God, it was a catastrophe.”

“Nice.” Timmy says dryly. Ramon looks serious.

He's silent for a moment before continuing: “They never leave them, you know.” He's not looking at Timmy as a hard expression passes over his tired face. “No matter what they promise you.”

‘Thanks a bunch,’ Timmy thinks, ‘just what I needed to hear.’

Loud he says: “No, I didn’t know that.” Ramon’s comment raises his hackles. He’s not to be cut out by Liz, he decides. This is his film set. He’s one of the leads. He won’t be hiding! Timmy puts the coffee cup on a folding table nearby and skips over to where Hops is chasing pigeons.

“Hey, darling, I missed you! Do you remember me?” She throws herself into Timmy's arms as an answer and he scoops her tiny body up to sit her on his shoulders and run around in circles, making silly noises.

Until Liz puts an end to it.

He stills, feeling like a thief, a usurper. As she tells him to be careful he knows it's not about Hops at all.

When Armie sends them over to their Gelateria Timmy feels like throwing up again. He'll never be able to go to his favorite ice-cream parlor again without thinking of Liz. Fuck it!

Fuck her!

No, that’s not… she’s Armie’s wife. The mother of his children. He shouldn’t think of her like that. Hate just breeds hate.

‘You are better than that!’ He chides himself - but it’s hard.

Later, they don't find a rhythm for their scenes. The acting feels heavy, wooden. Armie either looks at him with puppy eyes as if he's about to cry or forgets his lines altogether and it unnerves Timmy to no end. This scene is so important in the book but Armie ruins it time and time again, caught up in the trappings of his wrecked private life. It makes Timmy want to scream at him.

‘It’s your fault! Get it together! Just for once act like an adult!’

What he really means is: ‘Just fucking decide. Just choose me over her.’

Timmy knows his anger and impatience are not helping but he can't suppress his annoyance. He’s worn thin. He’s giving Armie anything he asks for but in return he just receives lies, half-truths and subterfuge.
Gladly, Peter rings him at the end of the shoot and asks to meet him for an early dinner in a restaurant near the river. It offers Timmy a much needed escape.

He doesn’t even say good-bye to Armie. He just can’t face him right now.

His agent’s husband already awaits him at the small trattoria.

“Timothée, dear, you look good. A bit tired but good. Is filming taking its toll?” Peter is dressed in a light linen suit and looks quite dashing, old-fashioned cosmopolitan, like a globetrotter from a bygone era.

“I’ve been out last night.”

“Having fun? That's good. But not too much.” Peter winks before looking at him more serious. Timmy wonders if his mother has spoken to him after all.

“No, I'm careful.” Timmy smiles. He's really happy to see Peter. Without him, he wouldn't probably be here.

“So, tell me all about it! All the gossip. I had work to do over the weekend, went to Venice, Rome… networking. But now I’m all yours. You know I will join you the other day? Together with André.”

“Yeah.” To be honest, Timmy dreads it and is at odds with Luca’s decision. He feels very young, inexperienced and even inhibited in the author's presence and wishes he wouldn’t have to film with him. What if he disappoints him with how he portrays the character he’s created?

He's saved from talking about the movie by the waiter taking their orders. Afterwards, he asks Peter about New York and Brian, enjoys listening to stories from home until dinner is over. It’s a familiar world he misses.

But Peter is not so easily fooled. “Now that you've successfully distracted me from telling me what's going on on set you have to have coffee with me as well. Come on. Give me all the juicy bits.”

Timmy feels himself blush.

“Oh? Oh! Do those juicy bits by any means involve – you?”

Timmy swallows hard, nods and sighs. Peter will hear about it anyway the moment he sets foot on set – actually, Timmy wonders if he’s not bluffing and already knows, having watched him and Armie last Friday night at the party- so it might be better if Timmy tells him first, in his own words. It’ll allow him to give his version of events.

Peter leans over, the smile wiped off his face. “What happened? You suddenly look... troubled.”

Timmy nods again, unable to form words.

“An affair, I guess.”

It's not just confessing having fallen for someone married – it's coming out to someone as well. Timmy has never done this before. He wishes they had ordered something stronger than coffee.

“The way you look makes me really worried. Please, Timothée, talk to me.”

“Can you promise not to tell Brian?”

“Of course not.” Peter sounds taken aback. “That bad? What the hell did you do?”
Timmy holds Peter's gaze. He says just one word, the only word he's apparently able to voice: “Armie.”

Peter stares at him and stares some more. Then he leans back - and laughs.

“Armie Hammer? You cracked Armie Hammer? God, Timo, Brian will never believe that.” He wipes tears from his eyes with his napkin.

Timmy doesn't know if he should feel relieved or hurt at Peter's giggling fit. So he just sits there and waits for it to pass.

When Peter has calmed down a bit he chuckles. “Armie Hammer. You know, there have been rumors. For years. Male escorts. Stuff like that. But then his wife got that baby...”


“Is that her name? Holy fuck – that wife! Boy, what did you get yourself into? I heard she's a harpy.”

Timmy shrugs. “You'll see for yourself. She's here. Came to set today.” He plays with his spoon, drawing patterns into his coffee drags. Aren’t they used to tell the future? He could really do with a divination right now.

“She's here? Are you kidding me? Does she know?”

Timmy nods, gnawing nervously on his lip.

“Shit! God, Timo, what the hell... what a mess. I hope it's worth it?”

Is it? “I don't know.”

Peter gets suddenly serious again. “Listen, Timothée, shall I talk to Luca? Or shall I talk to Brian and he talks to Luca? Just, please... it has been so hard to raise the money for this movie, we’re all basically working for board and lodging only because this project is so important... so don't fuck this up. Please.”

Timmy feels a little wounded that Peter thinks more about the movie than about him but from his perspective as producer he can understand it.

He pulls himself together. No use wallowing in self-pity. “No, of course not, we have come to an agreement. Luca knows. It's just – today has been pretty shit.” He feels suddenly on the verge of tears. “It was... humiliating.”

Peter nods and takes Timmy's right hand in both of his. “We'll sort this out, Timo. I promise.”

It feel surprisingly good to hear that.

Chapter End Notes

As you can see, this story now has a final chapter count! It will be 60 chapters and 3 epilogues set roughly ten years apart.
After one of the shittiest days of his life Armie decides that he's earned himself a liquid dinner. He buys a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label, a packet of Marlboro's, switches off his phone and sets to work.

By nine he's meticulously shitfaced.

By eleven he's wasted.

The bottle is almost empty – as is the packet of cigarettes. His throat hurts and his stomach burns. The room spins. He's lying on the couch because what's the point in sitting upright when he's alone? Can as well get comfy. His eyes keep falling shut and at some point he's too tired to open them again. He'll just rest a little.

He can hear Tim's laugh. He's on the terrace of the Villa, holding a baby, presenting it to Armie when he approaches. Rain is pouring down and everything is wet, Tim's hair plastered to his forehead. The baby cries and cries. 'He won't sop.' Tim says and drops the child just as Armie reaches them...

He jerks awake. It's still dark but outside the birds have started singing. The dream lingers at the corner of his foggy conscience. His mouth is dry, tongue swollen, head pounding. He's far from sober. And he needs to piss.

As he gets up, the floor seems to be moving. He staggers into the bathroom while holding onto various pieces of furniture. His hands have trouble to obey his sloshed brain. He needs a few attempts to open his trousers.

Swaying above the toilet bowl, one palm pressed against the tiled wall to steady himself, he can only hope to hit the mark.

Maybe water would help? He fills his tooth glass and greedily gulps it down.

Yet he’s bringing it back up again straight away, luckily still standing at the sink. While retching and coughing, he remembers the night Tim found him and the promise he’s made.

But where is Tim now?

Hanging out with someone else, having fun, not even bothering how Armie’s feeling.

Staring at himself in the mirror, a cruel smile spreads on his ashen face.

Fuck it.

Tim isn't here. He won't know. And if he finds out he has to cut himself. That was the deal.
Armie hates himself but he hates Tim even more in this moment because he's left him to his own devices, because he seems to be really friendly with this Ramon who is young and beautiful like Tim, because he met someone else after filming today, because Armie cares so much for him it hurts and when he hurts, Tim should hurt as well and oh god he's such an asshole but he just wants the pain to subside, to transform into something he can handle, he's used to – guilt, self-loathing, shame, anger…

Armie closes his eyes before pushing two fingers down his throat. He dry-heaves a few times until he feels the familiar sour taste of whiskey mixed with bile rise in his throat, filling his mouth.

It’s a real shame with the Johnny Walker.

He throws up until his legs starts shaking, threatening to give out. Too weary to even cry he curls up on the bathroom floor where he soon passes out again.

He's sad and pathetic and he knows it. Guilt and self-loathing spread a blanket of merciful unconsciousness over him as they lure him into a now thankfully dreamless sleep.

Luckily, he’s expected on set late the next day because Tim films with Esther, Michael, Amira, Peter and André before. Armie just has one short scene in which he’s in the background and quickly goes upstairs to prepare for Elio's and Oliver's midnight meeting.

He still feels like shit and looks not much better. His whole body hurts from hours spent on cold tiles. He's too old for this.

Piano music is wafting through the open windows as he arrives at the Villa, something melancholic and slow. Armie instantly knows it’s Tim playing. When he can hear Luca call cut he walks inside. The scene is set up in the Perlman's living room.

Usually, Armie would joke around with the crew and say hello to everybody before asking Tim about the piece of music but he feels too tired tonight. Washed-out. He just watches from the sideline, lingering in the hallway. Tim still sits at the piano – maybe they’ll do the scene again? Armie sees him look around and stretch, raising his slim arms over his head. He's wearing a brightly colored shirt too large for his thin frame. When Amira ruffles his hair he smiles before getting up. André says something in French to him, making Tim laugh out loud, throaty. He blushes a little and shakes his head, touching his neck, his chin before stuffing his hands into the pockets of his jeans, bouncing on his toes. He seems at ease yet a little fidgety as his gaze again darts somewhat nervously through the room full of bustling people.

Michael stands by the piano, leafing through his script, frowning. Luca is talking to Peter, their heads lowered over a small monitor, before he turns to Sayombhu, raising his hands and peering through the quad formed by his fingers. An AD marks a spot on the hallway floor with black tape, nodding to Armie in greeting.

Armie's just about to go over to Tim and say hello when Peter approaches him.

“Mr Hammer, a word, please.”

There's something in his voice that catches the attention of Armie's hung-over brain. He's suddenly on guard.

“Peter. Hi. How did it go today?” They shake hands. They had talked a bit at the party on Friday, mostly about how much they both loved Italy and a little about Tim.

“Can we go outside?” The producer sounds jovial but there's something in his tone Armie doesn't
like. Yet he's technically his boss so he doesn't really have an option to say no.

When they reach the driveway of the Villa Peter takes out his cigarettes, sighs and offers one to Armie. He shakes his head. His throat is still sore.

“You know that Timothée's agent is my husband?” Peter begins and Armie suddenly has an idea where this is going.

“Tim mentioned it, yes.” Armie crosses his arms in front of his chest and waits. Spears is as tall as he himself which is an unfamiliar feeling, standing eye to eye.

“Timothée has told me what's been going on. Between you two.”

Armie stays quiet.

“It's a delicate situation.” Spears takes a deep drag.

Armie still holds his gaze but wishes he'd accepted the cigarette.

The producer continues: “Timothée is very young. And very gifted. He's special, one in a million. He'll be going places if we're all careful and protect his huge talent. Don't you agree?” Spears stares straight at Armie's face and it feels as if his sharp eyes peer right into Armie's soul, weighing it and find it lacking.

“What is this talk? I break his heart you break my legs?” Armie tries to sound amused but he actually feels his guts twisting.

“A bit late for that, Mr Hammer.”

“Everyone calls me Armie.”

“I prefer Mr Hammer.” Spears gives Armie a thin smile. This is going downhill quickly.

“Did Tim ask you to speak to me?”

“Not literally. But we talked. He's... distressed. There's immense pressure-”

Armie can't listen to this. “Not from me. On the contrary. We're sorting it out right now.” Distressed? Tim is distressed? He seemed to have a lot of fun last time Armie looked. Only not with him.

“Are you?” Spears throws his cigarette to the ground, crushing the stub under his heel. “Let's hope for the best then. Just let me tell you, Brian is very well connected. A few words into the right ears and it will be very difficult for you to find work even on the small projects you seem to prefer lately after you failed in major franchises.”

This is getting ridiculous.

“What is this? What do you want from me?” Armie is more confused than angry.

“Nothing. I don't care about you. You have a career, a wife and a family. Timothée has nothing. He needs someone to take his side. To protect him.”

“I protect him.”

Suddenly, Spears steps up close, his face just inches away from Armie's. “No. I get the impression that you use him. You'll suck him dry, spit him out and leave him by the wayside to perish. I've seen
it happen a lot, Mr Hammer. Closeted men taking advantage of vulnerable young boys, ruining their lives and careers. Timothée seems to think you love him. If you really do you should know the decent thing for you would be to keep away from him and let him find his way.”

Armie feels as if someone has emptied an ice bucket over his head.

“Tim is an adult, he can decide for himself. He doesn't need a guardian or a chaperon.” But it still hurts to the bone. This man is voicing his deepest, darkest fears.

Spears laughs without humor. “Do you really know him so little? He's fragile and insecure and very inexperienced. True, he's smart and open but that only makes him more vulnerable. If he means something to you and you want to protect him and his talent, step back and let him live his life unburdened by an affair that can only end in disaster and pain for everyone involved.”

Armie looks hard at the man in front of him. He doesn't seem angry, only very worried. Genuinely worried. He swallows and is about to say something when he hears Tim's voice.

“Peter? Armie? Hi. I thought I saw you inside. Hey, what are you two doing out here?” Tim's hesitating before touching Armie's shoulder. He sounds both hyper and uneasy as his eyes dart from Armie to the producer.

“We just talked.” Spears says, his tone indicating that they did a lot more.

“You played wonderful.” Armie has only eyes for Tim as he wraps and arm around his shoulder and squeezes.

“Oh man, I was so nervous. With André watching. God, he's so nice. Have you met him?” Armie feels Tim lean into him, trembling a little.

“For a minute. Last Friday, remember?” It's quite adorable how Tim blushes at the memory of last Friday.

“Come on, let's go back inside.” Tim turns and takes Armie's hand, dragging him behind as he skips up the driveway back to the house. “You have to listen to him. He saw some dailies and is over the moon. Besides, the mosquitoes will eat you alive out here.” Tim grins up at him over his shoulder, happy, elated. When Armie looks back, however, he sees Spears shake his head as he takes out his phone.

Back in the living room, Luca is already setting up for the shoot with Armie. While he yells orders in Italian Aciman is talking to Amira. She laughs, pointing at Armie and Tim as they enter. When the author sees them, he walks over and hugs Armie tight.

“Wonderful! Wonderful. You are Oliver. What I saw of your work... marvelous. I have no idea how you do it but you brought Oliver to life. Thank you!” He kisses Armie on both cheeks while Tim smiles next to him from ear to ear.

“Thank you.” Armie mutters.


Tim sighs, looks up at him as if he wants to say something but instead walks backwards to the piano until he bumps into it ass-first. Michael whispers to him but Armie can't hear what he says. Tim nods as he sits down on the bench, his long fingers hovering above the keys.
Spears and Aciman stand next to the piano, embracing each other while Amira and Michael flank Tim. Armie is shown his mark on the floor just as Tim starts to play again. Sayombhu and his camera are behind him – as is Ramon, holding the mic arm. He's looking at the crown of Tim's head, a strangely enchanted expression on his face.

But is it really strange? Tim plays amazing, passionate, heartfelt. It visibly bewitches everyone. Armie almost forgets to walk up the stairs. He just wants to listen to Tim. His gaze lingers but then he turns and climbs the creaking stairs up to the first floor where he waits until he hears Luca shout cut.

That's it. Just one take. Tim is coming upstairs to him and hugs him without saying anything, pressing his face against Armie's neck. Armie holds him, his hands fisting the slick fabric of his hideous shirt, but then Luca calls their names.

“Come down, my dears, lets have a drink to celebrate the day and my marvelous cast!”

When they come downstairs the crew is opening bottles of Prosecco, passing glasses around.

The first sip makes Armie's stomach turn. He clings to one glass for the next half hour and refuses a refill, leaning against the wall near one of the huge windows overlooking the garden. He's not really in the mood for a party. Luca says a few words of praise for Aciman and everyone raises their drinks to salute the writer who's all smiles and humble graciousness in return.

Tim mingles but eventually sidles up to him, perching on the widow sill, frowning.

“What?” Armie asks, sharper than intended.

“You're not drinking.”

“I don't want to.”

“Why?”

“What do you mean, why? I just don't want to have a drink tonight.”

Tim is silent for a moment, his head hanging low, staring at his feet. “It's just... you don't look too good.” He whispers as he looks up again. His face is serious.

“Thanks, man.” Armie forces himself to take a sip of the now flat Prosecco.

“No, I mean...”

“I just slept badly, Tim. I miss you. You went off yesterday and I couldn't explain--.”

“I tried to call you later but your phone was switched off.”

It's true. Armie saw it today after waking up but he couldn't bring himself to call Tim back. He'd been lying on his bed, staring at the ceiling the whole afternoon, feeling like the piece of shit he is until he couldn't ignore Liz's calls any longer. Her bollocking didn't help.

Apparently, she'd made a few calls to acquaintances back in the States. Armie had zoned out and blamed his headache.

“I wanted an early night.” He says now, not looking at Tim.

“Did you go to her?” Tim's voice sounds tight, equally frightened and bitter. It doesn't suit him. It
breaks Armie's heart a little more.

“No, I didn't, Tim. I stayed at home.” He sighs. He can't tell him the whole truth. He's sure Tim
knows he's lying.

Last night he thought that he wanted to see Tim hurting but now he knows that he couldn't live with
causing him any more pain.

’He's distressed.’ He hears Peter say those words and wants to smash his glass against the painted
wall.

“And today?” Tim sounds small. Too small.

'Today I felt so ill I could barely move till late afternoon. I wallowed in self-pity instead, thinking
about ways to fuck you up even harder as a cheap distraction from my own sorrow and
shortcomings'. But loud he just says: “No. No, I didn't go to Liz.”

Tim shifts his weight, moves a little closer. “How’s it going then, the sorting out? Did you come to a
decision yet?” He clenches his long, beautiful fingers. He's still wearing the too large, too floral shirt.
It makes him look even more delicate than he really is.

“Tim, please...”

“What?” His voice is hoarse, eyes black.

“You want to do this now?”

Tim shrugs. “This time is as good as any, I guess.”

Armie looks around. Everybody seems to give them space, outright avoiding them. They all know.
reach a decision yet. All I know is that I miss you and I miss my daughter. But you saw Liz
yesterday. She’s a fighter. At the moment she won't step aside. Maybe in time she might understand
but for now... it's just a huge mess.” He sighs, feeling helpless, inadequate. Tim deserves so much
better.

It's like a sharp knife twisting in his guts when he sees Tim's shoulders sag. He looks lost, humiliated.
Armie hears Peter's words in his head ‘the decent thing for you would be to keep away from him and
let him find his way' and he hates himself even more.

“Come back to my place tonight?” Armie asks on an impulse. He knows it's a mistake but that never
stopped him in the past. He aches for Tim.

He's almost relieved when Tim shakes his head. “Better not. You know, I've been thinking as well. I
need time too, I guess. Yesterday was pretty shit. For me.” He downs the rest of his Prosecco and
then stares into his empty glass.

“I'm so sorry this happened. I didn't know she was coming to set.”

“Didn't you?” When Tim looks up at him his face is unreadable.

“Of course not. What do you think of-” But Armie's interrupted by Michael who walks over to them
and tells them that they are all leaving.

Armie excuses himself from dinner at Luca's. Tim doesn't even try to persuade him otherwise.
Instead, he gets into a car with Peter, Sayombhu and Ramon. Armie decides to walk back to Crema.

Back at his apartment he eats everything he can find: a glass of Nutella, a stale baguette, a packet of crackers, five bananas, a whole watermelon, half a salami and a large chunk of Belmonte.

Afterwards, he sticks two fingers down his throat and brings it all up again.

"The decent thing for you would be to keep away from him and let him find his way."

With his head over the toilet bowl he hears his mother's voice over his retching: 'Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.'

Armie is starting his penance now.

The day had been a true rollercoaster. Timmy had been a nervous wreck in the morning. Armie's phone had been switched off since last evening. He'd tried to reach him after parting with Peter but to no avail.

The night had been shit. He'd briefly entertained the idea to get some Vodka again but eventually had decided against it. Instead, he'd FaceTimed with his sister ('Hey, little brother, long time no see.') and afterwards listened to music until he'd felt tired enough to crawl into bed. He'd been too exhausted to even attempt to have a wank.

The first scene Timmy shot the next day was kissing Esther up against the wall of the Villa. It left him embarrassingly hard. He heard Armie's voice in his head, telling him again how wet Esther's cunt would be, how good she would taste. God, he really needed to get laid!

Luckily, Esther was a good sport and just smirked at him, giving him a two fingered salute after Luca called cut.

"Sorry." Timmy whined, pinching his dick. That made Esther laugh.

Thank god, André arrived only afterwards and was spared Timmy's juvenile reaction. Timmy had feared his presence on set but now it turns out to be a delight to talk to the man who created his character. And Oliver. And all the other protagonists now populating the Villa for real.

He's such a nice, warm man. Very intelligent, sophisticated. Not the least bit arrogant. He speaks French with Timmy. They share anecdotes from New York. André teaches at Columbia where Timmy had been briefly enrolled for a year. He even knows Timmy's mum by sight from some events of the Jewish community.

They really hit it off. It feels comfortable, like home.

André's acting isn't bad either. They mostly improvise the scenes. It's fun.

When it finally comes to playing piano Timmy isn't nervous anymore. By now he feels confident enough to pull it off.

Eventually, Armie arrives. He doesn't look good though and that bothers Timmy. His face is waxen beneath the make-up. He seems a little grubby. Not that Timmy minds but it's unusual.

When he finds him outside with Peter the whole scene feels strange, surreal but he can't quite put his
finger on it. Is it Liz? Timmy's still not over her scene from yesterday. The longer he thinks about it the more humiliated and exposed he feels.

Armie seems to withdraw even more during the small drinks reception for André. Timmy starts to really worry. Something is wrong here. What did he miss?

Yet trying to talk to Armie proves futile. Timmy doesn't want to ask and when he does it anyway he feels even worse afterwards.

When Armie doesn't join them for dinner Timmy is both relieved and disappointed. He decides to turn to Peter.

“What did you two talk about?”

Peter looks him straight in the face. At least he's always been honest with him. “About you. I told him that you're distressed.”

“Fuck, Peter, why?” He can't believe it! Armie doesn't need to hear this shit. It's for Timmy to deal with his problems. It will certainly not help his cause if Armie thinks he's making a fuss.

Peter touches his arm, gently. “I saw you act today. You're a revelation, Timothée. This film needs you! At your best. That should be your priority.” Timmy hears the barely hidden critique loud and clear.

“Armie did neither seduce nor corrupt me, Peter.”

“No, but he distracts you. His main concern is neither this movie nor your well-being.”

“That's not true!” Timmy abruptly withdraws from Peter's grip.

“Timothée, Peter, what's going on? Come, have some champagne.” Ferdinando materializes in front of them holding a tray full of champagne flutes.

Timmy huffs and takes the offered glass. Peter walks away to talk with Luca. Timmy downs another glass. And another. And another. He has wine with dinner. And Grappa afterwards.

When he gets up to go to the loo he sways and has to grab the back of his chair. “Woah, careful, Tim.” Michael steadies him.

Esther offers to take him home. He accepts without resistance.

She makes sure he's safely stored on his couch with a water bottle in his hand before leaving, kissing him good night on the cheek.

When she's gone, Timmy stares at his phone. No message from Armie.

Just as he's about to text him someone calls.

“Hey, where are you?” Timmy needs a moment to recognize Ramon's voice.

“I'm home. I'm drunk. Like, really fucking drunk.” He giggles.


Timmy just hesitates for a moment. “Sure.”
Mistake

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning: The second part of this chapter will include a borderline rape scene and really bad coping mechanisms. If you don't want to read this, skip that part.

Armie feels like shit when he drags himself out of bed the next morning. Everything hurts. His throat is sore. The taste in his mouth almost makes him throw up again. Even strong coffee doesn’t help.

At ten, a car collects him to take him to Pandino, a small town between Milan and Crema where they’ll shoot today. Tim’s already in the back seat, wearing shades despite the overcast sky.

“Hey, morning.” He greets him but something in Tim’s stiff posture tells Armie that he’s not in a talking mood.

A lukewarm “Hey,” is all Armie gets by way of an answer as Tim continues to stare out of the window at the landscape passing by outside.

They don’t speak until they arrive on set. To be honest, Armie doesn’t mind. His head is still pounding, his shoulder and neck muscles are tense. But worse than the physical pain is feeling like a total failure after his relapse. He knows he has to get a grip on the purging but he also knows he won’t. His world is silently imploding while he watches, paralyzed by fears to the point of apathy.

He sips from his bottle of water and tries not to look at Tim.

Apparently, Luca has invited Aciman on set today again. It only heightens Armie’s unease to be watched by the man who created his character, especially on a day when he doesn’t feel up to his form.

It doesn’t help that Luca is already stressed out when they arrive. The weather worries him. Will it hold? They try the blocking around the World War I memorial but it somehow doesn’t work. The angles are difficult. The scene doesn’t flow. Luca confers with Sayombhu how best to frame Elio's and Oliver's interaction around the monument but they can’t agree on a set-up.

Armie feels pushed around. Luca plants him in the foreground, then the background, left, right and center. It’s irritating. He’s not a prop, for fuck's sake! His director’s indecision makes him nervous. His mood deteriorates further.

In between, he watches Tim talk to Aciman. They speak French presumably, judging by their body language. Eventually, Tim takes off his sunglasses. Something in his eyes makes Armie recoil. His gaze seems both jaded and perturbed at the same time, a strange mixture of wariness and torpidity that's at odds with his usual guileless exuberance. He's fidgeting even more than usual, shifting, squirming, looking around the square as if searching for someone while at the same time fearing to find them.

Armie wonders what happened last night after he went home.

When he can't find a solution for the monument scene, Luca decides to film the dream sequence first. Armie and Tim are both to climb the memorial. It feels a bit like a sacrilege to Armie when he jumps...
the fence. Tim winces a little as he throws one long lean leg over the railing and Armie offers his hand to steady him.

“You alright?” Armie asks.

“Yeah. Might have torn a muscle.”

“When could you possibly have torn a muscle?” Armie tries to joke but Tim’s face stays blank, eyes once again hidden behind his shades. Armie crosses his arms in front of his chest and presses his lips together.

“What?” Tim asks, sounding annoyed.

“Nothing.” Armie wants to shake him until his teeth rattle.

They roll and Armie starts to climb the artificial mountain, Tim right behind him.

“Shit!” He hears him mutter, accompanied by the sliding of rubble. When Armie turns, he sees Tim has slipped and scraped the inside of his lower leg on the sharp rocks.

“Here, hold on.” Armie reaches for him and this time Tim takes his hand. It’s a little clammy as it lies in Armie’s huge palm, limp and cold.

They climb and skitter up, around and down the monument until Luca calls cut.

“Okay. Next scene is you both embracing and kissing on the piazza. Tim, open your shirt. Armie, reach into his shorts.”

Armie looks at Aciman after listening to Luca’s directions, who’s sitting at a small table off stage. He just smiles and nods. Well, then… here we go. He’ll be grabbing Tim’s cock for all the world to see. He’s not sure he likes the idea.

They stand in the middle of the square, Tim wearing billowy. It hangs open, almost sliding from his bony shoulders, exposing his narrow, pale chest. His small nipples peak in the chill of the cloudy day. Armie can see every rib, his pectorals, even the few downy hairs below his navel, leading down… He remembers licking, kissing, nuzzling them.

Fuck! This scene will kill him.

He wraps his hands around Tim’s waist, pushing them up his back until they cup his protruding shoulder blades. Armie remembers sweat pooling between them as he buries his face in Tim’s neck and kisses him softly, open-mouthed. His smell, his taste nearly overwhelm him.

Tim stays rigid under his touch, stiff as a plank.

Tim’s wearing Elio’s dark bathing shorts today. They don’t have a button, just an elastic waistband. As his right hand sneaks inside it Armie drags his lips over Tim’s jaw and can feel it clench. His fingers are not met by underwear, it’s just rough netting covering Tim's groin. He's soft, his short pubes tickling Armie's palm as his smooth cock curls in Armie’s grip. His fingertips brush Tim's testicles, warm and silky in their wrinkled sac. Armie remembers sucking and licking them and also what lies below, behind...

Tim gasps softly as Armie caresses his most tender parts in front of more than fifty people. But it doesn't matter, it feels like just the two of them all of a sudden. It’s been so long since Armie had him. But the connection is still there, revoked by just a few tender touches.
In this moment, Armie desperately wants to see Tim's eyes. It suddenly feels important. His sunglasses are a barrier between them. Just Armie’s reflection stares back at him.

He lowers his gaze, bows his head and looks down. He wants to see something, he needs to see… Tim's shorts have slid down a little as Armie pushed his hand inside them, exposing Tim’s hipbone, his lower belly to Armie's sight.

There’s a bruise on his milky skin, right down there. A violet mark matching the pattern on the shorts, obscenely glary against the sensitive flesh between Tim’s pubic bone and belly button.

Armie knows for sure he didn’t put it there.

He freezes completely. Time seems to stand still.

He has no idea how long it takes for him to slowly raise his face. Seconds? Minutes? His body feels leaden, heavy. Tim’s head is thrown back, exposing his long throat as if to mock him in his false seductiveness. Elio's gold and silver chains lie entwined against Tim's collarbone but as the sun is hidden behind clouds they don’t gleam, the metal as dull as Armie feels.

Someone put a hickey on Tim’s body right there. Right. There! Just above his cock. The cock that had been inside Armie.

The bitter taste is back in Armie's mouth. God, he fears he might throw up. This time, it's neither Guilt nor Self-Loathing who make their unwanted appearance but his mother's voice again:

'Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.'

Armie takes his hands off Tim as if he’s been burned. Sayombhu, who’s been circling them with the camera, lowers the lens and frowns.

“What’s the matter, Armie?” Luca asks.

Armie shakes his head. He stares at Tim who slowly takes off his Ray Ban's. His eyes are dark, pupils blown. Armie watches as he licks his lips, his mouth hanging a little open, breathless, wanting...

Oh, he’s good.

Like a whore is good in faking arousal.

Armie almost ruined his life for… this. A cheating slut. A boy who couldn’t keep it in his pants for even a few days. Who fucks around with anyone willing. God, and Armie had him bare. That test result isn't worth the scrap of paper it’s written on!

He should have known after the video from the club! He's been such an idiot.

Armie suddenly knows who put the hickey there. Over Tim’s shoulder he can see Ramon holding the boom, hovering at the edge of the scene, long dark curls, tattooed calves, strong arms.

Did those arms hold Tim last night?

Is the fucker grinning?

He wants to shout it all over the Piazza. No, better, he wants to slap Tim's oh so innocent face until he hears him confess his betrayal, his infamy echoing from the walls of the surrounding houses for everyone to hear, drowning out the birds and crickets, the peaceful sounds of the sleepy Italian
village, replacing them with Tim’s shrieks and screams.

He wants to see him on his knees, his eyes dark with fear instead of lust. He wants to choke him until those treacherous eyes pop out of their sockets.

He wants to hurt Tim like Tim hurt him, rip his heart out and throw it to the wolves for them to tear it to pieces.

Aloud he says. “Sorry. Luca, I thought you called cut.” His voice sounds eerily calm despite the storm raging inside him.

He just wants this to be over with.

Deliberately, he wipes the hand he just had down Tim’s pants on his t-shirt before stepping back.

“No, I didn’t.” Luca frowns, looking at Armie as if he’s about to ask a question. Yet instead he says: “I think I have what I need. Let’s break for lunch.”

Tim stays rooted to the spot as Armie walks away before Luca has even finished his sentence.

They eat in one of the cafés at the piazza. Tim resumes talking to the novelist while Armie keeps to himself. He’s still wearing his shades and can scan the set for Ramon without raising suspicion. He spots him packing equipment on the other side of the square, his baggy t-shirt sweaty, clinging to his broad back.

What does Tim see in him? True, he's closer to Tim's age than Armie but apart from that? He's just an ordinary stage hand. No match for Tim's intelligence, his sensitivity. Right now, he laughs about some stupid joke, his voice too loud, gesticulating a bit too much. Over the top. Fake. What a show-off. Does Tim really fall for this?

Or is it just his cock he wants? Someone who takes him hard and without finesse, just fucks the living daylights out of him? Armie imagines the two of them in bed, Ramon pounding into Tim’s delicate body with his less than average dick while Tim howls and mewls like the slut he is...

His tramezzini suddenly tastes like ash. He throws it back onto his plate, coughing, spitting the remnants into his napkin.

He's still staring at Ramon when the man suddenly turns, looking Armie in the face. But if he's expected to see triumph in his gaze Armie's been mistaken. On the contrary, what Armie encounters is best described as barely hidden disappointment, mixed with anger and contempt. It hits him unprepared in its viciousness.

“I don’t know… what do you think, Armie?” Apparently, Luca has been talking to him for some time but he didn’t listen.

“Sorry?”

“Do you have any idea how to fix this?” For a split second Armie thinks Luca is referring to Tim and himself and Ramon and Liz and the whole fucked-up situation. But apparently it’s still about the staging of Elio's and Oliver's conversation. Armie couldn’t care less.

“Why not do it in one shot? Getting off the bikes, walking around the monument, then moving down the other side before leaving. A large circle.” If they don’t mess it up it could be done fairly swift.

Luca tilts his head and nods. “That sounds interesting. Let’s try it.”
While the crew lays the tracks for the camera, Tim dares to sidle up to Armie as if nothing had happened.

“That was your idea? Cool.” Tim points at the camera next to which stands Ramon. Is he trying to rub it in?

Armie shrugs. He can’t speak. He’s literally choking on his rage.

“Hey, what’s up? You’re acting a little weird lately.” Tim’s Converse scrapes the asphalt. He tilts his head in his typical birdlike fashion. His eyes seem puffy, clouded, but that might be the weather.

“Don’t you wanna talk to Ramon?” Armie asks and is shocked how bitter he sounds.

“What?” Tim goes completely still. He pales visibly beneath his make-up.

‘Oh, you cunning little fucker, got you here!’ Armie nods in Ramon’s direction who’s now sitting on the dolly. When Tim stays silent he lights a cigarette. They are supposed to be props but fuck it. Fuck it all.

“Just fuck off, Tim.”

“Why? What did he tell you?” Is that panic in Tim’s voice? Armie hopes so.

He throws his cigarette to the ground, grinds it out with his heel and turns to walk away. Tim’s saying something but he’s not listening. Instead, he gets his phone out.

“Liz? - Hi, it’s me. - Yeah, I know, sorry. - Are you free tonight? There’s a place I’d like to show you. We need to talk. - Great, I come around at eight. – It’s… good to hear your voice.”

He’s glad that Oliver mostly keeps his sunglasses on during the whole following scene.

^^^^^^

Timmy should have known the night wouldn’t end well when Ramon showed up at his door with a bottle of vodka and some Red Bull cans.

He was already more than just a little tipsy when they started to drink too quickly, too much, gossiping about cast and crew, Ramon telling him some funny stories about Walter, Sayombhu and even Luca. Timmy mostly talked about Armie.

Until Ramon reminded him: “And now his wife’s here.”

“Yeah, but, that doesn’t mean...,” Timmy mixed another drink and downed it in one go, the sickeningly sweet flavor coating his tongue as the alcohol went straight to his brain. “It doesn’t change... fuck...,” He lost his train of thought somewhere in the middle of that sentence, never getting back on track.

Ramon took his glass from his hand and put it onto the table, suddenly sitting very close. When did that happen?

“Yeah... whatever...,” he said, before he leaned in and kissed Timmy.

'Yeah... whatever...,’ Timmy thought and opened wide, allowing Ramon to push his tongue into his mouth.

Somehow, they undressed, all clumsy limbs and awkward fumbling. Ramon ended up on the floor
between Timmy's spread legs, sucking him off. He worked really hard but Timmy was simply too drunk to come. He almost dozed off during the blow job. This wasn't going well.

Ramon's mouth was too wet, his tongue too sloppy.

He wasn't Armie.

Eventually, Timmy feared a chafing. His cock felt too sensitive. It started to hurt a little. But when he tried to scoot away Ramon grabbed his thighs, hard.

Timmy capitulated and hoped it would be over soon. He was just so tired.

He started to moan, more out of discomfort than from pleasure, hoping Ramon would release him. When he stopped his futile ministrations a few minutes later, Timmy stared down at him in a mixture of gratefulness and abhorrence. It suddenly hit him that this had been a mistake.

He felt a little sick as he watched Ramon pull off and wipe his mouth.

“Sorry.” Timmy whispered., clenching his fists at either side of his naked thighs, feeling vulnerable, exposed and ridiculous. “I'm so sorry, I don't think I can do this.” He closed his eyes, his head lolling back, leaning against the cushions. Fuck, why wouldn't the room stop spinning?

“What do you mean?” Ramon asked, his voice raw. Timmy didn't answer. He thought it was fairly obvious what he meant. But somehow Ramon didn't get it.

“Hey!” He shoved Timmy’s hip no too gentle. When Timmy just groaned, Ramon bit into his lower belly, digging his teeth into what little soft tissue Timmy had on his body. Timmy yelped. Ramon didn't let go.

“Please, you're hurting me.” Tears welled up in Timmy’s eyes but Ramon only bit down harder. Timmy started to struggle but somehow his arms and legs wouldn’t obey him. Then a hand wrapped around his throat and tightened. Timmy decided to just wait until Ramon stopped.

Which he luckily did right before Timmy blacked out. He coughed but Ramon grinned up at him, licking his lips. He slid up Timmy’s torso until they were face to face, clambering in Timmy’s lap as he said: “Don't play shy with me. I know you like it a little rough.”

Ramon moved surprisingly quick as he lowered his weight on Timmy’s legs, straddling him. When Timmy tried to writhe under him Ramon grabbed his hair and yanked his head back. “If you're not in the mood – I am.”

Timmy just stared back at him, uncomprehending. What was going on here? His eyes started to flutter shut but snapped open when Ramon tugged at his curls again. “Hey, Timmy, it’s no fun if you pass out.”

Ramon slapped him left and right. A little playful at first. Then harder. To bring him back, sober him up? Or as a reminder who was in charge here?

Timmy was too drunk to process all of this properly. He struggled to simply keep his eyes open.

“Hey, fuckboy, stay with me.” Ramon pinched his thigh at the junction of his groin, hard. Timmy was grateful when his other hand let go of his hair, but only for a second because now Ramon curled his fingers around Timmy’s chin, digging into his cheeks.

Over the last few minutes, Timmy's cock had gone from half-mast to flaccid. This seemed to
disappoint Ramon. “You don't like it, eh? You don’t like this, me?” Ramon grabbed his testicles and squeezed. Dark spots started dancing in front of Timmy’s eyes as he made an embarrassing keening noise at the back in his throat.

But the pain also helped him to focus. Even in his whacked state Timmy heard the threat in Ramon's voice. His fight or flight reflex kicked in. Instinctively, he tried to shake Ramon off for real but to no avail. Ramon was stronger, heavier, and pinned Timmy down onto the couch.

His face started to hurt in Ramon's vise-like grip.

It dawned on Timmy that he had drunk way more than Ramon. And now this evening was taking a turn he really didn't liked and wanted.

“Stop it!” His voice sounded muffled. But anyway, Ramon took his hands off him. Timmy blinked a few times, his heart hammering hard in his ears.

“Jesus, fuck-“ he huffed, too soon apparently.

Because next thing he knew, Ramon shoved him down onto the couch, pinning Timmy’s arms to his sides as he squatted on his chest. Thus immobilized, Timmy could only yield as his head was yanked up and forward again. He gasped in pain, opening his mouth, and Ramon took advantage of that, pushing his hard cock past Timmy’s lips.

Timmy spluttered and squirmed, tried to turn his face away, tried to kick out, his legs thrashing, only to realize that Ramon had him totally under control. He wanted to scream but couldn’t because a dick was shoved down his throat.

*No. No! Not again!*

Timmy bit down. Ramon first gasped then howled, loosening his grip on Timmy's hair. Timmy took his chance and bucked up, struggling against Ramon's hold in earnest, knocking the low coffee table over in the process as his long legs searched for leverage. Cans and the vodka bottle crashed to the floor and the loud, sharp noise startled Ramon. He boggled and almost jumped, scooting back.

Timmy was able to free his hands and shoved him off of him before quickly sitting up and scrambling to his feet. He felt dizzy, swayed with the momentum of his movements and had to grab the armrest of the couch to steady himself.

Ramon was still on the sofa, massaging his dick, a pained expression on his reddened face.

“What the hell... what the hell do you think...? Are you mad? Fuck... fuck off.” Timmy stumbled backwards, naked, just wearing his socks, trying to get as much distance between them as his lounge allowed. But he moved too fast. He skittered on the polished floorboards and the room tilted suddenly as he slipped, landing on his bony ass. He must have looked truly undignified but he didn't care as sharp pain shot up his spine. If he hadn't been that drunk he might have been truly scared.

“Sorry...,” Ramon murmured, followed by something else but Timmy didn't listen as he tried to get back on his feet.

“Just... just fuck off!” Timmy yelled again, now on his knees, disoriented, and fuck, was he actually trembling? He stared at his shaking hands before looking around to find his clothes or something to cover himself with.

His t-shirt hung over the back of the sofa. Timmy saw that Ramon had got up in the meantime and now rounded the couch and approached him, hands raised, palms up.
“Timmy, listen...”

Timmy didn't want to listen. “Go! Just go!” He was on his feet again, backing away. He felt small and silly. He wanted to cry.

“Hey, Timmy, you're upset. Sorry if we went too far too quickly.” Ramon's voice was low, soothing, but Timmy didn't fall for it. “I thought you wanted it. You never said no or stop. I really think I can help you get over Armie. I'd be so good to you. Just, let me-” Ramon was standing too close. Timmy could smell him. His cock was still more than half-hard. It dawned on Tim that Ramon had really enjoyed holding him down, and he also enjoyed seeing him like this, defenseless, naked, embarrassed.

Timmy felt sick. But he wouldn't let Ramon have this, him. He raised his head and took a step forward.

“Just go!” Timmy was surprised how firm he sounded. He was also very sure that he had said stop but Ramon didn't listened.

“Okay.” Ramon's head hung low and he shrugged as if more than a little disappointed at Timmy's refusal. But when he looked up his eyes were cold, calculating. “Just, I truly think you should be clearer with your intentions and what they imply. Next time you might not meet someone as nice as me when you suddenly decide to change your mind. Your little game is dangerous, like, come on to someone, then ditch them.”

Timmy had no idea what Ramon was talking about.


“I mean, you flirted with me, you went out with me, I bought you drinks, I treated you nice. Where did I go wrong? So tonight I thought... well, that I could claim my reward. I mean, why wouldn't you? You certainly send me very obvious signals.” Ramon reached for Timmy and he hated that he flinched. He forced himself to hold his ground. Ramon's thumb started to caress his shoulder. “I mean, here we are, just the two of us. It's been pretty shit for you the last few days, I get that. I told you I once had a married man myself, I know how it's like...”

Timmy wasn't physically able to listen to this any longer. He felt bile rise in his throat. Was it just the alcohol? Whatever, he had to assuage Ramon and make him leave.

“I'm sorry... for... what I did. I'm not... ready for this. Us. You did nothing wrong but... please, go.” He shrugged Ramon's hand off and stepped back until he hit the wall. His hands covered his groin. Yet he tried to smile. “It's not you, it's me.”

Ramon threw him a look before slowly turning away. “Okay, fine, no hard feelings.” Timmy sighed inwardly as Ramon started to put his clothes back on. Timmy watched, the wall he leaned against keeping him upright, paralyzed by drink and something almost resembling fear.

Don't show it! Smile. Tell him you are sorry. Tell him another time, maybe. Just get him out of here!

“Come here.” Ramon walked over to him when he was dressed and when Timmy took a hesitant step towards him Ramon pulled him into a tight hug, his hands skimming Timmy's naked body all the way down to his buttocks, giving them a firm squeeze that made Timmy wince. “Let's not hold this against each other, okay?”

Timmy just nodded, biting his lips as not to start screaming. He feared that he wouldn't be able to
stop. The next thing he knew, Ramon kissed him, hard, his tongue pushing against Timmy's shut lips until he understood and yielded, allowing Ramon to invade his mouth.

He wanted to cry. He wanted to yell. He wanted to shove Ramon away and kick him until he was a bleeding pile on the floor, begging Timmy to stop.

But Ramon was taller, stronger, sober and so Timmy went pliant and endured it.

*This will be over soon. You'll be alright. He'll go. You can do this. Just breathe. Think of something else. New York. Pistachio ice cream. The way Armie's skin smells just before you fall asleep against his chest.*

When the door closed behind Ramon Timmy sank to the floor and sat there for a long time, his head buried in the crook of his arm, rocking back and forth, trying to steady his breathing.

Eventually, he crawled over into the bathroom and stuck a finger down his throat, making himself throw up before taking a long, scalding shower, scrubbing himself raw, eyes firmly shut. He had no recollection how he found his way into bed, but there he woke the next morning, curled up in a fetal position, feeling absolutely dreadful.

His muscles were stiff, his eyes bloodshot, the lids heavy and swollen. He still had trouble focusing while brushing his teeth and feared he might be sick again. Taking an ice-cold shower made him at least look partly human again, though he knew that in fact he was filthy, tainted, ugly.

After a cursory glance he avoided looking at himself in the mirror. His body felt alien, as if it belonged to someone else.

Meeting Armie in the car overwhelmed and unsettled him further. He couldn't tell him what had happened. He felt so ashamed. Armie had warned him but Timmy hadn't listened. This was all his fault. Ramon had said so himself. Like the guy in the club. Did he never learn? Maybe he liked it, wanted to be used, overpowered, taken advantage off? Timmy felt increasingly queasy as snippets from last night continued to come back when he closed his tired eyes.

*Ramon holding him down. Ramon slapping his face. Ramon's tongue pushing into his mouth.*

He took a sip of water to rinse the vile taste.

As his intoxication slowly subsided, his brain kicked into gear. Had he encouraged Ramon? Had he wanted him? It was true, he liked him, he went out with him, he let him buy him drinks... was it any wonder Ramon thought he wanted to hook up with him?

He had been lucky that Ramon had stopped. Maybe someone else wouldn't have. If he behaved like a slut no wonder people started to treat him like one. He had flirted with Ramon at Luca's party to get Armie going. So maybe he deserved what had happened for being so selfish? He was just a fucking tease and got what had been coming for him.

He felt rattled and anxious when they arrived on set. What would happen when he came face to face with Ramon? He didn't want to find out. And he was equally unable to face Armie. Armie mustn't know. He would get angry, and rightly so. In his discomfort Timmy mostly stuck to André during preparations and breaks. Talking in French about New York reminded him of home, of being safe and secure.

He was still a little woozy and almost tripped over his own feet while climbing that monument. But Armie grabbed his hand and steadied him. If he only knew how unworthy Timmy was of his kindness, his protectiveness, he'd surely let him fall.
Ramon stared at Timmy as he angled the boom in his direction. His gaze was grave, a little threatening even. Or did Timmy just imagine that? During a break he tried to speak to Timmy but he quickly turned to Luca and asked him something, anything, to escape. He heard Ramon cough as he backed away. Timmy realized that he was shaking again.

“Are you okay, picino?” Luca asked. “You got a little drunk last night.” But there was no sharpness in Luca’s tone. Timmy just shrugged.

“Hang-over.”

Luca wagged his finger at him, smiling.

In the next scene Armie had to push his hand down Timmy's shorts. He felt the impulse to wince at the initial shock of being touched like this and repeated in his head over and over. 'This is Armie. It's okay.'

But then Armie pulled back abruptly and retreated with a strange expression on his face. He looked troubled, furious.

What was going on? Timmy had no idea. There seemed to be something he wasn't getting. Maybe it had to do with Liz?

But then he stared down where Armie's hand had touched his skin and saw it – the bright purple bite mark Ramon had left just above his groin. How had he not seen it before? Had he been so drunk? Or had he avoided looking... there?

As the crew set up for the next scene Timmy decided to gather up his courage and walked over to Armie. But instead of listening to his feeble excuses Armie saw right through him and asked about Ramon. Timmy froze. Did Armie know? Had Ramon already talked to him? God, what had he done? Armie must hate him now. Timmy had cheated on him, drunk and totally out of control. He wasn't to be trusted. He was just a cheap little tart.

The panic grips Timmy tightly, breathing becoming difficult. He had invited Ramon over, had allowed him to kiss him. Had he even initiated? He likes to be choked and slapped by Armie. So maybe he liked it with Ramon as well? Maybe he has just forgotten what really happened, his whacked brain playing tricks on him... maybe he only imagines fighting Ramon off. He had been so fucking drunk... anything could have happened.

He imagines Ramon talking to Armie, telling him that they made out, that Timmy had wanted it, badly, that he had begged for it...

Did he? He fears he might go crazy.

And then Armie turns and just leaves him reeling, doubting everything. Timmy can hear him ring his wife as he walks away and that is too much. His fingernails dig into his palms, leaving deep half-moon shaped marks.

“No, please, Armie.” He whispers. “Please.”

Armie doesn't even bother to look back at him. And why should he?

Timmy's glad that in the following scene the camera is behind his back most of the time so no one can see his waxen face and burning eyes he hides behind black sunglasses. Somehow he gets through the scene. They only do it once because the sky darkens, a thunderstorm approaching.
When he changes out of costume after they've wrapped for the day he sees that there are also marks on his left hip and on his upper arms, as well as a bruise high up on his thigh. They hurt to the touch. Must have happened during their struggle last night. When Ramon held him down. He doesn't want to remember. He looks straight ahead as he pulls his own clothes on.

As he walks off set he senses Ramon’s eyes following him. His back tingles and the hairs on his arms stand on end but he doesn't turn around. He just slides into the car next to Armie and waits until it pulls away from the square in the little Italian village and the monument commiserating people who'd been dead even before his gran was born because they fought in a war that's almost forgotten now. Useless. What a waste. Time fucks with us all, he thinks, bending over to rest his head between his knees.

Armie doesn't say a word.

Timmy breathes in, counts to five, breathes out. He repeats this a few times until he feels a little better and sits up again. Armie just stares out of the window.

“Can we talk?” Timmy asks.

“About what?” Armie sounds far away, almost bored.

“I don't know... the scenes today? Last night? Us?”

“Do you have anything you wanna tell me?” Armie faces him with his shades still on, voice cold and hard as steel.

Timmy swallows. Shall he really do this in the car? “I'm not sure. I just thought-”

“Not your strong suit, darling.” Armie interrupts and puts an end to their conversation until he exits the car on Piazza del Duomo with a curt “Bye”.

Timmy's apparently not even worth a 'Later' anymore.

He moves in trance as he walks up to his apartment. The remnants of last night greet him with cruel blatancy: cans and bottles on the floor, his clothes strewn in between. He suddenly hates his usual chaos. His mom had always rolled her eyes at his untidiness and he suddenly understands her.

The mess reflects his life.

He starts to clean up like manic, throwing rubbish out, emptying the overflowing ashtray, gathering his clothes up from the floor, putting them into the closet. He stacks books and magazines on shelves, does his washing up, and even vacuums before mopping the tiled floor until it shines.

He saves the bedroom for last. Ramon didn't go in there. The sheets still smell of him and Armie – and of peach juice.

To Timmy's surprise, the peaches in the bag on his nightstand are still firm, not putrefied. He carefully carries them over into the kitchen and puts them in the fridge. It seems a lifetime ago that he and Armie made use of the innocent fruits.

Yet they didn't wither, they are still fresh and round, a deep pink, smelling delicious. It's almost as if they want to remind Timmy of the good times he and Armie had. Timmy reverently takes one peach in his hand and bites it. The taste explodes in his mouth, triggering all sorts of memories – both lewd and sad.
He'd always known that they would end. But not like this.

Not by not speaking to each other about things that matter.

Elio broke his silence today because he thought Oliver should know. Because he wanted him to know.

He firmly closes the fridge door, grabs his phone and keys to run over to Armie, not bothering to shower or change after his cleaning spree. Before he leaves, however, he remembers to take the bracelet. He doesn't put it on though. Maybe Armie will want it back. It would be his right to reclaim it. Timmy has betrayed him. He's not worth it.

Timmy knows his only chance is to come clean to the man he loves and wait how he will take it.

Everything else is a sham and a waste of time they don't have.

Maybe, if he's very lucky, Armie will forgive him.
Armie closes his apartment door and needs to lean against it for a moment to steady himself. Today has been – bad. He hates himself for cold-shouldering Tim – but hates Tim even more for what he's done.

It feels worse because Armie's not sure if he can really blame him. What has he to offer Tim apart from trouble and uncertainty?

Yet Armie had truly hoped Tim would wait, that what they had meant something to him worth waiting for. Apparently not. Well, what did he expect? Tim is young, beautiful... Armie should rip his feelings for him out now before the pain starts to fester. He knows it's for the better.

Tim took the decision out of his hands and made it for both of them. So it's back to Liz and that sad half-life he's led up until meeting one brown-haired boy in Italy. Armie feels an icy cold seep through his veins, settling in his bones.

For once, Self-Loathing and Guilt take a back seat as their even uglier cousin Self-Pity makes an appearance.

He has tried to be true to himself for once – and where did it lead him? Only into misery. He should have trusted his gut feeling and never signed up for this film in the first place.

What the hell went wrong between them?

But when he tries to think about it all he can see is the bruise on Tim's skin, mocking him and his love for this beautiful boy he thought was precious, special.

Well, apparently he's just like all the other whores he fucked.

Armie can hear the siren call of a half-full Vodka bottle in his fridge. He knows the escape it offers is not a solution but it's still enticing.

To do something to stop his mind from playing his very own porn movie titled 'Tim and Ramon fuck' on a loop, he strips the bed he's shared with Tim in so many times to throw the sheets into the washing. The smell hits him unprepared. Suddenly, he sees Tim beneath him, eyes wide, mouth slack, begging to be taken, to be choked, to be spanked, his cock pumping into his pliant, willing
Did he beg Ramon as well? Did he spread his legs wide, showing off his tight pink hole? Did he look up at him with those fuck-me-eyes he made at Armie while on his knees, gagging on his cock, his expression telling him he loved it? Loved him...

Armie starts to rip the sheets to shreds. He'll never be able to sleep in them again, anyway. It feels good to destroy something.

In the end, he abstains for a whole of twenty minutes before giving in. He doesn't bother with a glass, already making for the bathroom while the burning Vodka runs down his throat.

He doesn't put the bottle down until it's empty. He just has to wait a few seconds before his stomach rebels and decides to get rid of the excess toxic beverage flooding it. Armie dry-heaves a few times and when he brings up the clear, sharp-smelling liquid it doesn't even stink of puke. He continues until all he spits out is yellowish bile.

Finally, his body feels exhausted and gratefully numb – he has no strength left to think or hate or be angry or sad. A familiar ache spreads through his limbs, grounding him, taking all his troubles away, reducing him to barely existing, but wiped clean, empty.

There's a knock at his door. Instinctively, Armie straightens and glances at his phone. He still has an hour before meeting Liz for dinner.

The knocking continues, becoming almost frantic. Armie needs a moment to get up and wash his mouth. His hair is sweaty but that can't be helped right now. Otherwise he looks surprisingly okay. Normal. As usual. It's both funny and a little frightening how good he is at hiding.

Armie knows who's on the other side of the door. He knows he should tell him to fuck off but doesn't have the inner strength to do so. He's such a weak, pathetic pussy that he can't even put a proper end to an affair.

He squares his shoulders and tries to prepare for either a tear-jerking excuse or more lies. Yet he didn't take into account what the sight of a disheveled, sweaty, gaunt-looking Timothée on his doorstep would do to him.

He literally can feel his heart stutter in his chest.

“Tim.” Armie knows he sounds stiff, taking refuge to coldness as not to break down right in front of the boy.

“Armie. Please, we have to talk. Last night-” Tim seems agitated, almost manic. He's not meeting Armie's eyes.

“Just don't.” He can't do this. He'll meet Liz in an hour and has to shower and change before. He needs to get his old life back for what it's worth and try to save what he can. “Please, leave.”

He doesn't want to hear Tim's story. He wouldn't believe it anyway.

But Tim is not moving, stubbornly holding his ground. “You owe me this much.” He sounds fierce, placing his palm on the door as Armie starts to close it. “I need to talk to you.”

“I'm not the person you should be talking to. Talk to Ramon instead. If talking is what you want to do with him.” The dull ache in his stomach is replaced by a different kind of poisonous agony spreading slowly through Armie's body, making him voice all the mean, destructive things he has on
his mind.

Tim hunches forward as Armie says his new lover's name, shoulders sagging, hands balling into tight fists. "I'm not... please, Armie... as my friend..." He eventually looks Armie in the face. There is an expression in his green eyes that has Armie hesitate.

Something is off here. He feels it.

“Friend? I'm your friend now... Okay, whatever.” Maybe he shouldn't do this but he's too tired to resist. He decides that he won't allow hope to awaken and usurp the callous emotional deadness he's striving for right now. He'll listen to Tim but he won't be lured in or touched by whatever apology he comes up with.

“Thank you.” Tim says in an unusually subdued manner as he walks past Armie into the lounge.

“What is it? I'm about to meet my wife.” Armie can't stop from rubbing it in. Tim has marks on his body someone else put there. He's allowed to act a little petty.

“It's... it's not what you think it is.”

Armie almost laughs. “I've heard those words before and what follows is usually exactly what I thought it was. So, surprise me.” He's folding his arms over his chest. He'll give Tim five minutes to drop some platitudes about how sorry he is and that it didn't work out between them, then he'll tell him to leave. For good this time.

But Tim stays silent. All bravado seems knocked out of him. Armie sighs: “I'm waiting.”

Tim shifts his weight from one foot to the other. “Yeah, sorry, maybe... I don't know. But it's not... well, maybe I did encourage him a little, you even said so yourself, and that I shouldn't play with people so I might just have gotten what I deserved but I really didn't like it and I tried to stop him, I think, and I'm sure nothing serious happened but if you know more please tell me because I was really spaced out but I still told him to stop, I'm sure, but maybe I don't know, he told you something or-”

“Tim.” Armie interrupts. This is all too much for him to take in right now. His head starts to hurt as he tries to make sense of Tim's torrent of words. He really needs some fluids.

Tim's mouth snaps shut mid-sentence. He sinks down on the couch as if his strings had been cut, staring up at Armie like a lost puppy, eyes huge, bottom lip quivering. It could be a show but somehow Armie doubts it.

Or do you just want it to be genuine?

Armie's not sure. But some of the phrases Tim used fuel his growing unease: 'I might just have gotten what I deserved' - 'I really didn't like' - 'I still told him to stop'.

“Tim, please, calm down.” Armie rubs his temples and tries to concentrate. But his body is screaming for rest, his muscles locking. He might be swaying a little. Shit! He's really not up for this right now.

Tim is gazing at him as if waiting for something, a reassurance, maybe forgiveness but Armie still doesn't really know what he's dealing with here. 'Come on! Pull yourself together! He's trying to tell you something. Figure it out.'

But he's not sure he wants to hear Tim's truth. There's a dark hole opening beneath them, threatening
to swallow everything good and pure they had.

“Was it like the guy at the club? Well, you seem to have a tendency to get into this kind of situation. Maybe you like it?” Armie's too exhausted to keep his accusations to himself. Fuck it! All he can see is Tim being forcefully taken by that guy Ramon and loving it, gagging for it – like he did with Armie, begging for more. “We both know you like it rough sometimes.”

“Only with you.” Tim whispers, a blush creeping up his cheeks. His eyes go even bigger and start to shimmer wet and that's when Armie's legs give out and he sinks down onto the coffee table.

He badly wants to hate Tim and for Tim to hate him back, to get up and leave, find someone else and let Armie return to his empty yet somewhat secure life. So why does Tim look at him like he does, frightened yet unabashedly hopeful. Where does that strength come from?

He has to burn out what's left of his love for Tim, cauterize his emotions, or he knows he'll go mad.

'Remember what they did!' This is Self-Loathing talking, making Armie wallow in his agony. 'Your precious boy bend over for someone else. And I bet he enjoyed every minute of it.'

Armie tries to focus on his rage. Rage is much easier to handle than love.

“Don't, Tim! He put his marks on you. On your skin. There.” Armie tries to raise one hand and point at Tim's midriff but his body doesn't obey him. His hand hovers midair, shaking. The room goes dark at the edges. Is it already that late? Breathing is becoming increasingly difficult.

“Armie?” Tim is suddenly crouching in front of him. What a sight! Only, it blurs... what the fuck?!

Next thing Armie knows is his field of vision has changed drastically. There are dark, unfamiliar shadows in front of his eyes. His whole left side hurts. He needs a moment to realize that he's apparently lying on the floor.

“Armie?” There's worry in Tim's voice – and anger. Slim fingers touch his face, brushing back his damp hair. He wants to recoil from the tender gesture but that's actually a bad idea as the room starts spinning the moment he jerks his head. He can hear himself retch. God, this is embarrassing.

“Armie, what did you do?”

“Water.” He croaks out, his mouth filled with a vile taste. “Water... please... Tim.”

He instantly misses the hand on his face when it's gone. 'Breathe.' After an eternity the neck of a bottle is pressed against his lips. Armie swallows eagerly. He feels the cold, refreshing liquid run down his throat and fill his empty stomach.

He blinks, slowly turns his head. After a moment he thinks he can sit up. Tim helps him and he doesn't have the energy to tell him not to. In fact, Tim holds him when they lean back against the couch, one arm around his shoulders, the other stroking his belly like you do with little kids who complain about tummy ache. Armie smiles besides feeling like shit.

“Hey,” Tim says, “what was that?”

Armie tries to swallow but ends up coughing. “Don't know... the heat, maybe?”

“What heat? Don't lie to me. We're past that.” Tim presses his forehead against Armie's throbbing temple.
“Are we?” Armie leans against Tim, savoring his touch, his smell. “Did he fuck you?”

He can feel Tim tense and shake his head. “No. But I think he tried to... I don't know... It was a big mistake.”

“Was it?” Armie asks. He's not sure he wants to hear the answer. His body is starting to shake again and maybe it's not just because of dehydration due do constant purging.

Tim moves back, staring up at the ceiling. “I can't remember much. Only that I didn't like it. Because it wasn't you. Did Ramon talk to you?”

“No. Why should he?”

Tim shrugs, removing his arms, scooting even further away. Armie wants him back close but when he reaches for him Tim gets up and walks over to the window, staring outside. Dust is falling.

“Can you tell me what happened?”

Tim is quiet for so long Armie's not sure he said those words. Or maybe Tim didn't hear him? But eventually he speaks in a hushed tone, his rigid back turned towards Armie who's till sitting on the floor, feeling like the proverbial picture of misery. “He came over last night. I was lonely and drunk and...”

If Armie wasn't too weak to move he'd put his hands over his ears. Or he'd walk over and hug Tim, hold him and tell him he loves him no matter what.

“I thought I wanted it. At first...”

“Tim.” Armie mouths.

“But turned out I didn't. I couldn't!” Tim huffs as if laughing at himself. He turns and stares at Armie, intense, unguarded. There's an expression of sheer terror in his eyes. Fuck, what is it with this boy and his open display of emotions? Armie still can't handle it.

“I... we... it was....” Tim's jaw clenches, walls going up around him. His eyes glaze over. “I shouldn't have come here. Sorry. You are meeting your wife. Liz. That's good. I'm... I'm not... I better go.” Tim makes for the door, stops. Fumbles in the pocket of his hoodie. Takes out something he drops next to Armie's head on the couch cushions. “I just wanted you to know... I'm sorry. I don't deserve this.”

Armie turns and looks. It's the bracelet he bought for Tim.

Tim's tone shocks Armie into action. Because he sounds flat, dead. Tim never sounded like this before. Not even after... fuck, he's been such an idiot!

Armie summons all the strength he has left to get up and step into Tim's way. He realizes with a pang of guilt how ill Tim looks, frail and worn. If he hadn't been trapped in his own head, struggling with his fears and demons, he might have seen it earlier. Tim's just... not glowing anymore.

“Just tell me, Tim. As a friend.”

Tim's bouncing on his toes as if he wants to run. He shrugs, stuffing his hands into his front pocket. “He called and came by. Ramon. We had a few. And suddenly... he was... we were... well, if you really want to know... god, it's so embarrassing, but okay, I guess you have the right... I didn't get it up and he got angry and that's when I really had enough but on the other hand I did invite him and
I... flirted with him, even you saw that so... I don't know.” Tim falls silent, coughs, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, looks anywhere but at Armie. “I'm sorry.”

Armie feels cold. And sick. Really sick. “Did he hurt you? Did he... did he force you?”

“No.” Tim shakes his head. “Not really.” It doesn't sound very reassuring.

“Not really? Those bruises-?”

“He bit me and I tried to fight him off, so-”

“Why did you have to fight him off?” Armie's voice is barely audible.

“I told you. He got angry... held me down... and slapped me, and his hands were around my neck, and he wanted me to... wanted me to... suck his cock.” That's when Tim's voice breaks. He touches his throat.

Armie feels frozen. Someone tried to hurt his precious boy again and he couldn't protect him because he’s still chained to another person; because he's a fucking asshole who thought staying away from the man he loves would do some good.

This is all his fault! If he hadn't messed around with Tim nothing of this would've happened. Not the guy at the club, not Ramon trying to... he can't even think the word. All this keeping his distance is utter bullshit! He needs to be with Tim. Because he loves him. Only him.

“I was so stupid. I didn't see where this was going. I'm so sorry.” Tim whispers and Armie grabs his shoulder so hard that he flinches.

“Don't say that. Don't ever say that again! You have nothing to be sorry about. The guilty fucker here is that piece of shit who tried to rape you.” Tim winces. “And me, because I couldn't get my shit together and left you alone to fall prey to some depraved bastard.”

“No, Armie, I'm not prey. I brought that upon myself...”

But Armie can't listen anymore as nausea washes over him in a thick hot wave. “I think I'm going to throw up.” He groans, staggering in the direction of the bathroom in the hope to reach it in time.

“Again?” Tim's voice hits him like a fist to the stomach. Not a good thing in his current state. He clings to the smooth porcelain of the sink and spits saliva into the basin, watching it trickle down the white ceramic until it disappears into the drain. Apparently, he has nothing left to bring up. That doesn't stop his body from trying, though.

He stays there until he senses Tim's presence behind him.

“Did you really think I'm so blind? I know what you did. You know what that means, right?” Tim's voice is firm, hard. There's no trace of the terrified boy from just moments ago. Now he's on a mission, already opening Armie's bathroom cabinet.

“No, Tim!” He can't let this happen on top of all.

“We had a deal.” Tim sounds eerily calm. “You broke it.”

“No, it wasn't-”

“You throw up, I cut myself. Remember?”
“No, Tim-”

“I thought you were the type who used a straight razor.” Tim closes the mirrored cupboard door and goes over into the kitchen. Armie forces himself to stumble after him.

“No, Tim! No, no, no...”

He's too late. Tim already has a knife in hand and his t-shirt and hoodie pulled up. Armie watches in horror as he drags the blade across his lower ribs, blood welling up immediately. It runs down his heaving side and Armie is reminded of images of the crucifixion of Christ he had to look at as a child.

Tim doesn't make a sound, doesn't even hiss.

They stare at each other, both breathing heavily. Tim's eyes are blazing, the green irises reduced to a halo around dark, bottomless pupils but there's desperation beneath his fury.

“Drop it!”

The knife clatters onto the tiles. The blood soaks the waistband of Tim's sweat pants. Armie awkwardly hands Tim a tea towel.

“I had to do it.” Tim says, voice trembling, as he presses the white linen on the cut. “Quid pro quo.”

“Shut the fuck up.” Armie closes the distance between them, gathering Tim's thin frame in his arms, stroking his back. Tim let's him but doesn't hug him back. Instead, he buries his face in Armie's neck. He can feel the wetness of Tim's tears. “Was that because of what I did or because of what happened to you?”

Holding Tim feels like holding a hummingbird.

“I don't know. I just can't anymore. I feel... dirty. Such a fuck-up. I just don't want to feel anything, anymore, Armie.” Bony fists press into Armie's abdomen.

“Shhh, baby, shhh. I've got you. We have to talk to Luca.”

“No!” Tim tries to struggle free but Armie won't let go. “He'll lose his job. He needs it.”

“He should have thought about that before he slapped you and forced you-”

“But I encouraged him!” Tim's protest is muffled by Armie's chest.

“You didn't! Just stop blaming yourself.”

Tim huffs a sad laugh.

“I talk to Luca, if you like it or not. This can't happen on set.”

“Didn't you tell me it happens all the time?”

“Not to you. I'll see to that.”

They stay like this a moment longer until Tim squirms.

“You should get ready to meet Liz. Take a shower, change... or she might see-”
“She doesn’t care.”

When Armie feels Tim's lips on his neck he shudders. “She should.” Tim whispers.

'Yeah, and that's the difference between you and her', Armie thinks. 'I don't deserve you.'

Before he can say something, however, Tim suggests: “Or you could cancel.” He tentatively places his hands on Armie's hips, his breath hot on Armie's skin. Yet it doesn't feel like a come-on. It's just Tim seeking closeness, warmth, connection, endearing in its shyness. And Armie wants, god he want – but he can't.

“Sorry, Tim. But no. I have to talk to her. It's important.”

It might be the most important talk of his life. The past hour has shown him that there never really was a decision to be made. He just has to finally tell the truth before his indecisiveness and cowardice destroys them all.

Timmy leaves when Armie starts to run the shower. He's almost glad that Armie didn't invite him to stay. If he's honest, he feels way too raw right now to even just imagine anything intimate with anyone.

Of course, Armie has insisted to apply a bandage to his cut. It's tight. Timmy imagines it to be Armie's arms still holding him.

He had to do it. They'd agreed that this would have to stop. He knows it's a severe punishment but if Armie can't see how wrong it is what he does he will never break this vicious cycle.

Timmy at least knows that the cutting gets him nowhere. Only, sometime he forgets...

Like today. It had been deliberate. He had wanted Armie to see that if he hurt himself he hurt Timmy by extension. And if he hurt Timmy, he'd bleed.

But that's not the whole truth. The pain helps to take his mind off what Ramon did. It also helps to stop thinking about Armie at dinner with Liz. He doesn't even know where they are. He doesn't care.

'Forget it. Forget it all. You can't do anything, change anything, anyway.'

What he cares about is that Armie held him and told him it's not his fault. It's the only thing he wants to think about right now.

He still doesn't know where he and Armie stand at the moment. How much did he destroy by hooking up with Ramon? Is he forgiven? Or is Armie just pitying him? He might not be above taking even that.

Shit, he's just drained and tired, getting maudlin. He takes out his phone to find some distraction. When he looks at it, however, he sees that he has twelve messages from Ramon. He deletes them without reading, then switches his phone off.

He wants to take a shower but that would mean to remove Armie's bandage. So he orders a pizza and waits for it on his couch, reveling in the unfamiliar neatness of his place. He's not really hungry but he knows he has to eat. Pizza is comfort food, good for the soul.

Timmy removes his hoodie and t-shirt and picks at the gauze wrapped around his torso. For better or
for worse...

There's a knock on his door half an hour later. He freezes for a moment until he remembers he awaits delivery. He quickly throws the t-shirt back on when he hears a familiar voice. To his surprise, it's Esther.

“Timothée, putain! Why is your phone off? Open this fucking door or I kick it in.” Despite her harsh words Timmy can hear her laugh.

“Hey, sorry... I was...” He scratches the back of his head as he opens the door. “I was just tired.”

“Yeah, sure. Like Elio, I'm sure you had a lot to do.” She blatantly glances down at his crotch. That's when she sees the bloodstains on his sweat pants. Fuck! He should have changed them! “Mon dieu, Timothée, what happened?”

“Nothing.” He ushers her in. “Do you want something to drink?”

“I want to know why there's blood on your clothes.”

“I had a small accident.” He busies himself in the kitchen. Another knock announces the arrival of his food. “Esther, could you...?”

Esther can.

“Was it Armie?” She asks as they sit on the sofa a few minutes later, sharing Pizza Margherita.

“Why do you think it's Armie when I say I had a small accident?”

“Because I read a bit about him. Okay, I cyber-stalked him, is that a word? He's into some interesting stuff. Tying people up and so on. Or he was into that before his marriage.” Esther gives him a pointed look.

“Why are you telling me this?” He tries to sound indignant. He's not sure if she's joking.

“Oh, come on, Timothée!” Esther throws her hands in the air, rolling her eyes dramatically. “We all know what's going on. You weren't exactly subtle. And now his wife is here... shit, I should have brought something to drink. Do you have anything in?”

“Just Diet Coke.” Timmy points at the two cans on the coffee table. Maybe there's some left-over Vodka Ramon brought but he'd prefer to drink his own piss before he touches that stuff again.

Esther sighs dramatically. “Than that'll have to do. But I have to say you are a philistin americain, Timothée.”

Timmy grins as he takes another bite, tomato sauce dripping down his chin.

In the end, they talk for hours. About Armie. About Liz. Esther listens with baited breath as Timmy recounts how Liz almost walked in on them, then hugs him afterwards.

In turn, Esther confesses an affair with a married French actor on her last film.

“I know how it is.” She says and shrugs.

“Do you love him?”

“No.” She shakes her head and smiles. “Oh, Timothée... pauvre chérie! He didn't love me either. But
it was fun.”

“This isn’t.”

They sit in silence for a moment before Esther asks: “Shall we go over our scene for tomorrow?”

They do.

As always, loosing himself in someone else’s life helps Timmy to forget about this own.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was actually much harder to write than the one before. I’m still not absolutely sure about it but as I kept editing it didn’t get any better, it just kept changing up to the point where it started to get away from me so I thought it better to put it out. Here it is.
Over dinner, Armie still suffers from the shock of hearing Tim's story and watching him bleed. He's even quieter than usual lately, absentmindedly ordering just something from the menu without paying it any attention. He's not here to eat.

“But you hate anchovies.” Liz tells him and he stares blankly back at her until she explains to him that he just ordered a pizza topped with the little fuckers. He crumbles up another Grissini, takes a sip of water, pops an olive in his mouth.

“All the blood down in your dick, thinking about your toyboy, husband?” Liz pierces a salad leave, smiling cruelly.

The way she mentions Tim and blood in one sentence doesn't go down well. Calling him his toyboy, insinuating he's some sort of slut after what he's been through – due to Armie's idiocy – is the last straw that breaks Armie's composure.

“Sorry, I lost my appetite.” Armie places the napkin next to his plate and looks for the waiter. He needs more wine.

“Apparently not for cock.” She doesn't even try to pronounce it in French.

“Liz, that's low, even for you.” Armie realizes this has been a terrible idea and starts to get up. Liz is in one of her moods, maybe because he's been a no-show those past couple days. Definitely not an ideal situation to break the subject of their separation.

“Don't you dare leave me alone here. People are already looking.” She hisses, grabbing his wrist. He slowly sinks back into his chair.

“Than maybe you should stop making a scene.”

“I'm making a scene? Me? After all you've done, Armie... It's not me frolicking with a barely legal teenager on and off set every fucking day.”

“He's twenty.”

“And you'll be thirty in a few weeks.”

“Thanks for reminding me.”

But it's true. And he's lived a lie for most part of it. He pulls himself together. He's made a promise to himself. He'll settle this tonight.
It's vital that he stops this dinner from further escalating into rhetorical mud slinging.

“Actually, I really have to thank you for reminding me. Thirty is a milestone, don't you think? I've made up my mind. I don't care about what antics you'll get up to or what tantrums you'll throw – I have to be with Tim. I simply have to. I'm sorry. We have to find a way, good or bad. It's up to you. Tell me what you want. I get my lawyers onto it to draw up a settlement.”

Why had he been so afraid of coming clean, making decisions? He suddenly can't fathom his hesitancy as he remembers Tim trembling in his arms. As he remembers Tim cutting himself. This will never happen again. He'll be there for him. Together they can try to be better for each other. Something he never had with Liz.

Opposite him, Liz pales a little beneath her make-up. That's the only visible sign she gives that she's heard him and understood what he said. Her smile freezes. “But you could be his father, Armie!” She sounds equally shocked and amused. As per usual, she simply refuses to take him serious.

“Hardly. But you could be his mother.” Armie looks at his wife, watching with childish satisfaction when she pushes her plate away. Gotcha!

“Sorry, I think there was something wrong with the food. I suddenly feel sick.”

“I'm sure you know how to take care of that, Elizabeth.”

A few heads turn as Liz rushes out door, leaving Armie to settle the bill. He only does so after downing three Grappas.

So, that was that.

He feels somewhat light-headed when he leaves the restaurant. As he tries to call Tim his phone is switched off. Good, the boy needs rest. They both do. There will be time to tell Tim about his decision when they are both in a better shape than today. Besides, there's something else he has to do for him before he's worth of Tim's affection.

They film Elio's and Marzia's last scene the next day, as well as Elio and Oliver in the bar where Oliver plays poker as it is the same location.

It's strange, jumping back to the very start before fast-forwarding to the very end.

Timmy can only stare at Armie's miles of legs during the bar shoot. Those short shorts are outright sinful and he's still not used to it. Especially after nearly a week of abstinence. Being horny is a welcome distraction from his anxiety.

“How was dinner?” Timmy asks as they wait for the crew to set up the tracks for the dolly to shoot in the square.

Armie takes a deep drag of his cigarette. “At least it stayed down.” He arches an eyebrow, staring back at Timmy steadily as if to challenge him. Timmy's not sure if he should laugh or punch Armie. Almost on its own account his fingers touch where billowy covers the slash below his right nipple. He has removed the bandage this morning. What remains from the cut is a thin red line running over his ribs.

Timmy is aware that Armie's eyes follow his hand. “Does it still hurt?” He asks. Timmy shrugs.
“Not really.” The small wound doesn't. Yet the prevailing uncertainty is eating Timmy alive. “But, man, what I mean is—”

Two Grips carrying spotlights shove them to the side, excusing themselves profusely. The whole square is full of bustling crew members and bored extras.

“Let's talk about it later.” Armie says.

Timmy understands. He understands that this is not the best environment to have a serious talk. Yet he's not sure how much longer he can wait. Understanding their situation is one thing, enduring it another. He puts his Ray Ban on to hide his eyes.

As if to reassure him somewhat, Armie puts one arm around Timmy's shoulder and pulls him to the side as a stage hand running cables passes them by.

Timmy's eyes roam the location until he sees Ramon talking to the sound engineer. He's not looking in his direction. Nonetheless, Timmy instinctively wraps his arm loosely around Armie's waist, who squints down at him.

“What?”

“Can I have one as well?” Timmy nods at Armie's cigarette.

Armie offers him the packet.

They stay close like this until Timmy is called for. He likes it. It feels good. He missed this.

When Timmy sits in the car and waits for Esther to approach, watching Amira walk over into the bar, he has no trouble crying. It comes naturally to him. All the things that have happened over the past few days make it easy for him to burst into tears.

Shaking Esther's hand, watching her little sad smile bloom on her face while remembering last night, he means it when he says: “Pour la vie.”

Afterwards, when he chats with Amira and Esther, he catches Ramon staring at him. He ignores him but feels his gaze linger at the back of his neck.

Where's Armie?

He finds him talking to Luca in the shade of one of the old, dilapidated buildings surrounding the Piazza. Their voices are hushed but they both look angry. Luca's face is reddened as he shakes his head and says something Timmy can't hear but it only seems to rile Armie up further.

When Timmy sidles up to them Armie excuses himself to get some water.

“What was that?” Timmy asks.

Luca shrugs. “Armie's a little upset.”

“About what?”

“Don't worry about it, Timothée.” Luca sounds drained, irritated.

“Okay.” What the fuck is going on here?

Luca visibly tries to calm himself. “Anyway, how are you? Everything okay?” Despite his obvious
tiredness Luca smiles at him fondly, patting his shoulder, squeezing it gently.

“Yep, I'm fine.” Timmy lies. He can’t tell Luca the truth. He’s his director, his boss, and certainly doesn’t need Timmy’s personal problems on top of the stress he’s apparently experiencing with making their movie.

“You've done a magnificent job so far. I know it's not easy for you.” Luca pulls him close. Timmy can smell his expensive aftershave that reminds him of his father. “But you are doing great. I can't say it often enough. The next few days will be especially demanding. Try to get some rest, okay? Relax.”

Timmy nods, his forehead touching Luca's breastbone. He's actually as tall as Armie. Timmy feels safe in this moment, untouchable, protected.

“We're all here to help you, you know that, right, tesoro? We're here for you. Whatever you need.”

“I appreciate that, thank you.” Timmy suddenly feels at the verge of tears.

Later, when he sits with Armie in the car back to Crema, he asks: “Can I see you tonight? Just for dinner, a movie maybe?” He’s not sure if this keeping their distance thing is off or not.

Apparently not. “Sorry, I've... there's something else I have to do. I'll see you tomorrow and then we can talk, okay?” Armie squeezes his thigh. Timmy shrugs, looks out of the window. He should be patient. But it doesn't feel okay. He doesn't feel okay.

Ramon had again tried to talk to him on his way to the car. He'd even reached for Timmy when he hadn't stopped walking. Only Armie stepping up to Timmy and handing him a water bottle had deterred him. He shudders, his hands clutching at the water bottle until his knuckles turn white.

“Hey, everything's going to be fine.” Armie tells him, his huge hand resting on Timmy's left knee. 'Fine'? Timmy's not sure he remembers the last time things were really fine between them. Were they ever?

He dines again with Esther that night, in a small Trattoria in Crema just off the Piazza del Duomo. It's fun. He succeeds to ignore what troubles him at least for a while. Liz. Ramon. The movie. His future. His career. Instead, they talk about acting, their families. He confesses that both he and his sister had a crush on Esther's brother when they were teenagers and Esther promises to introduce them.

“I'm sure he'll love you. Tout le monde t'aime, Timothée.”

Timmy doubts that's true but it's nice of Esther to say so.

When he arrives on set the next morning, at the station where they'll film Elio's and Oliver's goodbye, Ramon is nowhere to be seen. They go over the blocking more often than usual as the train is expensive and they can't afford many takes with it. Armie hugs him again and again while the camera aims for the best angle. Timmy doesn't mind.

Yet he can't overlook Armie's pale complexion, his tired eyes, as if he'd barely slept. It adds gravitas to the scene but also increases Timmy's fears. He has a lump in his throat. Fuck, one of his ticks is showing as he touches his neck again and again.

What if Armie leaves him, like Oliver leaves Elio that day? Would Timmy wait twenty years? Could he? That's the span of a whole life. Those past days have been bad enough. He can't imagine living much longer in this limbo.
When they eventually roll, a new guy is angling the boom. Timmy asks Sayombhhu during a break and is informed that Ramon quit the day before and has already left.

Timmy hates himself a little for the relief he feels.

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Watching Tim and Esther in their scene gets Armie in a strange mood. Isn't this how it should be for Tim? Find a nice girl, in her case even someone with the same cultural background and profession, fall in love, maybe have kids some day?

As if that had worked for him.

Still, isn't he depriving Tim of a chance to what is generally, universally regarded as happiness?

Another fact that makes Armie uneasy but also makes him stay on set even after his scene with Tim is done is that bastard Ramon obviously ogling Tim, who in return seems to ignore him completely. But Armie senses Tim tensing up. Once or twice Armie sees Ramon make a move in Tim's direction as if to talk to him, provoking Armie to step up, flexing his muscles, shielding Tim.

Ramon shoots him a contemptuous look but keeps his distance.

Armie wonders if he should corner him and tell him to fucking cut it out but fears he wouldn't be able to just stick to words. He's not a violent person but he doubts he could keep his temper in check. He's a good boxer, loves to train on speed bags. The thought is somewhat appealing to Armie's darker notions.

He had to watch Tim bleed. Wouldn't it be so much better to watch blood drip from that turd's nose, mouth, crimson rivulets spilling over his skin as Armie makes him pay for what he did to Tim, returning the favor and giving him bruises in secret and not so secret places?

No, there has to be another way!

When they are wrapping for the day Armie finally pulls Luca aside.

“Can I have a word?”

“Sure, Armie, dear, what is it?”

Armie's looking around. Everyone's busy packing up. Tim chats with Esther and Amira at the far end of the square. Ramon is putting equipment into a van.

“It's about that boom operator.”

“What, about Ramon?”

Armie takes a deep breath. “I don't like him.”

Luca just stares at him. “You don't like him? What is this? Are you getting... how do you say... airs and graces now, Armie?”

Armie feels anger well up inside him. How much can he tell Luca without revealing what Tim confided to him? “No, I'm not! This is not about me. It's about Tim.”

Luca sighs. “Armie, they just like each other. They are almost the same age. I know your situation is... complicated but don't let this interfere with our work. If this happens, it will ruin everything. I
told you before. I won't allow that.” Luca sounds suddenly cross. “Jealousy is helping no one.”

“This is not about... my situation, as you call it. But that fucker made a pass on Tim-”

“Timothée is old enough to decide for himself. Leave it, Armie!”

“Fuck, Luca! You don't understand-”

“I do understand, Armie! And I won't have you talk about anyone of my crew like that. Basta!”

“Tim is one of your crew as well. Don't you think he deserves your protection, your commitment? Or are you just fucking around with all of us for the sake of _art_?” Armie makes air quotes around the last word to mock his director and instantly knows he's gone too far.

Luca looks disappointed, hurt, but also furious.

“This is what you think of me, Armie?”

Right then, Tim materializes by their side. Armie can't face him, not in his state. He's too upset. So he raises his hands and just walks away.

“I need some water.”

Later, when Tim asks if they can have dinner, he has to decline. It's not that he doesn't _want_ to. He'd love to spend the evening with Tim, tell him about his talk with Liz, his decision, the next steps. He's already emailed his lawyers. And Liz has contacted hers, as she'd informed him this morning. Things have been set in motion. Armie is aware that Tim needs to know what's happening.

But first he has to help fixing Tim's problem. If he can't protect the man he loves he's not worth him. He has to make Luca see. Ramon has to go, for Tim's sake. Armie has brought him into this situation, he has to sort it out. Preferably without involving Tim. It has been enough for him already.

He arrives at Luca's house at about nine. This time, Luca himself opens.

“Armie.”

“I'm sorry about what I said earlier. About how you deal with all of us. I know I sounded bitter and ungrateful. It was unfair and I apologize.” Armie hadn't thought about what to say, he just blurts it out.

Luca hugs him in return. It feels good.

“What did you tell Tim we were talking about?” Armie mumbles against Luca's shoulder.

“That you were upset but not why.”

“Thank you.”

Luca releases him and looks him up and down. “Won't you come in and tell me what's going on? What is it that's troubling you?”

As they enter the kitchen, Peter Spears is there as well. Armie stops in his tracks and stares.

“Good evening, Mr Hammer.” There are papers and photos strewn all over the large kitchen table, a laptop open and humming in the middle. In between the creative chaos sit small Espresso cups.
“Take a seat, Armie.” Luca pours him a cup as well.

“I don't want to interrupt.” Armie remembers the last time he talked to Spears. That didn't go over too well. He really doesn't need him here, now.

“Oh you are not. If this is about Timothée, I'm sure Peter wants to know as well.”

“I'm all ears.” Spears sits up and folds his hands on the table.

Armie takes a deep breath, sits down. Moves some photos around on the table top. They are stills, one of him and Tim with their bikes when they filmed the Armance scene.

“This is quite personal.”

“Oh, please.” Spears shakes his head. Armie's dislike increases by the minute. He fixes his attention on Luca. Clears his throat.

“It's all my fault. If I hadn't... never mind. It has been difficult between me and Tim lately so Tim invited Ramon over, they got drunk and it ended with Ramon trying to force Tim to... fuck, how do I say that? Okay, he held him down and tried to force Tim to suck him off.”

Spears hand holding his dainty Espresso cup freezes half-way to his mouth in mid-air.

Luca's face falls. “Armie, these are serious allegations. I have to ask you, are you sure?”

Armie swallows. “I saw the bruises.”

Luca is silent, his expression stony. Spears carefully lowers his cup, leans forward. “When?”

“Yesterday, when we were filming at the monument. It happened the evening before.”

“Oh god.” Spears sounds genuinely shocked – and worried. “How is he?”

“Perturbed. He's trying to cope.”

“He's trying to cope?” Spears repeats Armie's words, adding an acerbic undertone. “What's that supposed to mean?”

Before Armie can answer Luca raises his hand. “Does Timothée know you are here?”

“No.”

Luca rakes a hand through his hair “This is... I'm horrified this should have happened on my film, with one of my crew members. If it's true-”

“Why should Timothée make up something like this?” Spears asks. It's not that Armie suddenly likes him but he understands in this moment that they are both on the same side, Tim's. So he nods with vehemence. “I believe him.”

“I should talk to him.” Luca murmurs.

“No. Don't. Please. Why not talk to Ramon instead? Why drag Tim through it again?”

“I have to agree with Armie.” Spears gets up and starts pacing the kitchen.

Luca sighs. “I'd never thought... we are a family, you know that, Armie.”
“Believe me, I know about all sorts of shit going on in families.”

“I bet you do.” Spears snorts. But it lacks malice. Armie looks up at him. He still can't figure him out but senses that they should join forces here. So he swallows a bitchy retort and just says: “No-one's blaming you, Luca. But, please, something has to happen. Tim can't go on like this. He's in an impossible situation.”

“Why didn't he tell me?” Spears mumbles, more to himself than to Armie or Luca. Out of sympathy, Armie looks away.

Luca stares down at the table. “Okay. I'll talk to Ramon. Tonight. But maybe I need to speak to Timothée afterwards.”

“Yeah, fair enough. Just... be gentle with Tim.”

“I'll see to that.” Spears sounds fierce. He's already digging out his phone from under the papers.

“Of course. Of course.” Luca sounds deflated and Armie's heart clenches. He hates being the bearer of these bad news but it had to be done.

Armie sees himself out, leaving Peter and Luca sitting in the kitchen, his director resting his tired face in his palm while the producer is already dialing a number.

He feels a little better. He's done the right thing. He can trust Luca – and Peter. If they say they'll talk to Ramon they'll talk to Ramon. And if Ramon admits what has happened they will take the appropriate steps.

And by the look on Spears' face this won't be a pleasant chat.

When Armie returns to his apartment, he feels restless. He checks his emails. His lawyer has written back. He needs more information and proposes different procedures, depending on Liz's cooperation.

Armie knows he should contact his agent and PR people as well and inform them of the impeding ultimate MCA – but not tonight. He's had enough. One thing at a time.

He plugs his phone in and listens to some music. He misses his daughter, getting her ready for bed, reading to her. Yet he's used to that feeling. He's been away so often in her short life already. Maybe it won't be such a big change for her if he moves out after all? She'd still be seeing him every few weeks...

Moving out. That sounds somewhat final. He'll have to find a new house in LA. Or should he move to New York, where Timmy lives? Should they move in together? Or would that be too fast?

It's a fact that Armie doesn't like to be alone. And he and Tim have already shared so much, it would feel strange to him if they decided to live apart. Keeping their distance didn't work in Italy, why should it work back home?

Tim told him he shares an apartment with some friends. Going by the state of Tim's flat here, Armie can imagine his squalid digs. Didn't he even mention rats and cockroaches? Armie's certainly not moving somewhere infested by vermin.

He should get Nick onto it, find them somewhere nice to live. He's sure Tim would like the East Village. Armie's by no means as rich as everybody thinks – including Liz – but he has a trust fond at his disposal.
If he bought Liz a bakery he can buy Tim an apartment.

Armie's sitting by the open window, chain smoking but sticking to drinking water for a change when his phone rings. He initially hopes it's Tim.

"Ramon will leave us. He's exempted with immediate effect." Luca says. He sounds beat.

"Okay." A wave of relief washes over Armie.

"Thank you for telling me, Armie." Armie hears the sadness in his tone. He's sorry for having shaken Luca's faith in his familia.

"So there's no need to talk to Tim?"

"No need at all. Ramon was quite... frank. He didn't see that he did something wrong. He told me the same what you told us earlier but he called Tim some names. Maybe that's the worst. I don't know. I never thought I would be forced to have a talk like this."

'It happens everywhere.' Armie thinks. At least this time it had just been a small cog in the machinery. If Ramon had been someone higher up in the hierarchy, things could have ended quite differently.

"I don't want Tim to know that I spoke to you, okay? I'm not sure he'd like that I broke his confidence."

"You did the right thing, Armie. But I promise not to tell him. Good night."

But Armie can't sleep, he's too keyed up. The emotional turmoil he's been through the past days keeps him awake till the small hours.

Next day is Saturday and despite the relaxed Italian hours, they film nonetheless. They can only rent the station on a weekend. Armie's aware that Tim scans the set the for Ramon first thing when they arrive at the station and his rage and pain return. But then Tim's visibly relaxing when he doesn't find him.

Good!

Armie needs every ounce of positive energy he can muster to get through the the good-bye scene. He knows it's important and he tries to convey his emotions as raw and honest as possible – but this scene takes him to a place he isn't ready for. Because he knows that this exact moment will come for them in the near future. In the book, Elio and Oliver won't meet again until Christmas and this could very well be true for both of them as well...

Just imagining that makes him grab Tim tighter.

He might hate this scene even more than the dance scene.

He's thankful the train is so expensive that they only do one take.

There's a break as the crew sets up for the scenes with just Elio alone after Oliver left. Tim sits down next to him in the shade a few minutes later, offering him a water bottle.

"Do you have a cigarette?" Armie has been smoking and now lights one for Tim as well. “Have you heard, Ramon is gone.”

“Yeah.”
“He quit last night.”

“Can’t say I’m sorry.”

Tim squints at him, shading his eyes with one hand. Armie holds his gaze. He won't tell him. He won't admit either that he'd made a few calls after hanging up on Luca last night, just dropping some hints in the hope of making sure that it will be very difficult for Ramon to find work on a film set ever again.

Eventually, Tim nods. “Still strange, as the shoot is nearly over.”

“Don't remind me.”

“You didn't like this scene.” It's not a question. Armie shakes his head in answer nonetheless. “This is fucking hard for me as well.”

“Yeah...,” Armie feels too emotional for many words. “Sorry.”

“No, that's not... God, this is just awful.” Tim stubs out the cigarette. “I don't want a good-bye like that when we finish. Don't come with me to the airport or something, okay?”

“Okay.”

Tim nods, pursing his lips.

“You actually told me what you want for our last night.” Armie watches Tim blush at the memory. “That still on?”

“Yeah...,” Tim bites his lips. Armie wants to devour him right on the spot.

“Okay.” Armie takes a deep drag from his cigarette and stares ahead at the overgrown train tracks. They have ten days left.

“You want to have dinner tonight?”

Tim smiles, nods. “I'd love to.”

Chapter End Notes

We all know what 'dinner' means, right?
Dinner - and lunch.
Don't say there's no fluff in this story...

'Dinner' turns out to be Kebab on Timmy's sofa. Armie comes around at eight, carrying two paper bags filled with spicy grilled meat, salad and bread.

“T'm sorry, I can't eat any more pasta.”

Timmy grins, accepts the bags and goes in search for plates.


“You're a caveman, Armie.” Timmy rolls his eyes but has to admit the food smells delicious.

“And don't you like it, darling?” Armie croons. “Oh my god. You've got wine!”

And it's not even plonk, but a decent Orvieto. Amira helped to choose it after today's shoot had finished. Timmy grins proudly.

“Hell, and you cleaned the place up!” Armie uncorks the wine and carries two glasses and the bottle over into the lounge. “What's going on here, Tim?” Armie turns around, smiles. Timmy hasn't seen him this relaxed and outright goofy in days... or maybe even weeks.

Timmy shrugs. “I had enough of living like a teenager.”

“Ah, do you want to show me your best side? Seduce me with your housekeeping skills?”

“I doubt I can beat your wife at that. I'm shit at baking.” For a split second Timmy fears he's gone too far. Armie stills, looks up at the ceiling, then back at him. He comes over into the kitchen and takes both plates from Timmy's hands, puts them on the counter. 'Great! So that's it with dinner and talk!'

But Armie just hugs him, lifting him off the floor. “You cannot compare with her.” He mumbles into Timmy's ear. “I'll happily live with you in your old nursery at your parent's apartment, eating canned ravioli and Pop-Tarts, than spend one more day under one roof with her.”

“I'm not that young, Armie.” Timmy giggles. “I have my own apartment.”

“And Pop-Tarts?”
“Let me down.”

“Nope, not a chance.” Armie throws Timmy over his shoulder and no matter how much he squirms and kicks, he can't stop him from being carried over to the couch where he's unceremoniously dumped into the cushions.

“Fuck you!” Timmy shrieks.

“Later.” Armie goes back into the kitchen to get their Kebabs. Timmy takes a huge gulp of wine. It's really quite nice.

“So?” He asks, watching Armie suck hot sauce and grease from his fingers while wiping his own plate with a piece of bread. He tries for light-hearted yet his stomach is clenching. Up till now everything has been easy-going. But what if that is only Armie placating him, softening the letdown?

Armie takes a sip of wine. “God, Tim, that's good stuff. I remember I once had a similar wine at-”

“Armie!” Timmy puts his plate down. “Is this to be a wine tasting session?”

Armie turns and sighs. “Sorry.” He clears his throat. Suddenly, the atmosphere changes. If it had been filled with laughter and silly banter a moment ago now it seems heavier, pregnant with meaning. Timmy refills his glass, holds it up to the light and watches the amber rays dance in the the honey-colored liquid.

The rest of your life starts now’ he thinks.

“I spoke to Liz.”

Timmy closes his eyes.

“I told her it's over. I have contacted my lawyers since. Liz and I have a prenup. My dad might not be the heartiest man but he cares a lot about money. The family's money. He insisted. So most financial matters have already been taken care of. Now, with the kids, there's the question of custody, of course. But I'm positive that Liz and I can come to an agreement there as well... holy shit, Timmy, careful!”

Timmy has actually stopped listening after hearing the word lawyer. He's taken another large gulp of wine and almost knocked over both their glasses as he clambered into Armie's lap to kiss him. Which he does now, furiously, and doesn't care that Armie's lips are oily and his mouth tastes of garlic. Timmy tugs at his hair and grinds down against him while his hands are already pushing Armie's blue t-shirt up.

“Fuck, no. I've.Been.Careful.For.The.Past.Week.” Timmy accentuates every word with a nip to Armie's neck, his yaw. God, how he's missed this! “I'm done with careful!” He lets go of Armie just for long enough to yank the t-shirt over his head. He wants to bury his face in Armie's chest hair but Armie stops him, grabbing his shoulders.

“Hey, slow down.”

“No.”

Timmy is already pushing Armie down onto the seat.

“I haven't even eaten my... fuck, Tim... Oh god!” Timmy unzips Armie's shorts and pulls them down while mouthing down his belly, swallowing his half hard cock the moment it springs free. It just
needs a few hard sucks to fully harden in his mouth.

Armie stops protesting. Instead, his hands bury in Tim's curls.

“God, yes, I missed your lovely mouth.”

Timmy just hums in response. It transforms into a groan of frustration when Armie pulls him up a moment later. This didn't remotely make up for a week of abstinence!

But then he hears Armie say: “I want you to ride me.” Voice low, eyes already hooded. Timmy almost trips over his own feet as he sprints into the bedroom to get lube and a condom.

He drops both next to Armie's hip on the couch as he quickly strips. Armie pulls him back on top with one hand the moment he's naked while the other holds the condom up between them.

“What?” Timmy's already stroking Armie's big hard cock and fondling his balls while sitting on his thighs. “I thought you'd insist... because of... you know...” He's not saying HIS name here, now, naked with Armie on the same couch where... fuck! NO!

His movements stutter. His chin sinks against his chest. He tries to take deep breaths, closing his eyes.

“Hey, Tim.” Armie touches his cheek but Timmy shakes his head. He just needs a moment.

Armie feels different, sounds different, smells different.

And right now Timmy is on top.

He opens his eyes and looks down his body. The angry red cut still curls around his rib-cage, his ribs too prominent, ridges and dark valleys charting his torso. The bruises are still visible on his hip and belly, fading and yellow by now, but still there. He hates them. He hates his whole body. Too skinny, weak, the perfect victim...

“Hey.” Armie's voice is soft as he sits up. Timmy's erection is flagging. No, no, no! It had all been going great and then Timmy's fucking head got in the way.

“We don't have to... at all. It's okay.”

“No, it's not!” Timmy leaps up and Armie doesn't hold him back. He turns off the lights. It's not completely dark outside but the dusk baths everything in a grayish twilight. When he gets back on the couch he can't see the marks any longer. Good.

As he lowers himself again, his thighs brushing Armie's skin, he realizes that Armie is angling for his pants and t-shirt on the floor. “Sorry, this has been... I think this is too soon, Tim.”

“What? No!” Timmy tries to push Armie back down but he gently wraps his hands around Timmy's wrists and stops him.

“Tim...”

“No, please... god, I missed you so much.” Timmy scoots closer, searching Armie's mouth. When he finds it, Armie releases his arms so that he can throw them around Armie's neck. In return, Armie lifts him a little and sits him in his lap again.

They just kiss for long minutes, soft at first, then harder and harder. Soon, they are both panting, hands roaming everywhere they can reach. When Timmy throws his head back Armie tenderly bites
down the side of his neck before licking a broad stripe back up again.

“Fuck me.” He whispers into Timmy's ear. Timmy's heart jumps into his throat, his stomach drops.

He slides back a little, framing Armie's face with both hands to look him in the eyes. In the gloom they seem almost black.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.” Armie hands him the lube before starting to suck on his collarbone. Timmy stares over the crown of his head into the darkness. He swallows.

“Okay, but turn around, on all four.” He doesn't want Armie to look at him and see those treacherous bruises. Damaged goods, second best.

Still, he wants Armie so much it hurts.

He takes his time to open him, Armie's hands clawing onto the armrest as Timmy pushes in, one slick finger after another.

“Jesus.” Armie sighs as Timmy is three fingers deep inside him, turning and scissoring. It looks delicious so he licks the taught rim. It tastes of lube, sweat, soap, musk. Love. Trust. Armie sacks forward, whining.

“God!”

Timmy starts to pump in and out. He wants to hear Armie beg and moan.

“Come on, tell me that you want it.” Timmy is surprised how fierce he sounds. His free hand sneaks around and touches Armie's cock. He's hard and dripping. Good.

“I want... god, Tim, I want you to fuck me.”

Timmy kisses his tailbone, licks the dimples at his lower back, watches his muscle ripple, his spine arch. He's sweating. They both are hot all over.

“Please.” Armie whimpers. He whimpers even more when Timmy pulls his fingers out. They are sticky and wet, trembling. He drops the condom wrapper and curses.

“We don't...” Armie looks over his shoulder. It's too dark to see his face. “We don't need to... it's okay.”

“You sure? I mean-”

Armie twists and presses his index finger to Timmy's lips. “Just do it. It's okay. I know it's okay.” He turns back and braces himself against the armrest.

Timmy inhales. Exhales. Rubs the glistening head of his hard cock over Armie's slick hole. It's gaping a little, almost as if to suck Timmy in.

“Greedy.” He mumbles and Armie chuckles in response. It becomes a needy groan when Timmy bats his glans against Armie's entrance.

“That's fucking torture!”

“Yeah.” Timmy smirks and pushes in.
Armie clenches at first but relaxes when Timmy sinks in deeper and deeper. When his balls hit Armie's taint they both gasp.

Timmy stays still for a moment, reveling in the tightness, the heat, the control.

“Just... please...” Armie's back is heaving with the shallow breaths he draws. When Timmy starts to circle his hips the wheezing become curses.

“Fuck... yeah... deeper... more... come on... that all you got? Come on... just give me your cock. God!... Wreck me, Tim... just wreck me. Do it!”

God, yes! Timmy looses all inhibitions as he grabs Armie's hips with both hands and starts to slam into him without restraint. He doesn't care if he hurts Armie. He doesn't care if Armie gets what he wants, if it's good for him. He just wants to fuck into that slick, tight hole of his. His head feels light, his skin hot, burning.

He slaps Armie's ass and is rewarded with a deep needy moan. So he does it again. Rakes his fingernails over the abused flesh.

He's the one who decides when and if Armie will come. The knowledge of being in charge here reassures him. Armie will take what he gives him, do as he's told. It's usually not what Timmy wants or needs but tonight it feels phenomenal.

Armie bucks, shoves his ass back against Timmy's groin, choked wailing escaping his mouth. Timmy curses the fact that he wanted it this way around. He'd give a lot to see Armie's face right now.

His orgasm hits him sudden and hard. He thrusts deep and feels himself pulse, one, two, three times. Armie feels it as well; his muscles contract, this time to massage every last drop from Timmy's cock.

When Timmy's done, he pulls out. Armie protests but is silenced when Timmy replaces his cock with his mouth. He tastes salty sweat and lube and then, after a few probing sucks, himself. Armie squirms and spreads his legs wider to allow Timmy to bury his tongue deeper. He's just babbling incoherently, begging, pleading for Timmy to make him come.

Timmy loves to listen to Armie's broken voice, loves that he put Armie in this state of needy bliss. While his tongue caresses Armie's rim, lapping at his cum dripping from the tight hole, he reaches up and drags his fingernails down Armie's lower back. Apparently, that's enough, the pain-pleasure mix just right to make Armie sob and grind against Timmy's face, almost breaking his nose as he comes untouched all over the cushions.

“Tim.” Is all he says as he drops onto his side. There's a wet spot in the middle of the sofa and Timmy would get up to fetch a towel but he doesn't think his legs will support him. He just sinks against the backrest, his body covering Armie's thighs, his head pressed against Armie's rib-cage. It's uncomfortable but he feels boneless, made of jelly, unable to shift or move. Cum is drying on his chin. It itches.

“Wow.”

“Yeah.”

Timmy wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and starts to giggle.

“I think I've got lube up my nose.”
“Jesus.” Armie laughs so hard he almost falls off the couch. In the end, Timmy throws him the nearest bit of fabric he can reach – his own t-shirt – to clean up a bit. There are half eaten Kebabs on the small table. The wine has gone luke-warm.

Timmy grabs it nonetheless and drinks directly from the bottle.

“Pig.” Armie chides him before he reaches over and does the same.

Timmy stretches and curls back around Armie's side. He starts to get cold. “There used to be a blanket here...” He wonders.

Armie wraps him up in his arms instead, sighing against his shoulder blade.

“What?” Timmy asks. He could fall asleep like this.

“I had it all planned out, Tim. My grand romantic gesture. And instead...” Armie laughs into his hair, his warm breath ghosting over Timmy's scalp.

“What are you even talking about?” Tim has trouble keeping his eyes open as he snuggles against Armie's body, his coarse chest hair rubbing against his back.

“Wait.” Armie moves away and Timmy tries to stop him but has to accept that Armie is stronger. But he also has longer arms so he doesn't have to completely shove Timmy off the sofa as he grabs his shorts and takes something from its pocket. He sinks down onto his knees in front of the couch and takes Timmy's limp hand in his.

“Timothée Chalamet...,” he begins. Timmy can't stop giggling. “Love of my life, will you do me the honor and - stop laughing.” Timmy bites his lips. ‘...and accept this token of my deepest affection as a promise of my full commitment to you in the future, for better or worse?’ Armie's holding up his bracelet.

Timmy's still grinning from ear to ear. “You are not even divorced yet, you can't promise me anything.”

“Well, technicalities...”

“I'll remind you of that in the middle of the lawsuit. Besides, you already gave me this!”

“You are such a spoiled brat, Mr Chalamet!” Armie smiles back at him and Timmy curses the dim light because he can't see Armie's eyes.

“Et tu ne l'aimes pas?” Timmy gracefully extends his hand for Armie to put the bracelet back on his wrist. Where it belongs.

... Next day is Sunday. Luca has invited the whole family over: Walter, Peter and Sayombhu are already there when Armie and Timmy arrive.

“Sufjan has send his songs. I want you all to listen to them.” Luca declares as they are settled in his living rooms, lounging on the couches, sipping chilled lemonade and coffee as it's just eleven in the morning.

Timmy has opted for the floor, sitting cross-legged at Armie's feet, his back against the couch, playing with the beads of his bracelet, waiting for the music to start.
Dreamy, hazy notes waft through the high room. Timmy listens to the lyrics and the words hit him harder than expected:

*I have loved you for the last time ...*

*I have touched you for the last time*

He has to swallow and as the song ends he wipes his eyes with the back of his hand.

“Wow.” Armie says above him. His voice sounds thick.

“Beautiful, isn't it? I have the most perfect idea where to use it. Timothée, picino, are you okay?”

Timmy nods. “It's so sad. But very... moving.”

“It's perfect. It captures the essence of what Oliver meant to Elio.” Luca gets up and plays the song again. Timmy's rests his head against Armie's shin and closes his eyes. When the last notes have faded out, he excuses himself, gets up and leaves the room.

“Sorry, I need... a moment.” It's already too hot outside on the balcony so Timmy opts for the much cooler kitchen, splashing water into his face at the large sink. He remembers being in here with Armie, doing the dishes, Armie choking him against the fridge, just a few weeks ago but also a lifetime...

Timmy jumps when someone touches his shoulder. It's Armie.

“Hey, you okay?”

“Yeah, sorry, I don't know... but that song...,” Timmy shakes his head.

“Yeah, it got to me too.” Armie's eyes look suspiciously shiny.

“It's just... How does he do that? It's as if he knows us. As if he's been here, watching us. Going inside my head and... fuck!” Timmy tries to grin but it feels like a grimace.

“No idea but, yeah, those were my exact same thoughts. He's a true artist, he seems to sense and feel things and channels them into this beautiful music... god, I sound like a pretentious twat.”

They both giggle to fill the embarrassed, loaded silence. As their laughter dies down they just stare at each other.

“Do you remember-?” Armie asks and he doesn't have to finish, Timmy already interrupts him.

“Yes!”

“We had so much time ahead of us. God, if I hadn't been such a coward-”

“Don't.” Timmy closes the distance between them, staring up at Armie. He can feel his warmth, smell him, see the golden stubble on his throat and the tuft of chest hair vanishing inside his t-shirt. He wants to rake his fingers through it, touch it, touch him. Everywhere.

“Can I see you, later? I need to be alone with you.” Timmy smiles.

“That's not... I can't.” Armie sounds strangled. “Sorry.”

Timmy sighs, his shoulders sagging. “No, it's... okay.” He remembers last night. Maybe Armie is still
too sore.

“You know it's not that I don't want to...,” Armie trails off, his fingers stroking Timmy's cheek, his neck. Timmy closes his eyes, leans into the caress. “But I promised to take Hops out.”

Timmy blinks, nods. His chest feels too tight. “Of course.”

“We should go back. Luca has another song he wants us to listen to.”

“Not just yet.” Timmy whispers, trying to prolong this intimate moment for as long as possible. But it has to end. As everything.

They walk back into the sitting room a minute later, a little more composed. Peter looks at them and frowns.

“You felt it too, Armie, didn't you?” Luca asks, almost exuberant.

“Yes, I definitely felt it.”

Peter scoffs.

“Good. Now, here's the other song.”

The much more brighter and lively notes of Mystery of Love start playing. But the lyrics have an equally devastating effect of Timmy.

_How much sorrow can I take?_
_BLACKBIRD ON MY SHOULDER_
_And what difference does it make_
_When this love is over?_

This morning isn't getting any better.

When the music has died down, Luca starts to explain the scene he has in mind for it but Timmy's not really listening. That blackbird has been sitting on his shoulder often enough. He can't do this again. He's had the feeling lately that he'd become better in dealing with stuff that bothered him, that he could talk about it, reach out. Now he fears he might lose all he gained and once again give in to his self-destructive tendencies.

The cutting. The bad choices. The self-loathing.

Apparently, only being with Armie can take his mind off these things. But on the other hand, Armie has been the cause for much of his shit lately... it feels like an endless loop. His very own Oroboros.

_Cursed by the love that I received_

Yes, Timmy understands what that means.

He leaves Luca's in a dazed state, mind foggy with want, fears and memories that threaten to drive him crazy.

“Tim!” Armie's catching up with him on the small, cobbled side street. “Tim, wait. Let's... can we go back to your place? Now.”

^^^^^^
They stumble through the apartment door, already all over each other, limbs entangled, mouths greedily seeking the other's tongue, skin – anything to latch onto.

They don't even try to make it into Tim's bedroom, Armie just props him up against the counter, dragging his sweat pants and boxers down. Tim bends over, spreads wide, moans...

Armie just sucks two fingers into his mouth, slicking them up perfunctory at best before pressing in. Tim yelps.

“Lube?”

“I want to feel you.”

Cornflakes, washing-up liquid and their dirty breakfast dishes crash to the floor as Tim's arms flail for purchase. He bites into his fist as Armie enters him after barely a minute of preparation.

It doesn't take long. Armie fucks him hard and fast and Tim gasps and swears, demanding more. Armie holds him down between his shoulder blades and apparently the angle is perfect to hit Tim's prostate over and over.

The noises he makes turn Armie on even more than the tight heat engulfing him. So needy, so desperate for cock, willing to take it, to suffer.

“Who do you belong to?” Armie grunts. He feels savage, wild, possessed.

“You!” Timmy almost screams. “You!”

Armie comes buried deep inside him and feels his own body tremble and spasm only moments later. When he pulls out Tim winces, pushing up. He's made a mess on the counter, cum soaking the front of his gray t-shirt.

“Wow... okay... that was...”

“What you needed?” Armie stares at him while he pulls up his pants, awkwardly arranging his still half-hard but now over-sensitive cock beneath the soft fabric. For a split second Armie fears it has been too much, too soon. Too brutal.

Yet the urge to claim Tim had been stronger than his scruples. This is what he can give him to chase those dark clouds away. Armie's not totally insensitive. He'd seen how Tim's face had darkened and paled while listening to Sufjan's lyrics. That wizard stared right into their souls and laid their sorrows and regrets bare. It's frightening but also liberating.

“What we both needed.” Tim smirks. “Coke?”

They sit side by side on the sofa, gazing at one another, sipping their drink before suddenly dissolving into giggles.

“Jesus.” Armie drags a hand over his face. He can still see the dark spot where he came onto the cushions last evening. “I have to take Harper to the park this afternoon.” He has no idea how to unite the two worlds he's living in right now. He feels a little lost, torn between the kinky shit he gets up to with Tim and play-dates with his daughter. Being a parent still sometimes overwhelms him.

“Can I come too?” Tim asks shyly as if he'd heard Armie's thoughts.

Why the fuck not? Hops adores Tim and now that they are... what? Boyfriends? They are not fifteen
anymore. Lovers? Sounds too saccharine. Partners? Well...

“Yeah, sure.”

But they both need another shower and Armie wants to change. So they agree to meet on a bench in the little park just outside the old town at three. There’s a swing, a sandpit and a little river. Hops loves to throw stones into it.

Armie doesn’t tell Liz that Tim will accompany him.

Their interaction is strictly confined to child care but ice-cold nonetheless. Liz stares daggers at him when she hands their daughter over.

“Get her back by six, Armie. And watch out that she doesn’t get dirty or tears her clothes. This is Nicki Macfarlane. That means expensive. Also, they’d like some photos with her wearing it.”

Hops is dressed in a white, tufty silk frock. For an outdoor afternoon!

Armie certainly won’t waste the precious time with his daughter having her pose for pictures.

They’ve already reached the corridor and are waiting for the lift when Lilly comes after them and quickly hands Armie a shopping bag. He looks inside and grins. It contains nappies, wet wipes and some comfortable clothes.

At his place, he puts Harper into the gray leggings and the blue t-shirt with green stars on it he finds in the bag. Hops points at the stars and Armie explains that they are usually not really green but look pretty like this on her (as pretty as Tim’s eyes). His daughter smiles.

“We won’t tell mummy, okay, darling.”

She seems to understand because she shakes his head and answers: “Ice-cream.”

“You are a tough one, honey.”

Hops nods and smiles some more. She can play him like a fiddle.

She also wraps Tim around her finger. When they approach the park he sits under a tree in skater shorts and a fresh but too large t-shirt, looking so unbelievable young he could be mistaken for Harper’s older brother. The sun catches in his dark curls, giving him auburn highlights. He’s so beautiful Armie has trouble breathing.

When he sets her down Hops runs towards him, screaming “Teeeeeem”. Tim looks up from his phone and smiles back at her, catching her to lift her and throw her up in the air. His daughter squeals with joy.

She insists that Tim pushes her on the swing. The beads of his bracelet glow against his pale skin as he scrunches his freckled nose and counts in French, much to Harper’s delight. ‘This could be my life’, Armie thinks as he looks on and can’t suppress a broad, happy grin.

After Hops almost fell into the little river when climbing down the slope he carries his daughter on his hip over to a Gelateria, his free arm draped casually over Tim’s shoulder. He watches him argue with his daughter about the right choice of ice-cream – she finally decides on pistacchio as well – and it’s all just perfect. They feel like a family, no tension, just fun and love. Hop’s even offers her waffle to Tim, a rare privilege, and Armie memes a pout until she feeds him some of her ice-cream as well. She misses a little and Tim wipes the green mush from his cheek, licking his fingers clean with a coy
little smile.

Armie remembers him bend over the counter just a few hours earlier, legs spread, grunting while begging for cock. He wants this, all of this, his daughter and Tim and family time and hot sex with his beautiful lover and right now it seems tangible, possible.

Until his phone chimes with a text from Liz, reminding Armie that Harper is not to consume refined sugar nor lactose.

'Too late', he thinks, watching as his daughter licks sticky green drops from her little plastic spoon, eyes closed in absolute bliss. Liz will have to deal with the sugar-high later.

“Come on, you two, let's get you cleaned up before we return you to mummy.” Tim shoots him a wicked smile and Armie kicks him under the table. Tim yelps and Hop's looks from one to the other, frowning.

“Daddy?”

“Timothée was just a little naughty.”

“Bad Timmowtee.” Harper chides him.

Tim has to hide his face in his hands. Armie pinches his bottom when they leave the Gelateria, just out of sight from the customers, and Tim bites his lower lip while throwing Armie a look that gets him embarrassingly hard in his jeans.

“Is that a promise, daddy?” Tim whispers and only the presence of his daughter stops Armie from pushing him against the wall and devouring him right here and now.

Of course, Hop's throws a tantrum when she has to bath at Armie's, screaming on the top of her lungs until his patience is running out. That's when Tim walks into the bathroom, scoops her up in his arms and tells Armie to leave. He does, more grateful than he's prepared to admit. Through the closed door he can hear Tim talk sternly to Harper, calling her by her full name, and a few moments later his daughter giggles and splashes around in the tub.

He has no idea how Tim does it but it doesn't matter. He needs him and he wants him and he won't ever let him go.

“Thanks, man.” Armie briefly rests his forehead on Tim's shoulder, covered in a soaking wet t-shirt when he emerges from the bathroom fifteen minutes later, a tousled but clean Harper wrapped in a towel on his hip. “Who of you took the bath?”

Tim flips him the finger behind Harper's back.

“Will you still be here when I return from Liz?” Armie asks. Tim just nods, settling on the couch. He says good-bye to a tired Harper, playing with the remote of the TV as Armie closes the door.

Armie has a lot of things in mind on his way to Liz's hotel but they are absolutely not G-rated at all.
You Want It Darker

Chapter Summary

They need more.

Chapter Notes

Title's form This Is For You by Leonard Cohen.

There's a lover in the story
But the story's still the same
There's a lullaby for suffering
And a paradox to blame

Timmy wanders through Armie's apartment after he's left with his daughter – to avoid to think about where he's going.

Has he actually ever been here alone, able to explore? He knows he probably shouldn't but he's always curious and they are together so Armie surely wouldn't mind a little snooping around, especially as it takes Timmy's mind off the fact that Armie will be meeting the woman he's still married to.

The afternoon with Harper had been fun. Timmy's usually not too keen on kids – he often still feels like one himself – but they somehow like him. He hadn't missed the proud expression on Armie's face as he'd watched Timmy with his daughter. Had it been a test? Anyway, Timmy had been on his best behavior and really put in some effort.

Maybe this is what Armie expects of him, back home? Taking care of his child with him together. His children. Timmy swallows. This is daunting. No matter how much he enjoyed today, he's not sure he's made for being... a part-time parent? A step-father? At least not yet. He feels too young to shoulder such an enormous responsibility. He's never thought about if he wants to have children of his own. It just never crossed his mind until now. He's simply not ready.

But the kids will always be part of Armie's life so he'll have to tolerate them. He knows it's important to get along with them. Though he has to admit he thinks Hops is already a little spoiled brat. And she's not even two.

Well, as long as she just stays with them every odd weekend he'll cope. If he's honest, he just wants Armie for himself. It's bad enough that the kids and their mother will always lurk in the background. They shouldn't play a too prominent role in his and Armie's daily life together...

Their daily life together.

Timmy still can't believe that this will happen. He has no idea how. He lives in New York – well, 'living' sounds somewhat grand, he shares with two friends, their apartment the size of a shoebox. He
has no idea how Armie will fit into that arrangement – let alone two toddlers. And even if Armie leaves Liz, won't he stay in LA, close to his kids? Does Timmy want to move there? His few encounters with Hollywood have been... strange, to put it mildly. He knows he's not common leading man material. Could he really cut it there?
So, how much daily routine will there actually be for them?

All Timmy has ever dreamed of was them sharing expensive hotel rooms, living out of their suitcases, fucking all night after opulent dinners – not dirty socks, parents evenings and discussions who's turn it is to empty the dishwasher or take the rubbish out.

No, if he's really honest with himself, he has no idea what to expect. They have just known each other for a few weeks, meeting in very peculiar circumstances. What do they even have in common?

Armie likes outdoors, barbecue, hanging out with his small circle of old friends. Timmy's a city kid, loves New York with all his heart, did almost go vegan before coming to Italy because basically everyone does, and is eager to meet new people. His neighborhood, his school – it is – was – colorful, diverse. He needs that kind of variety, it's his culture, ingrained in his way of life. His family is the best example for it: half-French, half-Jewish, liberal, creative.

Whereas Armie's family is... the total opposite. Rich, Christian, conservative. That's the world Armie grew up in. And it still reflects on his personality. As Timmy skims his book shelf, for example, he's almost shocked how generic Armie's reading habits seem: Dean Koontz, Raymond Chandler, Dale Carnegie (seriously?).

Timmy makes a mental note to introduce Armie to Tanguy Viel, Hubert Selby and Eimear McBride as he idly strolls over into the bedroom. The bed is freshly made, the curtains open, letting in the evening sun. On Armie's dresser sits a clean ashtray, a packet of cigarettes, a thick withe church candle and a pump-container half-full of lube. Timmy grins, randomly opening cupboards and drawers.

There are Armie's t-shirts, a neat stack of soft, well-worn garments. Next is his underwear, gray and black cotton boxer briefs. They are clean, folded, boring... Maybe Timmy should get a pair Armie has worn from his hamper in the bathroom – or would that be weird? Well, Elio masturbates in one of Oliver's bathing trunks so he could pass it off as method acting.

He grins, opening another drawer.

Fuck! There's Armie's rope, the dildo, a bag of cloth pins. Timmy touches the soft hemp, running it through his fingers. He feels a tingling sensation low in his belly. This is the exciting darker side of Armie. Timmy wonders how he reconciles it with his almost prototypical straight white maleness.

Straight? Well, at least that has been a facade. How much else of Armie's life is?

Timmy has to admit that he loves the kinky shit Armie's into even more than he had previously thought. It unlocks something deep inside his soul. It's new, it's exciting, a learning experience, exactly the kind of stimulation Timmy craves. He's been surprised what it did to him, being tied up and getting used by Armie.

This is what he wants with him, reaching uncharted territory, stretching both their limits - not babysitting, nappies and potty training.

A cuddle on the sofa in front of the telly is fine but they can still do that when they are old.

Timmy never thought he had it in him, that submission would turn him on as much as it does. He can
still feel the slight burn from when Armie fucked him earlier. Armie's huge and they didn't use lube precisely because Timmy wanted to feel him, wanted to feel claimed, wanted the pain evolve into pleasure and take him to another plane. It's even better than getting high.

Should they talk about it? They never really talked about it, apart from Armie telling him to pick a safeword. Wouldn't it be the mature thing to do, to set boundaries, tell each other what they want and like - and what they don't like? To avoid disasters like that one time Armie tied him up and left. But somehow, to Timmy, this would take the magic away by stripping their interactions of the lewd secretiveness that's actually a huge turn-on for him. He's not interested in safe, sane and consensual – not with Armie.

Because he instinctively trusts him. Has done so from the beginning. He's not even sure why.

But he's sure that he doesn't want to trivialize what they have by talking about it. Words can't capture or convey how he feels when he's tied up and at Armie's mercy, nor when he has Armie beneath him and the power to do whatever he wants to him.

Timmy feels hot all over, his face blushing. He wants to give Armie something no-one else can or will. He wants for Armie to take him apart and make him whole again. Their quick fuck earlier has just been foreplay. Timmy needs more. They both need more.

Time to show how far he's willing to go...

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When Armie returns to his apartment the lounge is empty. Shit! Did Tim leave? He'd been really looking forward to spend the evening with him. Especially after his encounter with Liz.

She'd told him that she got hold of two tickets for some fashion event the next weekend in Milan.

“I talked to your agent and your publicist. Both think it would be good if we attended.”

“We? As in you and me?”

“Of course, Armie. As a couple.” Liz had smiled, all teeth and no warmth. He still shuddered thinking about it.

“We aren't a couple anymore, Liz.”

“Is that so? Well, last time I looked, we were still married. And let me guess, you spoke to neither your agent nor your publicist about... him.” She'd nodded smugly as he'd stayed silent.

“Why are you doing this, Liz? Is this really how you want us to be? Spending your life living a lie for other people's sake?”

“Why am I doing this, Armie?” She'd not turned angry, but had explained to him slowly, suddenly serious. “Because I have two children with you. I need the best deal for them I can get. For that, you have to have a career. The longer we're seen as a married couple, the longer your career will flourish. Do you really think anyone will hire you for important projects after this story breaks?”

“I'll always support my children – and you.” Armie had felt deeply hurt. How could she think otherwise?

“From what? As an out of work actor, fame fading fast? Your family will cut you off as well the moment they'll become aware of your new... proclivities. Can you imagine your mother embracing
her precious eldest son now living in a gay relationship with a boy almost half his age? She'll rather order an exorcism.”

The worst had been the Armie had known that Liz was right.

“We'll talk about this another time.”

Liz had clicked her tongue and raised her hands. “They'll need us rsvping quickly, Armie.”

“Who?”

“The Milan fashion show... do you even listen to me talking?”

“Whatever... I have to check the shooting schedule...”

Liz had just sighed, and Armie had known that she clearly saw through his avoidance tactics but dismissed him nonetheless, telling him that she had a massage appointment.

Armie hates that all she said makes perfect sense. As an openly gay actor, he might miss out on larger roles in the future. His family will cut ties and financial support. These thoughts do nothing to calm him down on his way home.

What he needs to take his mind off these things is Tim. He has to be close to him. They've been apart for too long. It didn't do them any good. On the contrary, it made them both miserable. Tim even got assaulted because someone took advantage of his loneliness. The incident with Ramon did show Armie how young and vulnerable Tim is – and how much he wants to protect him. Keep him for himself.

The thought of Tim belonging just to him, locked away, at his disposal, only for him to use does turn Armie on immensely, especially after a week of chastity. Last night had been for Tim. The quick fuck they'd had a few hours ago has done nothing to dampen his arousal – it had only spurred it on, hard and dirty as it has been. Tim had wanted to be used, to be hurt, had asked for it. Armie's cock twitches at the memory.

He wants to do so many filthy things to this boy.

But apparently, Tim has made other plans and left. Did Armie spook him? Had he been bored by the afternoon? Did he get tired of waiting? Armie is about to start panicking when he sees Tim's phone on the couch. He'd never leave it behind.

“Tim?”

“I'm here.” His voice comes from the bedroom.

As Armie opens the door, the sight that awaits him takes his breath away. Tim is kneeling on the floor next to the bed, naked, his hard cock resting in his left palm. It's already leaking, the slit red and glistening, a stark contrast to his creamy skin.

He found his dildo and placed it on the floor. Next to it, the church candle Armie keeps on his dresser is burning, adding something almost pious to the image of Tim in this obscene yet repentant position.

A fallen angel.

The angry cut below his rib cage is still visible, a stain on his porcelain skin.
Above it, a cloth pin is attached to each of his tiny nipples. He now flicks the right one with his free hand. It makes his cock twitch. A bead of clear precome drips slowly onto the floorboards.

Tim's eyes are cast down but he looks up as Armie enters.

“I've been waiting for you.” He breathes and Armie fears his knees might give out. But when he reaches for Tim he says “No. Just watch me.”

Tim has put a chair in the middle of the room, about five feet away from his naked body. Close enough to see, hear and smell – but far enough away not to touch.

“This is for you.” Tim says quietly as Armie sits down. “You said we should keep our distance so you could think. I want you to think about me now.” Tim licks his lips, leaving them shiny and wet before lowering his eyes again. When he pinches his left nipple a shuddery moan escapes his mouth. His chest is starting to flush rosy as he plays with the cloth pins, alternating his attention. It's evident how much he likes it by the soft noises he makes – and by the puddle of precome pooling in his palm. He's not really touching himself, just holding his cock for Armie to see.

A tremor runs through Tim's whole body. “Do you like me like this?”

“God, Tim...,” Armie sighs, pushing one hand down the front of his shorts. He thinks he might be drooling but doesn't care.

Tim is panting hard by now. His nipples look a little sore, two hard nubs bitten by the makeshift clamps.

“Do you like to watch me play with myself?”

“Very much.” Armie is already hard, his cock thick and heavy in his fist. He almost chokes when he sees Tim reaching for the candle.

“Tell me where to put it.”

Everything slows down. Armie stares at Tim holding the candle in his right hand, still presenting his cock with his left. Armie's gripping himself hard not to come on the spot.

“The middle of your chest.”

“Not my nipples?”

“You heard me, baby.”

Tim looks down and arches his back a little, puffing out his narrow ribcage as he pours a stream of hot, white wax down his sternum. It runs over his belly as well, only stopped by the hollow of his belly button.

Tim hisses but his erection doesn't falter.

“Again.” Armie's voice is rough. Tim dripping wax over his pale skin is the sexiest thing he's ever seen.

Tim's whole body trembles as the burning liquid hits him again. This time, the trail almost reaches the root of his cock.

“Now on your nipples. Start with the left one.”
Tim does, his moans getting louder. He's breathing fast through his nose as the wax hardens over the pins and his sensitive pink studs. Armie orders him to take turns until both nipples are coated with a thick layer of cooled wax.

“Sit back on your heels. Drip it over your thighs.”

Tim whimpers and Armie starts to stroke himself faster.

“I want to see you cock.” Tim begs, voice as shaky as his body. He looks painfully hard as his own dick still rests on his open palm.

“Stop talking. Open your filthy mouth and stick your tongue out. Look up at the ceiling.” Tim does as he's told. “Pour it over your tongue.”

There's a flicker of fear in Tim's eyes as he raises the candle, staring at it for a moment before tipping it in the direction of his face. Molten wax drips onto his red, wet tongue. By the sounds he makes it must hurt like hell. And yet he doesn't flinch.

He's the most beautiful sight when he tilts his head to look at Armie again, presenting his burned tongue coated in white wax before closing his mouth and swallowing. Spit runs down his chin. His eyes are black pools; he seems almost gone on pain and endorphins.

Armie briefly fantasizes about tying Tim down, pouring hot wax into his nostrils, over his mouth, his eyelids, watch him fight for breath afterwards as he grunts in agony, becoming a faceless sex doll...

Armie shakes his head to get rid of these depraved images.

There's one part of Tim's body still free from wax. His erection is outright throbbing by now.

“Okay, now your cock. Pour it over your slit.”

Tim huffs through his nose as the first drops hit his sensitive glans. The muscles in his abdomen ripple and clench at the pain but he doesn't pull back. He has to wait in between for new wax to melt as Armie tells him to do it again and again until both his cock and his hand holding it are covered in white wax.

Tim is grunting by now, making desperate noises deep in his throat.

“You want to come, babe?”

“Yes, please.” Tim nods frantically. Armie hears a slight lisp. His face is glistening with sweat and tears. When did he start crying?

“Put the candle down.”

Tim's eyes are glassy, two red spots blooming high on his cheekbones. “You wanna watch me fuck myself for you?” He rasps.

“God, yes, Tim.”

Tim grabs the dildo with this right hand, kneeling up a little awkwardly, squatting above the toy while spreading his legs. His left hand is still glued to his cock straining up against his belly.

“Lube?” He asks weakly. Armie is tempted to order him to fuck himself dry or just spit onto the dildo but that might result in serious anal fissures which is something Armie doesn't want to go to ER for on a Sunday night. So he drizzles a generous amount of lube onto his palm and reaches for the
rubber dick to slick it up.

Tim sighs with relief.

A shocked gasp escapes him when he pushes the huge dildo in, slowly starting to fuck himself with it. In and out the black toy goes, making Tim moan and buck his hips to find the right angle. When he's got it he shivers all over.

“Oh.” His lips form a perfect circle.

Armie has finally taken his cock out of his pants the minute Tim did breach himself. His fist is flying on his shaft, the friction lessened to bearable by the remnants of lube on his hand. It feels delicious.

“God, Tim, this is so gorgeous. You're so beautiful. Yeah, come on, harder, you can take more! Show me. That's it, deeper... there you go. Come on, fuck yourself, stretch that tight little pucker. I wanna see you gape.”

Watching Tim work his hole, giving him a fantastic show soon proves to be too much.

“Fuck!” Armie shouts, stumbling to his feet and shooting his load all over Tim's chest and face. It's a lot. The pearly drops run down Tim's cheek, mixing with the sweat and wax, dripping into his open mouth. Tim looks wrecked and ruined. Armie's cock twitches one last time.

“God, please...,” Tim speeds up now, ramming the toy inside himself and it only takes a moment before he comes as well, spilling his seed into his palm but also all over the wooden floor. Usually, Armie would make him lick it up but he senses that Tim has had enough.

He collapses forward and finally removes his hand from his spend cock to brace his fall, hissing in pain as the waxen coating breaks. Armie catches him before he crashes face-down onto the parquet. Tim's too exhausted to even remove the dildo. Armie gives him a minute, holding his trembling body before ordering him up again. He quickly removes the clothes pins. Tim screams.

“Shhh.” Armie soothes him, stroking his hair, kissing his temple. “I know.”

Tim silently sobs against his shoulder.

“Show me.” Armie says and Tim turns around clumsily, crawling towards the bed. He moves like a new-born foal, skittering awkwardly on all four until his upper body drops onto the mattress to support himself. Armie stares at his ass, his stretched hole. He flicks the dildo a few times, listening to Tim's whimpers.

“So tender, so delicious.” He whispers. “I want you like this all the time. Wet and open for me to take you. I think I'll buy you a plug.”

Tim only hums weakly in reply.

After another long moment Armie finally pulls the toy out. Tim's hole flutters but doesn't clench, staying open instead. Armie touches his rim, dragging his finger over the stretched, glistening ring of muscle while Tim whines with over-sensitivity.

Armie spits into Tim's gaping hole, watching his saliva vanish inside Tim's body.

“You feel that?”

“Ye-es.”
“More?”

“Please.”

Armie holds him open a little while longer with his thumbs, imagining what else he could pour into Tim's pliant, exhausted body. Hot wax. Piss. Acid. Watch him squirm, hear him scream and beg for more.

Beg him to stop.

Falling silent, loosing consciousness.

He would still want to fuck Tim if he were dead.

Those fantasies are frightening but also tantalizing. Sick. Alluring.

Eventually, he can't stop the sphincter from contracting. Tim obviously needs rest.

Armie sighs, kisses Tim's ass cheek, nuzzles his cleft. “This was the hottest thing ever.”

“Does she... does she do things like this for you?” Tim asks suddenly and Armie almost doesn't recognize his voice. He sounds raw, spend, very young.

“No. Never.”

Tim spreads his legs a little wider, ruts against the mattress, back against Armie's face.

“But this is not... you don't have to... there's no competition between the two of you.” Armie can't stand the idea that Tim did all this to outdo Liz.

As if he can read his thoughts he says: “I wanted to. I needed this. As did you.”

Armie loves him with fierce, violent force in this moment. He pulls Tim back against himself in an almost brutal embrace.

“Yes. Yes, Tim.” Armie wants to crawl under his skin, get inside his brain, discover what makes him come up with exactly the right things at the right time. But Tim needs something else right now. “Let's get you cleaned up, my little perverted nymph.” He whispers into Tim's ear. He can feel him grin.

“I also found your ropes. Can you tie me up again, later?”

“You're such an insatiable brat.” That's not a no and they both know it.
When Timmy opens his eyes the next morning, he stares right up into Armie's sweaty armpit, his dark blond hair sticking to the still fair skin there. Timmy inhales, breathing him in, curled up against Armie's side. From the angle of the sunlight drifting in it seems early and he wonders what got him awake, especially after last night's exertions.

There's a faint noise. It sounds like... fuck, it's Cardi B's Washpoppin, which means it's Timmy's agent calling. He clambers out of bed, straddling Armie in the process (who just grunts) and skitters naked over to his phone he left on the couch in the lounge yesterday.

“Wait, wait, wait!” Timmy whispers under his breath as he swipes the display, hoping Brian won't hang up. When he calls at such an hour, it's important.

“Brian, hey, what's up, man?” He asks a little breathless.

“What is going on over there in Italy?”

Brian doesn't fuck around. And he doesn't sound amused either.

“What do you--”

“Cut the crap, Timothée!”

Shit! “Did Peter talk to you?” Fuck, he'd asked him not to! He's sure his mom kept quiet.

“Of course Peter talked to me. He's my husband! Jesus, Timothée, what were you thinking... No, don't tell me!”

Timmy stays silent, grabbing his phone tighter. He can hear Brian breathe on the other end of the line, presumably in his loft in New York overlooking Central Park.

“It's called acting for a reason, Timothée.”

“Yes.” What else can he say?

“Okay, listen,” Brian sounds a little calmer. “There's already... talk. Not much but... your little Italian adventure with a certain Mr Hammer is attracting some attention. Notoriety. Apparently, his wife made a few calls, to a lawyer who happens to know the chief editor of EW, and guess into whom I bumped tonight at a dinner party? Oh, and to her husband's publicist, who left me an interesting message spiced up with the odd expletive. Which had me track down Peter, tightening the thumb screws. Timothée, honestly...” His agent sighs.

“I'm... I'm not sorry.” Timmy stares through the open bedroom door at the still sleeping Armie, one arm thrown over his face, the other stretched out to the side where Timmy had slept a few minutes ago.

“Well, you should be. Good news is I got you into that Christian Bale movie. It's a small part but a huge production. Oh, and Greta was impressed with your audition as well. Ronan is in talks for the female lead. Those are two very important projects for you. Then there's another thing I want to pitch to you. Even Woody Allan called. You are up and coming. We were all hearing wonders from your set. There's awards buzz starting. That's what we worked for since you were seventeen. You can't fuck that up!”
“Brian-”

“No, Timothée. We worked too hard for this. All those mediocre teenage films... you are so much better, destined for greater things. Not playing sons and boyfriends, supporting roles. You can work with the best and the hottest. But... not like this.”

“Like what?” Timmy's mouth is dry. He's not sure he wants to hear the answer.

“Hooking up with your co-star. Your male, married co-star. Openly. Listen, I don't give a shit if you screw every dick down there with a pulse – but not your colleague with whom you play being in love. Because that's no acting, and will get no awards for acting. Besides, no one will hire a gay, Jewish twink, at least not for the roles I have in mind for you. For the roles you want and rightly so. Timothée, if this scandal becomes known you are finished. No one will want to invest in you if you break up other actors marriages. That's just not how these things work.”

“I don't care!” Timmy is aware that he sounds like a stubborn child. He's almost in tears.

“Yes, you do! Remember those six weeks in Austin? You begged me on your knees to never have to do a film like that again. Have you already forgotten?”

He hasn't. That summer had been exceptionally miserable. Maika had treated him like something the cat had dragged in, not worth to share screen time with her, and somehow everyone on set had agreed. He'd hated every minute of it, kept to himself like a recluse - and prays the resulting movie never sees the light of day.

“I hoped that was in the past but even such movies will be out of reach for you if you come out now. Believe me, no one wants to see a fag get it on with the hot chick – not the gays and not the girls. You have to stop this madness right now.”

“I can't.” Timmy sobs, pressing the heel of his free hand into his left eyesocket.

“Timo.” Brian says a bit gentler. “Listen, I might be able to counter some of the gossip. But you didn't have a girlfriend over the last few years so that could be a bit tricky. I'll try. But this has to end. If the Hammers split up... you know how it is, Timothée, having destroyed an actors marriage, outing him, his beautiful wife's pregnant for god's sake... that's your death warrant in this industry. You can do whatever you want behind closed doors but not like this, out in the open.”

Timmy's throat hurts as he swallows.

“I can't do that, Brian.”

The silence on the other end is heavy and full of reproach. “Okay, I'm coming down there. We have to find a strategy. I have to talk to Luca, and to you and Armie in person. Jesus! The things I do for you.”

“Brian, please-”

“Bye, Timothée, I have to book a flight.”

The line goes dead.

A hand squeezes his shoulder and Timmy startles.

“Hey, babe, what's-”
Timmy throws himself against Armie's chest. “Fuck.” He chokes, his fists punching Armie's ribcage. “Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!”

Armie can't help it, he's getting angry. So fucking angry!

“I'll call her. Right now! I'll tell her to-”

“Armie, don't, it's too late anyway. The rumors are spreading. The cat is out of the bag. There's no use riling her up-”

“Fuck, Tim, she can't just... she can't just do such things!” Armie literally sees red dots dance before his eyes.

“Of course, she can. I mean, we didn't hide or anything so why shouldn't she talk about it? She's still your wife, she's hurt and angry and jealous...”

“Tim, don't take her side. Don't defend her. I can't listen to this!” Armie throws his hands up. He wants to destroy something. The poor coffee table gets another kicking. Tim jumps, backing away from him.

“Armie, don't...”

“Sorry.” He rakes his fingers through his hair. God, what a mess! “So, your agent is coming here?”

“Yes.” Tim nods. He looks extremely unhappy, nervously playing with the beads of his bracelet.

“And he wants us to break up?”

Tim chews his lower lip and doesn't look at Armie when he nods.

“Will you do it?” His chest feels too tight.

“No, I... fuck, no! But... he talked about some really great projects. Projects I want to do. And he said I won't get them when word gets around.”

Armie sighs, sinking down onto the couch. “I told you so. But you didn't believe me.”

“I... fuck, what am I supposed to do now?” Tim looks lost, very young. There are goosebumps creeping up his naked body. Armie hands him the soft plaid draped over the back of his couch. Tim takes it and holds it as if he's no idea how to do with it.

“Brian told you.” It hurts beyond believe to say these words out loud.

“Are you serious? Do you want me to go? I mean, this will affect your career as well...,” Tim's voice is too high, too thin.

“What career?” He means it.

“Armie, don't. You have other projects lined up after this. That film in India.”

“Yeah, well...” It's an indie action movie. Weinstein will produce it. Armie has never worked with him but has heard he's an unpleasant genius. What he picks turns into gold. And it's a big part. It could get him other stuff than supporting roles.
Tim sits down next to him, finally wrapping himself in the blanket before cradling his head in his hands.

“So, people know about us?” Armie asks quietly.

“Apparently the gossip is spreading. Brian will try to reign it in but he's not sure...,” Timmy mumbles until his voice breaks. His hunched shoulders start shaking.

Armie leans over and hugs him, pulls him close. “I'm not giving you up. But if you should decide to end this, I'll understand. You have so much to lose.” He whispers in his disheveled hair.

“Ha! What have I to lose? A marriage? My children, my reputation?” Tim pulls back to wipe snot from his nose. The tip is red. Armie wants to kiss it.

“My marriage has been over for a long time. I won't lose my children. She can't do that. I have some money. I can afford lawyers.”

“You don't want that, do you? Fighting in courts, your private life dragged into the open.”

Tim is right. “No, I don't want that. But I doubt Liz wants it, too. She's trying to feather her own nest, so to speak. These are empty threats. She won't go through with it. She fears public humiliation more than she fears losing me.”

“If you go back to her-”

“I can't do that, Tim!” He feels sick just thinking about it.

“She's pregnant. She needs you.”

“Believe me, that woman needs no one.”

“I wouldn't mind. We could still see each other, wait a little, sort this out. If you have some successes to your name again and my career is more established, we could try again.”

“And till then I live a sham marriage, steeling the odd weekend off to see you? Unable to acknowledge you in public. Always living in fear of being caught, outed.” Armie hugs him tighter. He never wants to let go.

“It would just be for a short time. One, maybe two years-”

“You really believe that? That we could do that? That things will have changed by then? Fuck, Tim, I nearly lost it last week and I was seeing you every day. And you were lonely as well and that fucker-”

“I've learned my lesson. Armie, please, if we both don't want to end this we'll have to face reality and make some plans that actually work. We can't live in a dream any longer.” Tim struggles to free himself, sits back, pulls the blanket tighter around his thin frame.

Armie knows he's right. If the last week has taught him anything it's that he can't loose him. But also that he has to sort out his life, make plans for the future. He's tired of lying. But if it helps to keep Tim?

“Can we wait for Brian to arrive before we make a decision?” He asks. Tim frowns, looks away. That's when his phone rings. It's his publicist. She's also a good friend of Liz.

“Hi, Evelyn.” Armie tries to sound cheerful as he turns away from Tim to answers the call.
“Armie. Liz called me earlier. Then EW called. And just a minute ago I had a chat with Brian Swardstrom. You happen to know what we all talked about?”

“Evelyn, please, can we just-” He can't do this with Tim present.

“No, Armie, we can't. Brian is flying over tomorrow. We have to talk about this and come up with a game plan.”

Armie takes a deep breath. “How about I come out, quit acting and go into business with Nick?”

Tim sits up straighter and makes a strange sound between a retch and a cough. Armie watches him from the corner of his eye.

“Don't be silly. That would be a waste. You hate business. You love acting. We'll sort this.” Evelyn sounds very convinced.

“What do you mean by that exactly?” Armie is suspicious.

“Marriages end, Armie. Couples get divorces. Actors discover they are bi. They fall in love on film sets. Just not all at once, okay?”

This somehow gets his hopes up. “So, you don't want me to stay with Liz and give Tim up?”

Evelyn sighs. “Armie, I'm not getting paid to tell you what to do. I'm getting paid to make what you do look good. And I'm not an idiot. I know you make your own decisions. Just, think about it good and hard. Talk to Brian. Figure out what you want. Take your time. And, for the love of god – be discreet from now on. I'll be sending Nicole over to you.” After a short silence: “Is he there?”

“Yes.” Armie turns and looks over to Tim, who's still sitting on the couch, staring down at the floor, frozen, barely breathing.

“Put him on.” Armie hesitates but then passes the phone over to Tim who takes it with obvious confusion.

“It's Evelyn Karamanos, my publicist.” Armie explains. Tim's eyes go big as saucers.

Armie can hear Evelyn talk to Tim for a moment. He seems tense at first but then relaxes. After he's hung up, he hands the phone back to Armie.

“They are sending in the troops. God, we must have fucked up really badly.” A lopsided grin spreads on Tim's face.

“I'm sure we'll find a way, Tim-”

Tim snorts, then suddenly straddles him, kissing him hard. “Fuck me, now. Maybe it's the last time. Please.”

“It won't be the last time,” Armie mumbles as he kisses him back. “I promise.”

“Don't. Just, take me.”

Armie does, there and then, not hard but gentle. Tim gasps beneath him, sighs, whispers his name against his sweaty skin, opening for him.

When Armie stares down at Tim, buried to the hilt in his tight little ass, his eyes a deep forest green, fluttering shut at every thrust, he can't imagine a life without this. Without him.
“Look at me. Hold my gaze.”

He wants to remember this.

When Tim looks up it's as if he sees him, really sees him, and Armie's whole body is flooded with an unspeakable tenderness towards this beautiful, amazing, extraordinary human being. He stills, their fingers entwine as he takes a moment to acknowledge the man giving everything he's got to him right now – his trust, his love, his future.

It's almost too much for Armie to take. He's on the verge of pulling out, of running away, hiding from these raw emotions he never learned to master but then Tim smiles, hooks his calve around Armie's waist and digs his heel into his buttocks.

“Don't you dare call me by your name.” Tim glares at him before he giggles, and Armie starts to laugh as well, because this is hilarious, outrageous even, the two of them here, in Italy, almost losing themselves in the characters they play. But Armie isn't Oliver and he doesn't want Elio. He wants Tim – and Tim wants him, for whatever reason.

He'll be damned if he ruins this, if he gives him up. He'll fight for both of them. He'll fight the industry, his family, and every bigoted asshat that dares to come between them.

When he starts to move again it's suddenly rough and fast, the way he knows Tim likes it. He fucks him so hard he sees stars and has to support him afterwards in the shower because his legs seem to have ceased to properly function. Not that Armie minds carrying a limp, naked, wet Tim around.

Not at all.

They are late on set that Monday morning but Luca just smiles at them a little melancholic and tells them to get a move on.
Tim has déjà-vu. Brian has a plan. Armie has a confession to make.

On Monday and Tuesday they film the last scenes at the Villa. It's hard, especially for Timmy. This place felt like home.

They shoot a few pick-ups before they film the scene between Elio and his father. Timmy's glad that he didn't need to prepare much for it – the weekend has been such an emotional rollercoaster, there simply has been no time for learning lines. So he just listens, reacts to Michael's precise yet unassuming acting, trusts him to carry the scene.

He's glad Armie accompanied him despite having not been called for today. He needs his moral support between takes because what Michael says hits him to the core and reminds him of the impermanence of all things. Will all he'll have left from this summer be a bonedepth sadness he has to accept because it's better than the empty void that'll be left if he rips out all his feelings for Armie and tries to forget what they had?

Timmy has to admit he's afraid of Brian's arrival. The call from Armie's publicist somewhat reassured him but the things Brian said about his future have shook him. Brian is usually right. And up until know Timmy always followed his advice.

Now his advice it to stop seeing Armie.

Timmy hates himself for at least secretly considering the option.

When they've finished for the day Armie seems subdued as well.

“Hey, you alright?”

“Yeah... it's just... I just wished I had a dad like Elio.”

Timmy looks at him. Armie never talks about his father.

“Yeah, I mean, I don't know, man... it's basically how I grew up so..” Timmy shrugs. “What got me was how Michael alluded to the passing of time. Aging. That's such a weird concept for me. I'm just starting to realize that we can't take it for granted that things last forever.” He punches Armie's biceps, not meeting his eyes.

“Well, come to my age...” Armie sounds ironic, snorting a bitter laugh. Timmy frowns. “Anyway, I just decided that whatever my children will do or become, I'll just be like Samuel. I'll love and accept them for who they are.” He smooths the wrinkles off Timmy’s brow with the pad of his thumb.

‘My children.’ It somehow hurts hearing him say that.
They stay in that evening, going over their lines for tomorrow. It'll be intense. Elio's and Oliver's last conversation. The last day at the Villa...

“Do you think Oliver chose the easy way as an escape? Marriage as the safer option over being with Elio?”

Armie stares down at his script. “I don't know... it might have seemed safer to him but I doubt it was easy. I am sure he genuinely loved Elio. But he also understood that he was very young and needed freedom and experience.”

“Then why didn't he say so? Why didn't he wait a few years for Elio?” Timmy can't wrap his head around it. It bothers him. He has to make sense of it all to be able to deliver his last scene.

“But he asks Elio if he minds. And when Elio doesn't answer he takes his silence as acceptance. They haven't seen each other for six months, that's eternity at Elio's age. Oliver thinks he's moved on. But he waits nonetheless, he says so in the book. Lives a parallel life, a coma...” Armie trails off. Timmy thinks he's finished when he whispers. “He remembers everything.”

“Dreammaking and strange remembrance.” Timmy says, resting his chin in his hand.

Armie kisses him in response, soft and almost chaste, banishing the shadows creeping up on Timmy again.

That’s when Cardi B starts to play in the front pocket of his hoodie. As he sees it’s Brian’s number, he excuses himself and walks over into the lounge, closing the door, hoping Armie understands.

“Hi Brian.” He tries to sound cheerful but knows he fails miserably.

“Timothée, I just touched down at Malpensa. I’m now on my way to Crema. How are things?”

“Today was… good. I think Michael and I really found a rhythm-“

“I’m not talking about filming.”

“Then what?” Timmy knows he’s deliberately obtuse.

“Have you thought about what we talked about?”

Talked about... well, Timmy remembers Brian talking and him listening. “You mean about Armie?” He tries to play for time.

“Of course I mean about Armie... Are you high or something?”

Timmy wishes he was. He turns. The door to the bedroom is still shut. “I can’t do that, Brian. I... I love him.”

“Jesus Christ, Timothée!” He hears the barely suppressed anger in Brian’s voice. “You are twenty, darling. What do you know about love?”

“Enough.” Timmy’s surprised by his own sassiness. He can hear Brian bellow a laugh.

“Okay, if that’s what you want. You made your bed, then, Timo. See you tomorrow. We’ll all meet at Luca’s. Bye.”

Timmy stares at the dark display for about a minute before he pockets his phone and walks back into the bedroom. He doesn’t even bother undressing but just crawls under the comforter and snuggles up
against Armie, closing his eyes.

Yet he doesn't sleep well. He gets up in the middle of the night, texting Will and Giullian. They make plans for pizza and Netflix next week. Because Timmy will be home by then. In New York. In his apartment. With his friends, back to his old life. Italy will be no more than a fading memory and three months worth of dirty washing.

They ask when he'll arrive at JFK. He has no idea. He hasn't thought about booking a flight. He'll have to ask Brian.

What he tries to ignore hits him hard in these gloomy hours just before dawn: they don't have much time left. They'll leave for Bergamo on Wednesday, spending that day in the mountains before night shoots in town for the rest of the week.

Then they'll have one last weekend before they finish filming at Lake Garda on Monday.

And then?

Pizza and Netflix with his friends in New York.

And that's it?

He doesn't dare to talk to Armie about anything regarding any sort of future before they've all spoken to Brian. It seems useless to make plans. Somehow he feels like being on parole, waiting for the judge to pass the verdict. Will it be for life?

Armie gets up early as well and when he finds Timmy on the sofa quietly makes him coffee before pulling him close, massaging his neck until Timmy outright purrs. A hot shower helps loosening his stiff muscles further.

He still feels tense, experiencing a strange sense of foreboding that leaves him melancholic, almost depressed.

The Villa looks different today. It's dressed up for winter, with Hanukkah candles and a huge fire burning in the living room.

Timmy looks different as well. He has shed Summer-Elio. His hair is styled in a new way, he's wearing long trousers, real shoes and even a beret. Everything feels a little colder. The summer and the memories it held are slowly fading away. There's nothing he can do to stop time passing.

They film the phone call first. Armie is somewhere upstairs as they talk, their conversation is real. Luca didn't want to add it during post-production, he wants the genuine thing. The full impact.

When Armie asks: “Do you mind?” Timmy's throat tightens and he couldn't speak even if he knew what to say. No, what Elio would say... because Timmy knows the answer. He does mind. A lot.

Afterwards, it's not hard to give Luca what he wants in front of the fireplace. The first take is still a little restrained. The second feels right, because Timmy actually feels a little better towards the end. Elio cried over Oliver but somehow now can feel happy for what they had, and is able to at least glimpse at a future in which he'll love and live his life – even if it has to be without Oliver.

At least he's experienced – and survived – his first love.

That somber, peaceful state only last a couple minutes, though, until Luca demands a third take. Timmy can't keep it together this time. He cries his eyes out. The prospect of Elio’s loss nearly
breaks him. Armie has to hold him afterwards. It's a bit like the aftermath of the peach scene. He understands in this moment that nothing lasts forever, everything is floating, passing by, slipping through his fingers. Whatever they'll do, the end is inevitable. Does it really matter how they fill the time in-between?

“You are the only person I'd like to say goodbye to when I die.” Timmy remembers the line from the book.

He hopes he dies before Armie because he can’t imagine having to go on without him. If the universe would doom him to that kind of loneliness he’d flip it the finger and walk off the ledge.

God, what is it with him today? Where do all these dark thoughts come from?

Elio and Oliver needed twenty years to mutually accept and acknowledge their love. That's Timmy's whole life so far. He simply can't wrap his head around it. Where will he be in twenty years? Where will they be?

He both hopes and fears he'll be still in love with Armie.

He has a sudden strong feeling of déjà-vu as he closes his eyes, curling up in one of the armchairs with Armie's arms around him: he sees himself standing on the terrace outside the kitchen, a young boy on his shoulders, while Armie approaches through the orchard, looking a little lost but happy nonetheless, waving and smiling as the sun catches in his blond hair streaked with gray...

Despite the sunny atmosphere of his daydream Timmy feels cold all over, as if someone walked over his grave (a phrase his grandmother likes to use). He shivers, pressing himself more firmly against Armie's chest.

“Hey, babe, I'm here. It's okay.” Armie rubs his arms to warm him, then leads him up the stairs. They sit on the bed in the room that used to be Elio's and became Oliver's for the summer before sheltering them both for a couple of nights. Them? No, Elio and Oliver.

But is there really a difference?

“If you don't want to go over to Luca's tonight I'm sure Brian would understand, after today.”

“No, he would probably drag me over there anyway. Or worse, just drop me as a client.”

“There are other agents.”

“Maybe, but that doesn't sound like something my struggling career needs right now.”

They fall silent. There's nothing to say. The crew gives them space, quietly packing up the Perlman household around them. It nearly takes an hour before Timmy feels able to change back into his own clothes and brush the gel out of his hair.

As they leave, Timmy takes one of the gold foiled chocolate coins and puts it in his pocket. He looks at the house, the garden before turning away, getting in the car.

He doesn't know it then, on that clouded June afternoon, but it's the last time he'll set eyes on the Villa.

He'll never come back.

^^^^^^
They part in Crema, going to their own apartments to shower and change before meeting at Luca. It feels like being lead to the slaughter. Armie has no idea what to expect except nothing good. Tonight will be tough. He dresses in a track suit. If he's put through the meat grinder he at least wants to be comfortable.

Armie is surprised to find his wife at Luca's as well as he arrives. She's sitting on a sofa, talking to Michael. A tall, gray-haired man is speaking to their host. That must be Brian. Next to them stands Peter, listening. Tim leans in the corner by the windows, as far away from Liz as possible, listening to a small young woman with dark hair. Nicole, Armie presumes. Esther enters with Amira from the kitchen, whispering into her ear.

Ferdinando hands him a glass of water before they all sit down. Armie ends up next to Tim, with Esther on his other side. Liz resides opposite and shoots them a look.

This somehow feels like a tribunal.

Brian quickly introduces himself and Nicole. She'll handle Tim's publicity from now on, he explains. “It will be easier when it's all done within one agency. We'll need to coordinate.”

Everyone stays silent and waits.

“Okay.” Luca starts, welcoming them all. “Thanks for coming. It seems we have a... situation at hand that needs sorting. For the sake of our film. Please.” He gestures towards Brian before sitting down again on the armrest of Ferdinando's armchair. He doesn't meet Armie's eyes.

“Grazie, Luca.” Brian gets up. “Listen, there's been some talk back in the states, New York and Hollywood. It doesn't matter how that came about - here he quickly looks over at Liz -- “but news is out that certain things are happening here. Let me put it plain and excuse my French but some influential folks believe you’re shagging like rabbits.” Brian glares at Tim and Armie with raised eyebrows.


“I don't care what's the truth here, in my experience, there's usually more than one. Anyway, we need to contain those rumors. They damage the chances of the film. Because there are chances. Huge chances. The sky's the limit and bla bla bla. Besides, Timothée has some exciting new projects lined up for Autumn. The same with Armie, so I've been told. No one here can afford jeopardizing any of that by some lewd gossip that's no one's business but those involved.”

Luca frowns and nods. Armie holds his breath.

“Now, there’s obviously the short answer: end whatever’s going on here and deny everything. But… too many people know. And denial usually only gets the rumor mill working overtime.” If looks could kill Armie would be dead by now. “I’m really not happy about this mess but those involved are adults so what can I do? I tried to explain to Timothée that it’s all very unfortunate, the timing’s fucked-up but apparently my client has made up his mind and decided a break up is out of the question.”

Armie doesn’t dare to look at Tim right now. He wants to hold his hand – no, he wants to kiss him breathless – but he knows this is not possible here and now. Yet he’s torn between utter gratitude for Tim’s steadfastness and rage in the face of Brian’s blatant patronizing judgment.

“Therefore, we had to resort to a plan b. That’s what we get paid for, isn’t it, to mop up behind those
we take care off and guide?” Armie feels his jaw clench. ‘You are his agent, he pays you to do a job, not to be his fucking babysitter! Tim’s a human being, not a product you sell to the public.’ But he knows that’s only partly true.

“It seemed important to get everyone involved on board. So, I've been talking to Miss Chambers today. We had a very good meeting, Liz.” Brian smiles warmly. Armie feels a little sick. “Afterwards, Nicole and I came up with a possible strategy. This concerns mostly Timothée, Armie and his wife but you others need to know about it as well to act accordingly. If we can pull this off I’m sure we have a chance to get out of this maybe bruised but at least alive.”

Armie braces himself for what's to come. Industry shenanigans always make him tense and anxious.

“You'll all do some press this weekend. I got people from Vogue, for example, doing photo shoots and interviews. When asked – and they surely will – how it is for you as straight men – because for them you are just that - to do a gay movie, how it was to kiss each other, how you played the sex scenes, you'll be honest. You'll tell them you fell in love.”

Armie nearly drops his glass. He looks over at Liz. Her face seems frozen into a blank mask as she clutches her drink.

“What?” Tim gasps next to him. “What kind of strategy is that?”

“The only one people will buy, apparently. I'm not saying you should make out in front of the paparazzi but hiding in plain sight seems to be the only way to contain this affair. Too many people could sell a story to E!News or whatever.” Brian scoffs. “So you tell them. About your love, your admiration for each other, your friendship, your closeness. Nicole and I will see to it that the questions won't progress any further. Be as honest as you want. Just don’t get too graphic. Keep it vanilla.”

“What's the catch?” Armie asks. He can't believe what he just heard.

“The catch, Mr Hammer, or rather the safe ground is that you are still married, soon becoming a father for the second time. And Timothée has only ever dated girls in public. So they’ve nothing to prove any of the rumors if you don't play into their hands by lying and hiding. Because you have nothing to hide and nothing to lie about. We'll make this into an epic friendship, borderline platonic love, male bonding, soulmates, bromance – call it whatever you like. I'm very sure those admissions will shock the media into silence. They’re not expecting something like that. We’ll set an example for how to deal with this in the twenty-first century.” Brian glances over at Nicole who nods.

Armie stares at Luca. “What do you say?” His head is spinning.

Luca shrugs. “My priority is my movie. I don't want to lie but I want people to see it as art and not as some softcore movie with you two making out.” His smile is thin and a little sad.

“Elizabeth?” It's Tim asking. Armie admires his guts.

Liz looks at him, her face still composed, but Armie sees a flicker in her eyes that betrays her put-on indifference. “My condition is that Armie stays married to me for at least the next two years. And acts accordingly in public. Then we might start 'drifting apart.'” Her voice takes on an ironic tinge. “Of course, I expect a generous financial settlement. And for Armie to secure our business, the bakery. And to provide for his kids.” Her hand strokes her flat belly.

Armie isn't sure if he wants to scream or sink at her feet and kiss them.

Brian nods. “Armie, you'll have to talk to your lawyers about that. What do you all think?”
There are nods all around. Most seem happy that things got settled quickly and civilized. Armie still can't look at Tim.

He swallows, clears his throat. “Well, could you explain the conditions a bit more, Brian? How is this supposed to work?”

Armie’s not sure he understood. So he stays married, but just on paper and only for the time being, and is allowed to gush about Tim and their time in Italy? That doesn't sound too bad, actually. He'll be away for most of the rest of the year anyway. That's six months out of the twenty-four Liz demands as a transition period to keep up appearance.

“Let me be clear: that means outings as a couple for Liz and Armie and no, absolute no public incidents involving any physicality between you two.” Brian points at Tim and Armie. “You got that? And I don't want to know if you still carry on behind closed doors, my job is to make you look decent in public and get this movie and my client promoted. Nothing more. Therefore, there won’t be a coming out for Timothée any time soon. He needs a career first. If he ever comes out, it has to be as an established actor. I’d still rather advice him not to. The backlash could be massive. I can sell a mystery. I can hint at … something. But the harsh naked truth might seem unappealing to many. Mark my words.”

Armie senses Tim sit up straighter next to him. He's playing with his bracelet, Armie realizes, touching the dark beads.

Brian sighs. “I know I sound like a stick-in-the-mud. But this is just step one in a long-term strategy. We might have to adjust when the festival season starts, depending on how the film is doing. Maybe we need to bring in Esther.” Esther snorts a laugh. “Not like that. But you could tell some nice things about Timothée.” Armie feels Tim squirm and cringe but Esther just pecks him on the cheek.

“No problem, mon amant.” She coos. Tim blushes again.

“Okay, fine. Thank you.” Brian looks around. “Any more questions? No? Then I’d like to give the floor to Nicole.”

Nicole’s voice is soft but firm with the slightest Italian accent. “I've already drawn up a schedule for the weekend…”

Armie's only half-listening as she explains the timetable for photoshoots, interviews and that fashion thing Liz had already told him about. He nods automatically, just wishing this to be over.

Eventually, they are allowed to leave. Everyone quickly says good-bye. No-one’s lingering. Ferdinando takes Liz back to the hotel. She doesn't say good night to Armie as she rushes out of the living room.

When they get their coats, Brian pulls Tim aside. Armie decides to wait outside. He needs some air. They end up at Tim's place.

“Could have been worse.” Armie sighs, sinking down onto the couch. He wants to reassure Tim that they can do this.

“Is it always like that, in Hollywood? Tactics, strategies, people planning your private life like an advertising campaign or a military expedition?” Tim sounds subdued as he sits next to him.

“Pretty much, yes. In the end, it helps to protect at least a little privacy. We need a public facade to hide behind that we're just mortal humans like anyone else.”
Tim is very quiet for a long moment, chewing his lower lip. Armie hates that he feels as if he’s been corrupting him, tainting him by bringing him into contact with the putrid world of showbiz.

His next question almost floors him.

“Who was there? Before me? Who did you hide?”

Armie swallows. This is very thin ice. He stalls. “What makes you think there was… someone?”

“Come on.” Tim pulls his knees up to his chest. “Peter mentioned rumors. And you didn’t seem inexperienced. You even hinted at other men.”

“Why is that important?” Armie knows he has to tell Tim, that he owns him honesty. But it’s so fucking hard to talk about it and so much easier to stay quiet and ignore the skeletons under the floorboards. Until they start to smell, their stench poisoning the atmosphere.


Shit! Do something.

“There wasn’t a… someone. There were many.”

“Woah! Phony! Did you dick down half of Hollywood with your pretty big cock, Armie?” But Tim sounds more disturbed than amused.

He just shakes his head. His mouth is dry. He could murder for a glass of water. “No. That’s not… I frequented escorts.” God, this is humiliating.

“Escorts? You ordered boys, like, online? How sophisticated. A few of my classmates went into that after high school. Helped making end’s meet between auditions.” Tim’s face is unreadable. Is he joking? Or is there pity in his voice? Is he shocked?

Okay, now that he’s started he might as well go all the way. “I wouldn’t call it sophisticated. Sometimes I booked them via an agency but most of the times… god, Tim, I’m so sorry. This sounds so sick and twisted… I just went to downtown LA or wherever to find myself, well, some boy who would let me fuck him for, you know, twenty bucks…” Armie trails off. His face is hot.

It’s pretty obvious that Tim doesn’t know.

“What? Twenty bucks... who’d do... Like, you fucked some crack whores? Just, where, in your car? Against a wall? What the fuck, Armie!” He’s scooting away from him.

“I don’t know if they were doing drugs.” He never asked. Never bothered. They were just holes to take the itch off.

“Shit! You are such an… I can’t believe you sat next to me when I got tested when all the while it was you-“

“Tim, please, calm down.” Armie reaches for him. Tim literally jumps off the couch and backs away.

“Don’t touch me! Fuck, Armie… how could you do that? To those poor guys? And to me?”

Tim is trembling, white as a sheet.

Armie buries his flaming face in his hands, almost shouts: “I told you, I’ve always been safe!”

“Have you? Really? Then how come you now about this PEP stuff you told me about? God, I’ve been so naive! Was that fun to you, fucking innocent little Timmy, for free for a change?” His
beautiful face contorts into an ugly grimace.

“No, it was never… you are something special, I told you. I mean it.”

“I seriously hope so! I seriously hope I’m not one of your hoes you use like fuckmeat!”

“Tim, please-“ It hurts hearing him say these things. Yet Armie knows he deserves it. That doesn’t make it any easier.

“When was the last time? Hm? Tell me. And don’t you dare lie to me.” Tim is standing ramrod straight, hands on his hips. Armie knows it’s a test. If he fails it this might be it.

“A few weeks ago. In Milan. Twice.” He’s giving himself over here, now totally at Tim’s mercy.

Tim sinks down onto his coffee table.

“In Milan.” He echoes, face and voice blank. “While we were already fucking?” Armie hates Tim’s choice of words.

“It was the first week of shooting. And we were just… god, it wasn’t serious between us back then, don’t you remember?”

“Wasn’t it?”

“You tell me?! Who came up with friends with benefits and said he wasn’t looking for anything more at the moment?”

“Yeah, but that was-“

“What?”

“I don’t know!”

They stare at each other for a whole minute.

“To be honest, it was awful. Both times, but even more so the second time. It felt like cheating on you.” Armie whispers eventually. “I’m sorry.”

Tim turns his head, stares at the wall. Armie has no idea what’s going on in his head and it frightens him.

“If you ever do this again we’re finished.” He says eventually, his voice firm.

Armie nods, relief flooding his body.

“And you won’t touch me again until you got tested. I know that probably won’t cover your last encounter but nonetheless, you’ll do it.” He doesn’t sound angry, just tired.

“I make an appointment tomorrow.”

Tim gives him a curt nod.

“Do you want me to go?” Armie asks. He would, if Tim needed space, time alone.

“I don’t know… it’s all been a bit much.” Tim pinches the back of his nose.

“Yeah.” Armie sighs. “Can I… Do you want some water?”
“Yes, please.”

Tim follows him into the kitchen, watches as he fills two glasses from the tab.

“Will you be okay, staying with Liz?” He asks suddenly.

Armie’s surprised by the sudden change of subject. “We won’t see each other often. And Brian is right, it wouldn’t look good, separating during her pregnancy.”

“Are you now happy about the baby?” Tim is leaning against the wall as Armie hands him the glass.

“Ugh, yeah, well... I’m getting used to the thought. I mean, it’s not the baby’s fault that it’ll be born into all of this.” Armie looks at Tim, who’s turning his glass around and around in his long, slim hands. “I promise, I won’t touch her. Liz. Ever again. Okay?”


“Two years.” He says. “I’ll be twenty-two.”

“You have work. It'll fly by. If you still want me then. Maybe you'll meet someone else.”

Tim snorts.

“There’ll never be anyone like you, Armie. Never.”

“Yeah, like the fuck-up I am, you mean. As if I haven’t proven this again tonight.”

“No.” Tim puts his glass down on the counter. “Tonight you proved that you can be honest with me. We all make mistakes, Armie. I mean, look at me.” Tim’s smile is lopsided. “All that matters is that we’re honest from now on. I’m so fed up with lies. I can wait two years for you but I’m not living a lie all this time.”

“I wish I was as brave as you.” Armie desperately wants to touch him, just hug him, but he crosses his arms over his chest instead. Tim said no and he’ll respect that.

“I’m really not brave. I’m fucking terrified. But I’m also madly in love with you, you stupid idiot.”

“Does that mean I’ve been upgraded to the couch?” Armie asks, his heart fluttering.

Tim gives him a once-over. “I think I need a foot massage.”

“What did your last slave die off?” Armie grins.

“Don't get cheeky with me, Armie.” But he can hear Tim chuckle as he walks into the bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for reading. We are almost there. I'm Isitandwonder on Tumblr.
As of 13th September 2018, this fic is on hiatus.

I thank you all for your very kind messages. I'm reading them, even if I don't feel up to responding right now. They help. Some nearly brought me to tears. I had no idea how much my little story means to some of you. That makes me proud, humble and very grateful. And I think I owe you an explanation.

Please, believe me when I say that going on hiatus wasn't an easy decision. I am aware that this story is blessed with an avid readership, seems to connect with many people and I'm really sorry to disappoint you. Good news is that I've finished writing it a few weeks ago and the remaining few chapters just need editing and some additions here and there. So the reason for this hiatus is not that I'm stuck or anything or don't know where I'm going with this.

The reason I felt the need to step back for a while is rooted in endless fandom fights over at tumblr. Over the past few days, a fraction of the cmbyn/A&T or whatever it does perceive itself fandom started to compile lists with the most delusional and toxic people over there, and posted these lists with many rude, aggressive, insulting and derogatory comments. I and many of my friends were on these lists. I was told I even topped one. The blog who published these has deactivated yesterday but I'm sure if you want to look for those lists and posts you can still find them (I haven't seen them all and have no desire to do so, the bits I saw were enough for me). I was also told that there is a huge separate fraction of the fandom meeting elsewhere than tumblr that outright hates me and my mutuals and wants us gone.

I've been through a lot since last summer. I've been called a pedophile, a misogynist, a fag hag. My stories were one of the first that got purged from the general cmbyn tag here on AO3 due to strategic complaints in spring. True, I voice my opinions on my blog. Those might be disputable. But I try to do it in a mature, civilized manner. I actually think I'm a rather decent person and I tried to be positive and encouraging. In that believe, I still continued to participate in fandom despite all the wank (not of a smutty nature, sadly), because the fun I had outweighed the mean experiences. I'm good at ignoring things - up to a point apparently. I even laughed about that first list.

I'm not laughing anymore. Apparently, everybody has their breaking point. I've reached mine. I'm not a porn-generating robot as one person once put it. I'm a human being. And I'm tired. I'm shocked about the hate I apparently provoke. I'm reeling right now. I feel deeply disturbed. These are poor conditions to continue writing.

I've been told to ignore the hate. I really tried. I've been told that with going on hiatus I'm giving the haters what they want. And, yes. I do. They won. They took the joy away from me, the satisfaction and happiness I felt when a paragraph worked or the words and ideas just flowed. Right now I feel just empty and an increasing reluctance to step into this A&T fantasy world I've created. I'm sorry.

I hope this gloomy mood goes away. I hope I just need time.

I promise I will publish the final chapters and I'd be happy if you stuck around, keep your subscriptions until I feel up to it. But I also understand if I've disappointed you or you just want to move on to another story. Thank you anyway for popping over.

I stop now before this gets overly melodramatic.

I should say peace & love but I'm more the See ya' fuckers type
Ps: The author of The Scene is Quesndays. They have a new tumblr under a different name and last I heard is that they want to continue their story.
Chapter Summary

They are trying to live what they agreed upon and it proves... difficult.

TW for a slightly non-con scene (this time gladly not involving Timmy).

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for your support, for reaching out, for your kind words and encouragement. Without you, I might have abandoned this story. But you all helped me to process what happened and to concentrate again on things that give me joy.

I'm overwhelmed by the response. I had no idea what my story means to some of you. I'm sorry for upsetting you. I'll try to post the final chapters till the end of September because I'm on holiday afterwards and I could imagine that there might be need to talk when this is over. I want to be available for you.

I love you all!

Okay, here we go, this is long...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Timmy wakes to Armie on his phone, struggling to speak Italian. Despite his still simmering anger he also takes pity on Armie stuttering “Scusi” on repeat and signals him to pass his mobile over after a moment, only to discover that there’s a hospital on the other end.

“Abbiamo bisogno di un test HIV ora.” He tells them, watching Armie wince at the word. “Si – Si – Grazie.”

He swipes the display to disconnect.

“You can come in right now. They are prepared to do it quickly in ER. Results will be in in a few days.”

The Ospendale is on the other side of the river, a little to the south of the old town. Armie just makes it back in time to the film crew’s meeting point, still rubbing the crook of his right arm.

They set off at nine, heading for Valbondione, a small village in the Orobio Bergamasche. They'll film up there the whole day, their location a remote valley with an artificial waterfall that is released from a nearby reservoir a few times a day.

Their destination can only be reached via footpaths, so they park the cars and trucks in the village. Everyone has to help carry the equipment up the mountain ridge. On their ascent, Luca explains to them that once they roll they only have this one chance to get the waterfall scene right.

Timmy loves it out here. As a city kid he's never been too keen on nature but this is beautiful. Truly majestic. He feels free. But it's also demanding, exhausting. Soon, his legs hurt as he strains muscles
previously shamefully unused.

Armie seems to get happier by the minute, too. He's in his element. He loves physical challenges and spurs Timmy on when he's about to quit or makes fun of him because he takes an embarrassing amount of pics that day and sends them to his friends with captions like >TREES!!!< or >ROCKS!!!< or even >BIG ROCKS!!!<. He blames the thinner air up here for his lack of creativity but it's just due to the overwhelming experience of climbing high up in the Alpine foothills.

When they have finally reached their destination and set up the camera, Luca makes them run up and down steep slopes, screaming, singing. They chase each other. They hug, they kiss, they roll around in the wet grass. After about fifteen minutes Timmy feels so sore and tired he might vomit.

“Get up, motherfucker!” Armie shouts at him, taking his hand, pulling him higher, higher until Luca calls cut.

“Jesus fuck, I'm dying!” Timmy wheezes while a red-faced Armie laughs and slaps his back.

It turns out to be one of the best days of filming, despite Armie having to peel at least three ticks from Timmy's neck. Those bastards seem to love him.

There’s a short break before the waterfall is released. Timmy sits on one of the big rocks, relaxing, and watches Armie talk to Luca a little higher up the slope. Armie is gesticulating and Luca is staring at him almost thunderous before suddenly punching him in the chest. Armie stumbles back and Luca nods and gives him a thumbs-up.

Timmy raises his eyebrows and wonders what that was about.

When the water cascades down with a deafening roar, Timmy is mesmerized. He suddenly becomes very aware of the forces of nature he's encountering here. It makes him and his issues, even his complicated relationship with Armie, feel small, insignificant in the face of such frightening beauty.

He takes off with renewed strength when Luca gives the sign, Armie right behind him. He can feel his breath ghosting his sweaty neck but every line of text is drowned out by the noise of wind and water. All Timmy hears is his own blood rushing in his ears, his strained gasps for air. He feels exposed to the elements, trying and failing to brave them alone when suddenly Armie grabs his upper arm, then his shoulder, pulling him into a searing kiss, pushing him down onto the hard ground.

This time, they don’t stop when Luca calls cut. Armie only lets go of him when Timmy makes a pained sound because there’s a sharp stone digging into his lower spine. They laugh while Timmy rubs his back until Armie pulls his jumper up to take a look.

“It’s just a scratch.” He tells Timmy, his fingertips brushing the aching spot.

Thank god, someone brings them dry clothes – jogging pants and hoodies – and Timmy gratefully pulls them over his shorts. He's starting to get cold.

Afterwards, he sits on a patch of grass and stares into the distance until Armie slumps down next to him, handing him a paper cup with hot, sweat tea.

“A penny for your thoughts?” He blows on his own cup.

“Everything just seems so small up here.” Timmy sighs, taking a sip. He can actually feel the hot beverage burn all the way down his throat until it reaches his stomach
Armie raises his eyebrows. “Yeah?”

Timmy feels a little silly but tries to explain. “I mean, these hills have been here for millions of years. They will still be here, looking much the same as today, when we're long dead. It feels like taking a glimpse into eternity – awe-inspiring and daunting at the same time.”

“Wow.”

“Sorry, I sound like a pretentious prick, but I've never been somewhere like this.” He gestures over towards the towering gray peaks surrounding them, some covered in white snowcaps.

“When we're back home I'll take you hiking up Mount Rainer. We can stay at a lodge, go fishing...”

Timmy grins. “Lodge sounds good. Not sure about the fishing, though.”

“I'll teach you. It's not that hard.”

Timmy laughs. Why not? “Yeah, okay.” He lets his gaze wander through the valley, scratches his sweaty nape, and that's when Armie finds another tick sucking his blood. “Ouch!” Timmy drops his empty cup. “What was that with Luca, earlier?” Timmy asks while Armie makes short work of the parasite.

“Nothing. He just thought I wasn't paying attention.” Armie shrugs.

“Weren't you?”

Armie looks suddenly serious. “Are we good, Tim?”

Timmy stuffs his hands into the front-pocket of his hoodie. His fingers feel icy despite the hot drink they've been holding. “Yeah, sure.”

“No, I mean it? I have to know.”

“When will your results be in?” He stares Armie down.

“By the weekend.”

Timmy nods. “Okay.”

“Tim-”

As their talk from last night comes back to him Timmy has the feeling as if the mountains are suddenly closing in on him. “Just... sorry. I need a minute.”

He gets up, starts walking without any idea where he's going, just away. He ends up climbing a small wooded hill where he sits below the trees, his back to the set. He needs some time alone. Armie doesn't follow him.

Timmy closes his eyes, takes a few deep breaths, listens. All he can hear are birds singing, the wind rustling in the tree tops. The air is a little warmer here, smelling of pine and rotting leaves. It's peaceful up here, quiet.

A little too quiet for his liking.

He's still trying to process what Armie has told him. Timmy can't imagine ever buying the services of a prostitute. How could someone do that, pay for something as intimate as sex as if it was some
mundane good, without any special significance, purchased like a new coat or a pair of trainers, a take-away meal? Out of frustration? Or is it the wish to control someone? How does one even negotiate prices, find out what’s on offers? It all sounds bleak and sordid and just very sad.

What a lonely, miserable life Armie must have led if that had been his only source of something resembling affection while at its core mocking and tainting it in its fake attempt to resemble love?

But maybe he’s nothing more to Armie than one of those boys? Maybe that’s all Armie wants or is capable of dealing with, the illusion of intimacy without having to invest real feelings? Or does he want control, someone he can do whatever he likes to, who doesn’t say no or complains like his wife does? In that case, he’s found his perfect match in Timmy.

He remembers Armie giving him that bracelet. Is it Timmy’s fee, just not as obvious as if Armie had left some notes on his nightstand the morning after?

Timmy shivers but this time it’s not from the cold.

Brian had taken him aside at Luca’s last night, just before they’d left, asking him if he’s really sure he wants this. With Armie. Back then he’d said yes but if Brian would ask now…?

He can still hear Brian’s almost imploring voice telling him that two years can be a long time. That things could happen, change. And he remembers his answer: “Don’t worry. I know Armie. I trust him.”

Ha! Funny, isn’t it, how things sometimes turn out?

He’s lucky that an AD finds him and tells him they are packing it for the day. Otherwise he might just have stayed up here, lost in thought.

Everyone is quiet on the way back. It's partly due to exhaustion but it also seems as if it has been an exceptional experience that cast and crew need to process.

When they finally arrive at their new base in Bergamo, it's already dark. They've all been booked into the same hotel. Even Liz and Harper.

Timmy is dead on his feet. He fell asleep in the Range Rover and now has a vile taste in his mouth. Everything hurts. He's cold. All he wants is a hot shower, some food and a bed. He'd actually skip the food if he has to leave his hotel room for it.

It's a bit awkward when he says good-night to Armie, who lingers in the corridor before opening the door to his double-room. They are on the same floor. Timmy's just a few doors down. Thank god their rooms are not next to each other. Timmy wouldn't be able to sleep – no matter how tired he is – knowing that Armie and Liz are just on the other side of the wall.

Maybe he could even hear them?

Armie has promised not to touch her but who knows? Maybe just a fuck to appease her. Old habits die hard.

As Timmy discovers that his room also has a bath tub he decides on a long soak to quieten those disturbing thoughts. He pours himself a glass of red wine from the mini-bar while waiting for the tub to fill and feels very suave.

As he sinks down into the hot water he groans with pleasure. His phone is playing some nice ambient. He closes his eyes and is about to drift off when there's a knock at his door.
“I'm in the bath!” He shouts “Who is it?”

“It's me.”

Armie.

“Come in.”

A moment later Armie saunters into the bathroom. He grins.

“Nice.”

But he looks weary around the eyes. His cheeks are hollow.

“Wanna hop in?” Timmy asks, maybe a bit too lighthearted.

Armie shakes his head. “Contrary to public believes bathtub sex isn't that great.” But he sits down on the edge of the tub.

“Who said something about sex? I'm too knackered anyway. I would possibly drown.” It's true. Though he wouldn't mind Armie scrubbing his back and washing his hair.

“Good. I feared your youthful libido would demand a performance tonight.”

Timmy scrunches his nose. “No. Not really. Not with... your wife in attendance. And... you know, I'm still waiting for your results.”

Armie nods. His left hand dangles into the water but he's not touching Timmy.

“Yeah, sorry. I wish she didn’t come.” His fingers brush Timmy’s knee underwater.

Timmy blows at a tuft of bubbles covering his chest, sending them flying all around the bathroom. They catch the light, shimmering all colors of the rainbow before bursting. “I don't want to think about you sharing a bed with her.”

“I won't. Harper's in bed with her. I'm sleeping on the couch. It's easier like that... with Hops.”

“Why don't you stay here, with me? Just to sleep.” Timmy hates how meek and disappointed he sounds. It's pathetic. He takes another sip of his wine.

“I'd love to... but I can't. I promised to keep up appearance.”

“Yeah, of course.” Timmy says it too fast and wants to bite his tongue off.

“You're aware I'll have to go to Milan with her on the weekend?”

Timmy closes his eyes. He should have chosen different music, something louder, more up-tempo.

“I'll be back on Sunday for the photoshoot. We go to Lake Garda early on Monday. And, after that...?”

“I'll be flying home from Malpensa on Wednesday. Brian booked the ticket.” Timmy murmurs. He keeps his eyes shut. He doesn't want to see Armie's face right now.

“Liz and I will meet Nick in Rome on Tuesday. You remember Nick?”

Timmy nods. The water is starting to get cold.
“So you stay on in Italy?”

“Yeah, for a bit. As we are all already here anyway... Listen, there will be pics on her IG. Better not look at them, okay?”

“But if I want to see you?”

“We can FaceTime. But those IG pics are for PR. Happy couple blablabla.” Armie sounds pained. “We just talked about it.” He tilts his head towards the door. “I just wanted to tell you.”

God, the next 24 months will be so weird. He'll be forced to lead a double life.

For twenty-four fucking months!

Timmy goes slack and slides down into the tub. When his head is submerged he opens his eyes and stares up at a contorted image of Armie looking down on him. All he can hear is the sloshing of water, too loud in his ears, drowning out everything else. He wants to stay under forever.

He only comes up when his lungs start to burn, gasping for air.

“Wow.” He coughs, shaking his head, his wet hair spraying droplets everywhere. Armie ducks and gets up. “Give me a towel, please.”

When Armie wraps him in the soft fluffy terrycloth Timmy closes his eyes again.

“So, our last night will be from Monday to Tuesday.” Armie whispers in his ear. “I'll book us a room at a nice hotel. Just the two of us. No Luca, no crew. No Liz.”

Timmy sighs and turns his head, trying to steal a kiss. Armie smiles and leans in.

“Good night, Tim.” There's another quick kiss to his temple and then Armie is gone.

Timmy just falls into bed, naked, and is out before his face hits the pillow.

^^^^^^

Their first night in Bergamo is strange. Liz cuddles up in the huge double bed with Hops while Armie makes his bed on the couch. It's a bit like a pajama party sleep-over – but without the fun.

“So, you said good night to... him?” Liz asks as he returns. She sounds only a little barbed.

“Yes.”

Armie fears she wants to talk about ‘it’ so he switches the reading light off, turns away from Liz and feigns sleep until it gets real.

He wakes early the next morning when Harper clambers all over him. They play for some time, but quietly as not to wake Liz. Around seven, Armie quickly dresses himself and his daughter and takes her downstairs for breakfast. Lilly collects her half an hour later, her face smeared with a mixture of apricot jam and Nutella.

Armie has the whole day as they have only night-shoots scheduled. Plenty of time. He knows Liz will probably sleep in. At half past eight he asks one of the waiters for a tray and loads it with Croissants, cake and a huge Cafe Latte and carries his loot up to Tim's room.

When he knocks it takes Tim a moment to open. He's clearly woken him as he's just wrapped his
obviously naked body in a bed-sheet, his hair tousled, eyes small and puffy, a pillow crease on his cheek.

“What... hey.” Tim scratches his head and smiles as Armie walks past him, setting the food down on the bed.

“Room Service.” He grins.

“Thanks, man.” Tim yawns and stretches, dropping the sheet before carefully getting back into bed as not to upset the tray. Settled, he drapes the duvet over himself and takes a sip of coffee, closing his eyes, sighing: “This is heaven.”

Watching Tim writhe with pleasure makes Armie’s mouth goes dry. He sits down by Tim’s slender feet peeking out from under the throw and starts to massage the right one while Tim takes a hearty bite of croissant.

“So, what's up for today?”

“I'll meet with Brian.” Tim says, crumbs flying from his mouth he tries to cover with his free hand. “It's about the new projects, contracts, stuff...” He wiggles his toes as Armie presses his thumb into the arch of his foot.

Armie raises an eyebrow. “Yeah, ‘stuff’. That’s me, right?”

Tim shrugs. “Afterwards I need my beauty sleep.”

Armie pulls his toes and Tim yelps softly. “I guess I see you at dinner then?”

Tim wipes his greasy fingers on the sheets. “Can you stay for a while?”

Armie smiles and releases his foot. “Only when you stop getting crumbs all over the bed.”

They end up cuddled against the headboard, Tim between his spread legs, his head resting against Armie’s chest. They both check their emails, read the news. It's so utterly domestic Armie grins like an idiot the whole time.

“Wanna take a shower with me?” Tim asks casually after a while, his eyes glued to the screen of his phone, but his free hand has been stroking Armie’s leg for some time now.

“Sure.” Armie kisses his neck just below his right ear, licks his skin, bites his earlobe.

“Just a shower.” But Tim tilts his head, giving Armie better assess. “You're still on probation.”

“Yes, sir.”

Tim's response is a hungry groan as he turns around to kiss Armie properly.

Yet they really just shower together. Armie washes Tim's hair, and Tim soaps his back with a soft sponge, his groin pressing against the cleft of Armie's ass.

It feels fucking good and is entirely not enough.

“We could just jerk off together.” Armie turns his face into the spray.

“Ah, but I know myself.” Tim gently bites Armie's shoulder. “The moment I see you touch your cock I'll lose it.”
“You're such a charmer.” Armie giggles.

“Am I know?”

Armie turns, nodding.

They just kiss for a while longer, Tim standing on tiptoes, rubbing himself against Armie's hip until the water turns suddenly cold and they both flee the shower, cursing and skittering on the tiles as they wrap themselves in towels.

Armie dresses quickly while Tim lingers, bending low over his duffel bag to search for underwear. The view makes Armie's slacks feel decidedly too tight.

He leaves before smashing Tim into the wall to ravage him. His excuse is a call Tim receives from his agent.

Liz has left him a message when he gets back to their room. She's gone shopping.

He decides to wander the city alone. It's beautiful. The day is overcast but that only adds to the somewhat Gothic charm of Bergamo. Armie enjoys the few hours to himself, free from any demands. He can just drift through the cobbled streets, stopping now and then for a coffee or to take a picture.

They all meet up in the early evening to have dinner. A bit of wine loosens the atmosphere. Tim looks just beautiful, if a little sad, his cheeks flushed from alcohol. Armie is reminded that back home he's not yet allowed to drink.

They start with filming the scenes in the hotel room. When Armie throws Tim onto the mattress the boy giggles so he starts to tickle him in earnest. Tim squirms and kicks and Armie can feel he's getting hard. He smirks down at him before really going for it, leaving Tim panting and breathless.

Later, Tim lies naked under the thin sheets as Elio dreams and Oliver stares out of the window before walking over to his sleeping lover. It reminds Armie of their morning together, of the illusion that it could be like this for them, their typical lazy Sunday morning in their bed, their house.

That this will have to stay a dream for a long time hurts so much Armie has to grab the iron railing at the window tighter, his body almost cringing as he shifts his weight.

He stands naked by the window, the warm breeze caressing his skin, and doesn't care anymore if people stare. Being nude around Tim feels somehow natural by now – even with a bunch of crew members bustling around them.

Watching Tim breath peacefully, faking sleep, also reminds him of all the mornings they've woken up together over the past few weeks. Tim always looks so sweet and innocent. Armie isn't acting when he sits down and allows his feelings to show on his face – sadness, loneliness, despair, longing. Tenderness. Love. How is he supposed to be without him? They'll soon have to part for god knows how long. Armie really fights the tears at this moment.

They don't have much time afterwards for the scenes set in the old town. They can't block off the streets for too long or the local restaurants will run riot. There's not even enough time for them to dress properly. Armie's just wearing a robe and Tim grabs what he finds – Armie's pink shirt for example – to rehearse the blocking.

The shirt is too big – like Billowy on Elio – but Armie can't take his eyes off Tim wearing his clothes. It's like they are more and more becoming one person, losing themselves in the other. Lines
blurring. Armie isn't sure where he ends and Tim begins.

Eventually, they kiss before running down narrow alleyways. Tim melts against him, open-mouthed, totally gone. Is he just acting?

This doesn't feel like acting.

They finish in the early hours, tired but also wide awake. When they get back to the hotel, Armie accompanies Tim to his room without asking, as if it's the most natural thing to do. Yet when the door falls shut behind them he's still surprised that Tim presses him against the wall and kisses him rough, hard, totally unlike Elio had kissed Oliver before. His hands fumble on Armie's belt, making quick work of it and Armie wants him so badly he can feel his whole body spasm, drawn towards this wiry, panting boy, but he gently pushes Tim back nonetheless.

“No, no, no... Remember what you said. Not before my results are in.” He's breathing hard through his nose.

“What a stupid, stupid idea.” Tim whines and tries to get close again but Armie steps to the side.

“I should go.”

“No.” Now it's Tim's turn to tackle him. He makes the most peculiar noise as he jumps on Armie's back, but it's no problem for Armie to shrug him off. He's light as a feather. Next thing Armie knows, Tim just sinks down onto the floor, hugging Armie's left leg with closed eyes. “Please. I don't want to be alone.”

Armie doesn't know if he should be embarrassed or touched. The sight of Tim on his knees gives him thoughts he can barely keep in check. He knows he could just open his jeans and shove his cock down Tim's throat and Tim would let him, even wants it, likes it brutal, needs it that way to get out of his head.

But afterwards Tim would probably feel bad, as if he'd failed his own rules. Tim had been quite clear: no more sex before Armie has done for him what he did for Armie. It's a basic form of respect not to tempt him otherwise.

“I can stay until you're asleep. But, please, get up.” Armie gently pulls Tim back to his feet. His face is flushed, a little wet. There are dark circles under his eyes. “Just get ready for bed, babe, okay?”

Armie waits for him while he brushes his teeth, then tucks him in.

“Want me to read to you?” He asks, only half joking, and Tim grins and nods, looking a little more composed. There's a book on his nightstand. “Seriously?”

When Tim nods again Armie opens the pages at random and starts: “'Was it my fault?' he asked when he stepped into my bedroom after lunch. - I did not reply. 'I'm a mess, aren't I?' - He smiled and said nothing. - 'Sit for a second.' - He sat at the far corner of my bed. He was visiting a hospitalized friend who was injured in a hunting accident. - 'Are you going to be okay?' - 'I thought I was. I'll get over it.'” Armie stops and looks up. Tim has grabbed a pillow and shoved it beneath his chest, hugging it tightly. His eyes are closed, his breathing even.

Armie carefully puts the book back on the nightstand, kisses Tim's cheek and silently leaves the room. The sun is starting to rise. The birds begin to sing.

When he reaches his room Liz is still asleep. Harper is snoring next to her, lying on her back, arms raised above her head. The horizon glows a deep violet.
There are numerous luxurious shopping bags strewn all over the floor. Liz did really go for it. One label especially catches Armie's eye. He takes a picture of the address printed in elegant letters onto the thick gray paper before folding his 6'5 onto the sofa once again to try and get a couple hours of rest.

Somehow he even manages to sleep in and wakes to an empty room. There's no note from Liz but he's sure she'll text him should something come up. He feels itchy all over. He didn't shower after last night and Tim's smell still clings to his skin. It's nice but getting irritating.

He takes his time in the shower (well, okay, he jerks off to images of Tim) before having coffee. After a late breakfast, he has some shopping to do. He goes in search of the boutique Liz went to yesterday. He's sure he'll find exactly what he wants there. And he does. Gets it gift wrapped and arranges for it to be delivered to Tim's room tomorrow morning when he will have already left for Milan.

And they say romance is dead.

When he tries to call Tim to ask if he wants to meet for lunch he gets no answer. He doesn’t leave a message. Instead, he meets with Lilly and Harper at a playground. When his daughter asks if Tim is coming as well he remembers their outing in Crema and suddenly misses him so fiercely he has to sit down on a bench. When he can breathe again he takes a picture of Hops on the swings and sends it to Tim.

‘Wish you were here.’ He texts. Still no reply. He pockets his phone, sighs, and takes his daughter over to the slide.

The evening brings another lavish dinner with the crew. This time, Liz is there as well while Harper is with Lilly. Liz makes a point of sitting next to Armie, laughing out loud, her teeth flashing dangerously white.

Armie sees Tim retreat into a corner of the large restaurant table, flanked either side by Brian and Peter. He doesn't seem to eat. Armie wants to tell him it's all show but there's suddenly a hand clawing to his thigh under the table, long fingernails digging in.

He lowers his head and has suddenly lost his appetite as well.

At least Luca tries to make easy, pleasant conversation with his wife, asking her about her day, her shopping spree. Soon, they discuss their favorite designers. Armie has to suppress a grin as Liz tries to pull Sayombhu into the conversation as well and he pretends to speak very little English.

Liz even takes a few pics with everyone except Tim, pressing her body against Armie’s, her head on his shoulder, even kissing his cheek for a selfie before she leaves when they start to set up on the Piazza by the church. The three Italian actors stand together, smoking, while Luca explains the blocking. Timmy looks so nauseous that Armie thinks there might be no need for the artificial vomit the set designers have prepared.

“Hey, where have you been all day?” Armie asks.

Tim just shrugs. “Sleeping, mostly.” He looks away, his fingers playing with the hem of his polo shirt.

“I called. I texted.” He hopes he doesn’t sound too hurt.

“I know. Listen, Armie, can we not do this now? I need to concentrate.”
“Sure.” Armie thinks that it doesn’t need that much concentration to puke all over yourself but decides to give Tim space. Maybe he’s just tired.

This time, the dancing isn't difficult for Armie. It's just a small set and he had some drinks before. The location reminds him of a fairy tale – or a nightmare. It’s enchanted.

Yet his mood shifts when Tim throws up. Armie feels a pang in his chest. He had seen the real thing not quite two weeks ago. He vividly remembers Tim's lean body heaving in his arms, drunk because he’d felt lonely. Because he’d thought Armie had deserted him, gone back to his wife. It had been his fault back then and even as he knows that this is not Tim but Elio, that this is scripted, it’s getting harder to distinguish between reality and their film.

Because this whole time in Italy has been a dream. Armie knows it. He also knows they’ll soon wake up. Or is he trapped in a nightmare where one only thinks one is awake until the monsters come to get one?

Watching Tim suffer is something Armie's getting increasingly bad at. It scares the shit out of him. Because he knows what Tim is capable of doing to himself.

Memories start to pop up in his mind: Tim cutting himself; Tim bleeding; his scars.

Armie's too tired to keep those visions in check. It gets more and more difficult to concentrate on Elio's and Oliver's last night together.

Troubling thoughts are closing in on him. The next scene is the last kiss they'll film. The last time he'll be allowed to touch Tim like this in public for a very long time, to hold him and caress him.

It's daunting. It's intimidating. Armie can't find his footing.

In the first take, it's too much.

“No, you should not swallow Timothée whole. We can't see his face.” Luca’s accompanying smile is thin.

The next take it's not enough.

“This is the kiss of a lifetime, not a shy peck on the lips. It's like... their wedding kiss? Give me more passion!”

After the seventh take Tim punches the wall next to Armie's head.

“Woah, watch it.”

“Then give me something.” Tim growls, lips spit-slick, red and swollen, the tender skin around his mouth starting to show irritation. Stubble-burn.

Armie inhales, counts to ten, exhales, tries to let go of his fears, finds Oliver again. He can feel Tim lean against him, his breath stilling while his heart hammers against Armie's chest. Armie wants to equally devour him and protect him. Tim is his, a precious, exotic bird, vulnerable, fragile. Armie thinks he could break his long neck with just one of his hands, large enough to wrap around it and squeeze until Tim would go slack, eyes fluttering shut...

He can feel himself grow hard and knows that Tim feels it as well. Their tongues brush. Tim exhales
and Armie sucks in his breath, greedily swallows it like he swallows everything Tim gives him. He tries not to break eye-contact as their lips touch, and Tim holds his gaze, his irises an almost otherworldly green. Tim rises on tiptoe, his whole body pressed against Armie's, and it's like becoming one.

EliOliver.

The eighths take is the last.

They don't stop when Luca calls cut. The stones of the ancient wall chafe Armie's back but he doesn't let go of Tim, who clings to him like a drowning man to a life-raft, almost biting his lips.

Everyone lets them be until they have to come up for air. Armie feels both dizzy and lightheaded. But when he looks at Tim he's met with badly hidden rage.

“Tim?” But Tim steps back, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

That's when an AD walks towards them, holding up Armie's phone. “It's your wife.”

“Tim, please, a minute.” He has to take it. It could be something with Harper at this ungodly hour.

The crew is already packing up around them. Armie wanders off into a side street.

But instead of an emergency Liz only gives him their schedule for Milan: when they'll leave, the time the event starts, what he's required to wear, etc. Their phone call is short, businesslike, until Armie asks: “You had to call me for that at four in the morning?”

“Harper woke me up. I thought you might be still… filming.” Ah, there it is.

“We just finished.” He hangs up.

He can't have been more than five minutes but when he turns Tim is gone.

Later, Armie discovers that the door to Tim's hotel room is locked. He knocks just once. No sound. Maybe Tim's asleep already? Armie doesn't want to wake him. Yet he lingers, leaning his forehead against the door as if by that he could somehow find a way into Tim's dreams.

For the rest of the night he doesn't even bother to try and sleep on the couch. He locks himself in the bathroom and watches silly Youtube videos until he hears noises from next door.

They leave early. Harper stays behind with Lilly. Milan is loud and hot and dirty. Armie hates everything, from the hotel they are staying at to the suit he's wearing; the fashion show they are attending, the people they meet and are forced to talk to. He leaves the floor to Liz. It's hard enough to stand next to her, looking presentable and pretend not being bored to death. Armie longs for a stiff drink but there's only Champagne and Liz had insisted that he stays sober.

Of course, there's a bunch of photographers and Liz doesn't get tired of posing for them, alone as well as by Armie's side, at his arm, placing his hand low on her waist. He plasters his generic smile on his face and prays that this will soon be over.

They don't exchange a single word just between themselves during the whole evening.

On their drive back, Liz hands Armie a flask from her clutch. Vodka. Nice. After all those years, she knows him well.

Without Harper the huge double room feels empty when they return. Armie’s already a little drunk
from the Vodka on an empty stomach and wonders why Liz didn't book a twin – or even separate rooms - but gets his answer soon enough.

When Liz walks out of the bathroom she presents Armie her purchase from the shop with the elegant gray bags. Armie knows by now that the little piece of red silk and lace must have cost a small fortune. It barely covers her full breasts, the hem ending not even an inch below her shaved snatch.

“What is this?” He asks, sounding bored. It's better than expressing the actual physical disgust he feels at the sight.

“Me trying.”

“Better not.” Armie turns away and switches off the bedside lamp. He's so fucking tired.

“There was a time you liked this.” Liz sounds more provocative than inviting.

He wants to say 'No, not really' but bites his tongue. “Can we please just go to bed. I'm exhausted.”

But his wife has other plans. She gets under the sheets, pressing her almost naked body against Armie's back.

“Just hold me, please.” She whispers. “I need you. I miss you.” Her lips brush his nape. Her tits rub against his shoulder blades. Her nipples are hard.

It feels so different from Tim. She's soft where he's all sharp angles. She's voluptuous where he's all skin and bones.

Armie doesn't like it.

“Liz…,” he sighs.

But he outright freezes when her hands sneak around his waist, cupping him through his pajama pants. She moans, throwing one leg over Armie’s hip. He can feel her wet flesh press against the ridge of his hip as she starts to move against him.

“You're so big and strong. Just give it to me, baby, just one last time.”

Armie is reminded of a Britney Spears song he hated as a teenager and lets out a sharp laugh.

“Liz, don't…”

She squeezes him again. He stays soft. He's not doing her the favor he did so many times before: to dream up a fantasy that would make him hard; because such a fantasy would involve Tim and he desperately wants to keep them apart, even in dreams. It would feel like violating Tim.

“Armie…,” Liz gasps, her breath as hot and humid against the back of his neck as her cunt is against his hip. He closes his eyes. Counts to ten.

Her other hand finds his nipple, pinches it.

“You can tie me up if you want. Or would you like to spank my ass? I can be your little girl. I’ll be so good, daddy. I'll do everything.”

“For god's sake, stop that!”

Armie turns and pushes her away, disentangling himself from her arms.
“I'm... I'm just... sorry...,” he switches the lights back on. Liz’s face is stony.

He just grabs a jumper, pulls it on, takes his wallet, and storms out. At reception he books another single room for the night, ignoring the curios glances of the night porter. He tips him generously to avoid ending up in some online gossip forum.

Liz skips breakfast the next morning. They drive back to Crema in silence.

Armie asks the driver to stop by the hospital and let him out. He doesn’t care what Liz might think.

He has to wait for about half an hour before a doctor can see him. He knows the results will be negative. But if not, he decides to drown himself in Lake Garda tomorrow. He’ll find a way. Might even be attributed to getting drunk at the wrap party, then falling off the quay. An accident. Better than suicide. For his daughter at least. And for Tim.

He couldn’t live with the remote chance he might have given it to Tim. Nor could he face the lifelong fear of accidentally killing the man he loves anytime they sleep together.

When he’s called up he’s strangely calm. The doctor is a young woman. She looks tired, but speaks English. She talks about antibodies and t-cell-receptors and even mentions that she studied in the US for a year until Armie is thoroughly convinced that this is it.

His death warrant. Because why can’t she just tell him if there’s nothing to worry about?

‘Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.’

He wishes Tim was with him. He needs someone to hold his hand, tell him it will be alright.

His mother would have told him to man up. Don’t be a sissy. ‘Stop sniveling. You’re embarrassing. You brought this upon yourself.’

He knows she’s right. Still. A little comfort wouldn’t go amiss.

But it doesn’t matter anymore. Because that’s it. He just hopes Tim’s clean. How often did they bareback? How high is the risk?

Never mind. He doesn’t care about probability ratios. Just the possibility that he has infected Tim is enough for him to zone out.

“Sorry, Mr Hammer, are you alright?” The doctor takes off her glasses, wipes them at the sleeve of her white coat.

He nods. Because why not? No need to bother her. He'll cope. His way.

Eventually, she hands him a piece of paper full of small numbers. He thanks her, shakes her hand, says good-bye.

Walks down to the river. Sits by its bank, watches the ducks. Smokes a cigarette. Looks down at his results. Looks again.

One word.

Negativo.

Jesus fucking Christ!
He lies back, stares up at the sky. Laughs. Just laughs. Runs all the way back to his apartment.

He wants to tell Tim but has no idea how. Besides, he’s already running late for their press junket.

Meeting the press and photographers at Luca's flat is the first taste Armie gets of what promotion for this film will be like. The journalists have been shown a short reel put together by Luca and Walter yesterday.

Armie can feel it. It’s been a while but he still remembers it. There's palpable buzz going during interviews. It's like an electric current. People are hooked. Again and again Armie and Tim are asked how they did it, if it was difficult to kiss another man, to play gay, to touch each other, pretending to make love; how they felt about the intimacy.

’How did you create that chemistry?’

’I forgot I was watching a movie. This felt so real!’

They just smile, nod, and tell them all that they really, genuinely like each other, that it was no big deal, that it felt natural, that they hit it off.

In the end Armie dares to say: “I just fell in love with Tim.”

The translator says: “Mi sono appena innamorato di Tim.”

The reporters smile, nod, smile some more.

He can feel Tim staring at him but doesn't turn to meet his eyes.

The photo call gets a little weird. It's done in Luca's lush backyard where their first rehearsal took place. They are told to pose together in a few costumes. Armie holds Tim as Oliver has never held Elio. He can feel him squirm. He's a little sweaty, his heart fluttering under Armie palm spread on Tim’s ribcage. Armie pulls him closer. Skin to skin. Chest to back.

In another shot, Tim leans his head against Armie's collarbone, takes a deep breath, exhales slowly. Armie can feel it down to his toes. Goosebumps rise on his arms, his neck.

“How was Milan.” Tim asks eventually. They are both down to their boxers, sharing a bottle of water and a cigarette, waiting for their next outfits. Tim tries to discreetly adjust himself and Armie smiles.

“Mostly boring.”

Tim arches an eyebrow, touches his neck. “And besides?”

Armie sighs and takes the cigarette from Tim's hand, their fingers brushing. “Horrible.”

Tim gives him one of his open-mouthed nods, blinking a few times.

“And you? Why did you leave on Friday?”

“I was tired.”

“And yesterday?”

“Brian had a script for me to read. And I started packing.” Armie can sense there's more but doesn't have the energy to ask. He’s still drifting on a wave of relief. He decides to ignore the hint at their
“Anything interesting?”

Tim shrugs. “Maybe. I could play a meth addict.”

“Charming.”

Tim snorts.

Armie takes a deep breath. “I got my results.”

Tim stands a little taller, takes a sip of water. “And?”

“And what? Negative, of course. I told you so. If you want I can show you.”

Tim looks down, shakes his head. Looks up. “It’s fine.” He briefly takes Armie’s hand, squeezes it. Looks around. But there are photographers setting up lights on the lawn. “I would have come with you if you’d asked. You didn’t have to go alone.”

Armie wants to kiss him. To hug him, never letting go. “It’s okay. It was no big deal.” He shrugs. Changes the subject. “Did you get my present?” He stares into the distance, unable to meet Tim's eyes.

“Yes.” When Armie turns Tim is blushing.

“Do you like it?”

Tim bites his lip. “Yeah. It's... beautiful.”

“It's for tomorrow.”

“I figured.”

“Will you-?”

“Of course, Armie. Of course I will.”

Chapter End Notes

I swear, when I was opening the novel randomly to find a paragraph Armie could read to Tim the book opened right there...
The Sense Of An Ending

Chapter Summary

Well, here we are... the final day of filming, followed by their final night together.

I nicked the title from the Julian Barnes' novel.

Chapter Notes

Okay, listen, this chapter got quite kinky. It's what Timmy wanted, and he can be naughty minx. So, if you are not into stuff like watersports, you should probably stop reading after Armie drags Tim into the bathroom and get back to the story around their morning after. Just a friendly warning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Timmy is sick just from watching Liz sitting at the table, holding court. Armie still belongs to her and she makes it very clear during their last dinner in Bergamo that she doesn't tolerate anyone else near him in public. Timmy wants to disappear.

Brian and Peter try their best to distract him. But even seeing the blank, distant expression on Armie's face doesn't make him feel better.

When he has to put the artificial vomit in his mouth he briefly chokes and wonders if he'll really need it. Right now, he could bring up what little he has eaten on cue.

He's not sure if Armie can still taste it when they kiss later. Is that the reason why he has trouble to fully commit?

Because Armie's not present. Timmy can sense it. Is he already back home, with Liz and his daughter? Detaching himself from the project, their project? From them – whatever that actually means.

Timmy starts to go off balance, losing himself in his head. If Armie seems to notice he can't help it. He's spiraling down, getting nervous before getting impatient. Why the fuck can't Armie pull himself together, concentrate, and get this fucking scene done right?

It's just a fucking kiss! They've done it so often Timmy lost count.

When Armie slides his tongue in Timmy's mouth he wants to scream and he wants to bite it; he wants to push him away and never let him go.

Instead, he punches the wall next to Armie's head, glaring at him, pressing his whole body against Armie's to make him feel that this is him, firm muscles, a cock.

'Take it, take all of me.'
When Luca is eventually satisfied Timmy is shaking. He feels flayed open, exposed to his core. And that's when Liz has to call. As if she knew... Timmy outright flees the set at the first opportunity.

He can hear Armie knock quietly at his door later. Just once. Timmy promises himself that if he'd knock another time he'll open. He'll stop. But a second knock never comes.

He's sure Armie hasn't heard that he smashed the thick tumbler on the edge of the sink. He's grateful that he got spared the humiliation of Armie seeing him like this. At the same time he wishes that Armie would take the shard from his fingers, hug him, tell him everything is going to be alright...

Timmy stares at the sharp piece of glass he's holding, reflecting the bright bathroom light.

“No. No, no, no, please, no...,” He's crying. He doesn't want to do this. Not again. Why doesn't Armie save him?

'Because you're not worth the effort, that's why.'

Because he's sad, pathetic, too complicated, too troubled, too demanding.

A boy. Just a fling. He's the usurper here, undermining a solid marriage.

Liz had touched Armie tonight under the table. Liz will spend the night with him in Milan. She's his wife, before god and the law. Timmy's just...

A nice fuck now and then. But nothing more. Not when a beautiful wife waits a few rooms down with whom everything is so much easier.

Timmy sees Liz's laughing face again in front of his mind's eye. Her long, shiny hair. Her moist lips. Her full breasts bobbing with every breathy giggle. He wishes it's her firm flesh he cuts. He want's to slash that smile off her face, wants to mutilate her perfect body until no one would ever look at her again.

But the smell of blood that fills the bathroom is only his own as it slowly drips onto the tiles.

He has trouble moving the next day. He's woken up around midday when a page boy brings a small parcel up to his room. Thank god Timmy remembers to put on a robe before opening the door.

He orders just coffee and orange juice for a late breakfast. The thought of solid food is enough to make him retch.

Armie and Liz must already have left by now.

He stares at the box he got delivered. It's pale gray. The label says Milly. When he tentatively opens it he's confronted with a fluffy mountain of deep red tissue paper. When he pulls it apart he gasps.

Wow.

Okay...

Later, he meets with Brian to discuss some future projects. The Belgian director is very interested in him but wants to meet first. No, not a real audition. Brian doesn't look at him. Timmy feels even more sick.

“I got you the books the script is based on.”

“You really think he wants to talk source material with me?”
“Impress him with your intellect.”

It's late afternoon when they return to Crema.

“Maybe you should start packing?” Brian suggests.

Timmy stands in the middle of his bedroom, staring at a huge hold-all and a backpack. Both are still empty despite him standing here for more than half an hour. He just... can't.

In the end, he at least succeeds in sorting through his books, magazines, just all the stuff that has accumulated over the past months. Months! He makes two piles – one is rubbish, the other he'll take with him. He finds an envelop full of Polaroids, must have been an early lighting test or something. It's Armie and him, entangled, so much skin... Another shows them arm in arm, smiling against the sun.

They both look so innocent. Happy.

Timmy has a lump in his throat as he throws the pictures on the rubbish pile. He has so many photos on his phone, he really doesn't need those.

When he gets up from the floor his underwear scratches against his cuts. He showers, applies some lotion. Lies on the couch, smokes, stares at the ceiling.

What's Armie up to right now, he wonders.

Fuck! Don't go there.

Time seems to slow down. Minutes stretch like hours. Timmy has turned down a dinner invitation from Luca. He's not in the mood for company. And he still doesn't feel like eating.

Maybe that's why he feels so dizzy?

He thinks about sending a text to Armie; but what is there to say?

'I miss you. I can't be without you.' - Bit melodramatic.

'Don't fuck your wife.' - Too entitled. And way too desperate.

Eventually, he runs out of cigarettes, drags himself over into bed and falls asleep.

Next day, Timmy is a nervous wreck. With a sore throat. He's done press for films before. But not when playing a leading part. He has no idea how the Italian journalists will react to what they've done.

Luca and Walter have prepared a press reel. Timmy watches it with everyone else. Armie squeezes into the reserved seat next to him at the last minute, a bit red in the face. He's very quiet, but Timmy feels his eyes on him, even in the darkened room.

What he sees on the large screen makes Timmy's heart beat faster. He's sweating, fidgeting, until a huge hand wraps around his forearm to still him, the beads of his bracelet grinding against the bones of his wrist. It hurts. Timmy loves it.

The tension between Elio and Oliver is palpable in every scene. The reel isn't longer than ten minutes but it incorporates the most intimate scenes: The piano scene, the Berm, the peach scene, their last kiss, their good-bye.
Everything apart from the midnight scene, Timmy realizes. Has Luca been aware of what had been going on and left that scene out on purpose, as it would be too obvious?

Apparently, the journalists like what they saw. They really like it. There's even applause, followed by a charged silence full of anticipation. Timmy feels relieved.

It's surprisingly easy to talk about the film with Armie by his side. He's professional. Every time Timmy's at a loss or starts rambling he jumps in with a witty anecdote or bon mot. Armie is the king of soundbites. Everybody loves him.

Timmy hopes that one day he'll be able to act that secure in front of the press as well. He still feels awkward, very young and inexperienced.

When he hears Armie tell all the world that he fell in love with him his heart stutters and his mouth goes dry. *I love you too,* he thinks. The cuts criss-crossing over his pubic bone burn, grounding him.

It helps to remind himself that this isn't real. Armie's just following the strategy they've agreed on. Damage control. But for a moment Timmy allows himself to revel in the public confession, imagining it being them coming out, telling all the world what they mean to each other, Armie openly acknowledging him, *them.* But he isn't. He can't.

Armie spent the last night with his wife. And he almost hasn't looked at Timmy since his return. Timmy feels left out in the cold, starving for a touch, a smile.

He'd do anything for Armie to just to get a little crumb of affection.

*Sad, you're so sad, Chalamet!*

But then Armie tells him about his test results – and it's like Timmy's stepping back into the sunshine. Apparently, Milan was a drag. Timmy's still not sure that nothing happened but he pushes these thoughts to the back of his mind.

He knows Armie wants him to wear his present tomorrow. And of course he'll do it. He's a slut for Armie so he can dress like one as well.

That evening, they all dine together one last time at Luca's. Timmy's in a strange mood. He doesn't want to leave but his time in Italy rapidly runs out. And he's not alone. The overall mood is much quieter than usual, almost melancholic.

When Timmy says good-night around ten Armie frowns and excuses himself, walking him to the door.

“You okay?” He asks.

“Me okay.” Timmy tries to smile. “I don't know, it's just... it's been such a strange day, all those people... and I think I need to be alone. A bit.”

“But I thought-”

“Yeah, I know what you thought.” Timmy replies. They really have to stop this. “Sorry. I know but... it's all been a bit much.” He bites the knuckle of his thumb. He's really not in the mood. Besides, Armie would see his cuts. Timmy doesn't think he can handle that particular confrontation tonight.

“Hey, of course, okay. I didn't want to...,” Armie steps back but Timmy pulls him close again, kisses
him softly.

“Tomorrow. We'll have all night.” He quickly turns and runs down the stairs.

They leave early the next morning for Lake Garda. Liz stays back in Crema, already packing up stuff, preparing their departure. For once, the weather is bright and sunny. It's more like a merry outing than work. There won't be much actual acting demanded today. They'll just have to walk around amongst the ancient ruins in the sun, sit in a boat and look stunned. The rest will be added during post-production. They've just this one day left for filming because the Roman monuments in Sirmione are closed to the public on Mondays.

It's a beautiful, inspiring place. These remains of an ancient culture have been standing here for over two thousand years. Timmy gets hit once again by the transience of time. When he and Armie will long be forgotten this majestic sandstone complex will still tower over the blue waters of Lake Garda.

He's reminded of a tale he once heard, featuring a king, a shepherd, a bird. For some reason Timmy has forgotten the king asks the shepherd to describe eternity and the shepherd says: There's this diamond mountain, which is two miles high, two miles wide, and two miles deep. Every hundred years a little bird comes and sharpens its beak on it, and when the whole mountain is worn away by this, the first second of eternity will be over.

The sheer infinitude of time had fascinated Timmy since he was a child. He'd often lain awake at night and thought about the story, not sure if it frightened or comforted him.

He's still not sure. Time might work in their favor or against them. It's hard to tell.

The black silk panties Armie has bought him bite into his sensitive flesh. He's half-hard the whole day. The lace irritates his raw skin, his short pubes itching as they get trapped in the thin fabric. He fidgets a lot as he repeatedly tries to adjust himself without attracting attention.

While Armie, Michael and Timmy sit for an hour in the boat, waiting for the camera to be set up, they just lazily sunbath. It's like a holiday. Floating on the water, Timmy has left his worries ashore. Armie takes his green shirt off and wraps it around Timmy's head as he starts to burn. Timmy stares at Armie's golden chest hair reflecting the sun as his scent surrounds him and knows if he should die on the spot he would go happy.

“So, last day.” Michael muses, stretching, eyes closed. “I just want to say, I wish you all the best. Everyone does.”

Timmy feels himself blushing.

“Thanks, man.” Armie says. He briefly squeezes Timmy's hand. Timmy hates it when he withdraws it as the camera arrives.

The last scene they film is them all splashing in the surf while the sun sets behind the mountains. Timmy's suddenly afraid that his panties will show beneath his wet white boxer shorts, but the descending darkness hides his secret. All his secrets

After the last slate they pop some bottles on the shore, watching the moon rise above the lake. It's breathtaking. Timmy quickly downs his glass as to not start crying.

It's over.

There will be a big wrap party later for all the cast and crew at a hotel in Desenzano. Armie and
Timmy attend for an hour, hugging everyone. Numbers are exchanged, promises made – ‘I call! We'll meet.’ - until Armie stops wiping his eyes and lets his tears run freely down his face. Luca holds him, patting his back. Timmy joins them. The three of them embrace each other one last time.

Timmy has no words for how grateful he is. He feels humbled, salvaged, saved.

“I can't... I'm sorry. We should go.” Armie puts an arm around Timmy's waist. “See ya, fuckers!” He shouts over his shoulder as he steers Timmy away from the bar. Cast and crew wolf-whistle but Timmy sees a few serious faces among them: Amira, Ferdinando. Brian. Esther gives him a very rude two-fingered salute as she visibly forces a smile on her face.

Armie has ordered a car that drives them to a secluded luxury resort five miles east of Desenzano. It's standing alone on a peninsula overlooking the by now black waters of Lake Garda. A liveried page boy leads them to their suite, carrying their duffel bags – Timmy's just black canvas, Armie's Louis Vuitton - and then they are finally, eventually alone.

“Hey.” Armie walks slowly over to Timmy who leans by the door, taking in the huge suite. They are still in the lounge area, furnished with caramel-colored leather sofas and low tables. A terrace overlooks the lake. Adjoined is a bedroom. Through the open double doors Timmy sees the large four-poster bed waiting for them.

“Wow.” Timmy mouths.

Armie takes his chin between thumb and forefinger. “The best is just good enough for you.”

Timmy snorts. “’You make it sound like I'm a cocotte.’” Timmy pronounces it French. Armie's gaze darkens. “Sorry, I didn't mean...” Timmy had no idea what he does or doesn't mean anymore – not with Armie's mouth only a few inches away. So he just leans in and kisses him, softly, open-mouthed, inviting Armie in to take him.

“I actually kinda like that.” Timmy whispers as they part. “Remember, I want you to ruin me.” He smiles, taking Armie's hand and puts it between his legs to cup his already swollen cock. It's rubbing almost uncomfortable against the lace of his underwear. “Don't you want to undress me and take a peek?”

“Are you-” Armie's eyes go wide as his hand squeezes. Timmy's cock is trapped in the unfamiliar fabric in an even more unfamiliar position. It's simply impossible to fit all of him into the flimsy garment definitely designed for a different anatomy.

“Oh god.” Armie gasps.

“Yep.” Timmy pops the P. “The whole day. I have no idea in what state they are.” He grins. “Wanna look?”

Armie literally lifts Timmy off the floor, throws him over his shoulder and carries him over into the bedroom. Timmy squeaks a little with surprise and puts up a fight for show – but it's more foreplay than actual resistance.

When Armie chucks him down onto the bouncy mattress, Timmy huffs. He has to bite his fist to suppress a giggle. Armie stares down at him as if he's an especially delicious piece of fresh meat. Timmy stretches his arms above his head, his chuckle turning into a smile he hopes is seductive.

“Unwrap me, Armie. I'm all yours.”

Armie groans as he straddles Timmy's legs and bends low to bunch up his tee while simultaneously...
shoving his shorts out of the way. A moment later, he freezes.

“Oh, Tim...”

Armie can't wait to peel Tim's casual clothes – black and white stripy long-sleeve, jorts and Converse – off him but the moment he pushes Tim's shirt up and pants down he stops and inhales sharply.

Tim's lower stomach is covered in scrawny cuts. They are halfway healed but look recent. Armie knows they haven't been there the last time he saw him naked.

“Oh, Tim....” Armie's lost for words. Tim seems momentarily confused but then looks down, eyes dark, and shrugs as best he can in his position.

“It's nothing.”

“Nothing?” Armie's voice sounds as hollow as he feels.

“I was... a mess. You were gone. But now it doesn't matter. We are here.”

“Tim, you can't do that every time I'm not with you. How am I to... fuck, just, please, don't.”

“I won't. I promise. It was just all too much. You and Liz-”

“This will happen again. I told you. We have to keep up appearance for this to work.”

“I know. I know.”

“Do you?” Armie's sits back. This came out too harsh. He's not angry. He's frightened, devastated. It's not pity he feels for Tim, but a bone-deep fear starts to seize hold of him. “I can't go on when I know that you do this to yourself.”

“It doesn't matter.”

“It does to me,” Armie lies down next to Tim. He strokes his cheek, his chin, down his throat and feels Tim swallow, his Adam's apple bobbing. “Listen. I love you. I want you to be okay. You have to be okay without me.”

Tim nods, eyes wide. “But this is who I am.” He whispers, his voice hoarse. “Do you want me, this?” He gestures down his lean, half-naked body.

Armie knows it's wrong. He knows he should come up with words of sympathy, telling Tim he can stop this, that he needs help, that he should get help. That he's defective and needs to be fixed so Armie feels better, less guilty. Tell him that what he does is not healthy, not normal.

But he says nothing of those things.

Instead Armie holds Tim's gaze. “I want everything. With you. From you.” He purposefully lets his fingertips wander over the marred skin, just grazing the lesions beneath the see-through lace. “You are the most beautiful person I know. God, the things I want to do to you...,” Armie swallows.

'I want to make you bleed.' He thinks. 'I want to hurt you, hear you whimper my name, beg me for more. Take you out of your head, tear you apart and put you back together.'

“Do them.” Tim sighs, his eyes fluttering shut. “Do them. All of them.” He stretches, presenting
himself, injured, vulnerable, defenseless.

It's all Armie has ever dreamed of. Someone giving himself over, willingly, without hesitation or restraint. Someone as broken as himself. They are equals in their suffering, bonded by self-loathing, but that also sets them free. They don't have to hide from each other. They don't have to be ashamed of their flaws. They can be honest. They are both wrecks. Before they met, they always felt they were missing something, lacking something. Now they've found that in each other. They complete each other and maybe from that something beautiful can grow?

Armie once saw a movie where someone said 'Damaged people are dangerous because they know they can survive.' Finding Tim made him understand what this truly means.

They can do unspeakable things to one another and will both come out of this alive. Scarred maybe, but alive. Not necessarily better, but changed.

“Get up.” Armie pulls Tim up and drags him over into the bathroom. The boy is barely able to pull up his shorts to prevent stumbling and crashing face-first onto the fluffy carpet.

In the bathroom an entire wall is covered by a mirror, reaching from floor to ceiling

Armie holds Tim up by his hair, makes him face his reflection. “Undress.”

Tim does it so quickly he almost trips over his own feet as he kicks off his Converse.

“Come here.” When he's almost naked, except for that sinful piece of French silk trapping his swelling cock, Armie pulls Tim close, his bare back pressed to Armie's chest. Tim stares at them both, his eyes dark and hooded, watching Armie's hands roam his body.

Those black French panties, as the lady in the shop had called them, sit low on Tim's narrow hips, the dark fabric a stark contrast to his pale skin, angry red cuts peeking out from underneath the lace inset. Above it, his concave belly is heaving. Below, miles of wiry legs carry him, dusted with the faintest fuzz of soft brown hairs. At the back of the panties there's a small silk bow above Tim's crack. He looks so hot Armie might have an aneurysm.

He splays one hand over Tim's flat chest while the other cups him, feeling his precome already soaking through the delicate lace. His cock is almost fully hard now and tries his best to escape its small confine, surely uncomfortably pressed to the right side, trapped inside a cage of see-through mesh.

Tim moans as Armie touches him where he needs it, rolling his hips in answer. To control him, Armie's right hand wanders from Tim's chest to his throat, resting loosely around its base. He can feel Tim pant and swallow, his pulse thrumming beneath Armie's thumb. He lays his head back against Armie's shoulder but doesn't take his eyes from their reflection, staring at them both from under his lashes.

He licks his red lips, lets them fall slightly open.

“You're gorgeous.” Armie nips at Tim's earlobe, never breaking eye-contact in the mirror and Tim shivers all over. Rubbing his clothed body against Tim's almost naked, feminized frame makes Armie feel powerful, in charge.

“You're so wet for me, baby.” Armie whispers into Tim's ear, his tongue stroking its almost translucent shell. Tim even has the most delicate ears he's ever seen.

“Yes.” Tim breathes.
He's not lying. Armie can feel it.

“Have you been like that the whole day?”

Tim nods and bites his lower lip.

“Poor little thing.” Armie pinches him, hard, just below the glans. Tim squirms and gasps but can't escape Armie's hold. “I'm sure you can get even wetter.”

“Oh god, Armie.” Tim sacks forward a little. Armie fears that his knees will give out if it wasn't for him holding Tim. He's outright slack with arousal.

“Come on, show me how wet you can get for me. How wet I make you.”

Armie's left hand leaves Tim's cock and comes to rest on his belly. He can feel the cuts beneath his fingertips. But they don't repel him. This is Tim, his lover, scarred, not afraid of pain, sometimes lost, sometimes sad – but beautiful in his despair. Tim displaying such vulnerability, allowing Armie to see him as a whole makes Armie harder than he's ever been before. The ugly wounds only emphasize Tim's perfection.

Armie increases the pressure of his palm against Tim's abdomen just below his belly button. Tim nearly topples over but Armie keeps him upright in a tight grip. Tim twists his legs in desperation as Armie doesn't cease to squeeze him.

“Please...,” he whispers, and Armie has no idea if he wants him to stop or to continue.

“What's your safeword?” He checks.

It feels like Tim resurfaces from a dream. “O-Oliver.” He says.

“Good. You wanna use it?”

“No.” Tim shakes his head.

“Then let me see. I know you want to.”

“But it's... so filthy. Dirty.”

“That's not for you to decide. If you make a mess you get what you deserve. For your own good.”

Tim's eyes literally flutter shut. Armie can see his pulse hammering in his throat. His face is flushed pink. There's sweat pooling on his upper lip despite the cool night air.

He's falling.

Armie pushes the heel of his left hand against Tim's lower belly until he feels flesh and muscle give. His fingers close around Tim's straining cock again, holding him in a lose grip. He's not really sure what to expect, this is more Tim's kink than his but he wants him to have this and to share it with him. Badly.

This will be their last night together for the foreseeable future. Armie wants it to be a night to remember.

Yet when feel the first spurt of warm piss against his fingertips he almost pulls his hand back. But then Tim makes a strangled noise between a sob and a mewl and Armie understands just how gone he is. He needs him now.
“Open your eyes. Watch.”

Tim's eyes snap open and he stares into the mirror, his irises drowned out by his blown pupils. Another spurt wets Armie's hand and he only grabs Tim tighter, his right hand closing around Tim's throat.

“It's okay, baby. Just let go. I've got you.” He can feel Tim relax against his body as his resolve crumbles. Warm piss runs over Armie's fingers as Tim drenches his little panties, wetting them thoroughly. He keens back in his throat as he watches, hips bucking, cock twitching in Armie's slippery hold. Armie can feel the sound reverberating in his palm covering Tim's vocal chords.

Armie stokes him through it, warm piss seeping through his fingers, running down Tim's bare legs. This is the most intimate thing he's ever done with anyone. Their eyes lock in the mirror before Armie lowers his gaze onto the tiles where Tim's feet stand in a pale yellow puddle.

“Oh, no, look at you. Did you have an accident, babe?”

Tim moans in reply, shuddering against Armie as the last drops drip from his slit and suddenly Armie realizes that he's close. His hand speeds up and Tim moans, his head lolling on his neck as they both stare at the small piece of soiled black fabric barely covering Tim's erection.

Desperate to feel his velvety hardness Armie reaches inside, impatience taking over in the end so he tears the dainty lace. He can see Tim's toes curl on the wet floor as skin touches skin. Tim's cock is slick with a mixture of precome and piss that Armie should find disgusting but that he just wants to taste instead. Or feed it to Tim.

He strokes him rougher, faster, and Tim gasps, his abdominal muscles rippling as his cock is finally freed. Armie's fingers tighten further around his throat, not enough to choke but enough to remind Tim who's in charge here.

“Please...,” Tim whimpers. His balls are still trapped inside the soggy lace. It must hurt.

“Not yet.” Armie watches Tim's hands clench into fists at his side. The beads of his bracelet match the shreds of the lingerie.

Armie’s hand speeds up. Obscenely wet noises fill the bathroom, mixing with Tim’s desperate moans. When Armie adds a twist to the upstroke, he can see Tim’s eyes rolling back in their sockets.

Tim's legs start to spasm, his feet skittering over the damp floor. Armie almost lifts him off the ground before he groans: “Now, baby.”

Tim shouts Armie's name as he comes, shooting all over the mirror. Armie holds him tight so that he doesn’t slip on the wet tiles when suddenly all his muscles go limp.

Armie has never seen anyone come like this.

“Fuck.” He hisses, and then rips the remains of the panties off of Tim. There go $90 but he couldn’t care less, they have been worth every Cent. Armie's so hard he fears he might burst his zip. His trousers are a little damp as well but he doesn’t mind.

“Open.” Armie grabs Tim’s chin. His jaw goes slack and Armie shoves the drenched ball of black lace deep in Tim’s mouth, pressing his tongue down with two fingers. Tim tries to turn away but Armie just holds him tighter.

“No, no, no. That's what happens to little boys when they make a mess. They get it fed right back to
them.” He can see in the mirror as Tim’s hooded eyes go wide. “Come on, on your knees, I wanna
watch you clean up – without your hands, of course. Use your dirty mouth, baby.”

He helps lowering Tim onto his knees, forcing him to sit in the cooling puddle of his own piss. If he
wasn’t as hard as he is Armie would love to add to it. Just the thought of pissing all over Tim’s white
back, his chest, his hair – oh god – maybe even into his mouth has him at the edge of orgasm.

Watching Tim’s lips greedily sucking his spunk from the mirror does nothing to calm Armie down.
He imagines the taste catching in the silken gag. “You like that? Swallowing your own cum?” His
voice is low, raw. Tim just hums, nods, and continues to suck the class until Armie has to pinch the
base of his cock through his trousers.

Enough!

He doesn’t allow Tim to dry himself off or to to clean up. Armie just drags him back into the
bedroom, one hand in his hair, the other around his midriff. Tim’s naked wet feet leave marks on the
fair carpet. Armie silently promises to leave a huge tip for housekeeping.

His cock is throbbing in his pants as he shoves Tim onto his knees again in front of the king-size bed.
Thank god the carpet is thick and fluffy. He doesn’t want for Tim’s legs to chafe.

“Bend over.”

Tim kneels up and lays his upper body on the mattress, his arms folded, hands on either side of his
head.

“You soiled yourself, you dirty little slut. Couldn't you wait?” Tim whimpers at his feet, his flushed
face turned sideways, resting on his right cheek. There are still traces of cum on his lips. Armie
imagines how it must feel when his by now sensitive cock, trapped beneath him, rubs against the raw
silk duvet. He swallows, palming his own crotch, enjoying the friction.

“God, look at you. Want me to fuck you?” Tim nods, moans low. He’s started drooling on the
creme-colored duvet, his saliva leaving dark stains.

Armie walks over to his bag and gets the lube. He outright rips off his clothes and it’s almost comical
how eager his dick bobs out as he pulls his boxers down. He towers a moment above Tim, staring at
his heaving back before getting on the floor as well, squatting behind the trembling body of his lover.

Armie can smell him. Tim is wet everywhere but it's not unpleasant. Armie's hands stroke his back a
few times as if preparing him for what's to come. His hard cock rests against Tim's damp crack. He
suddenly wishes he'd still wore the panties and Armie could look at that little ribbon riding high
above his lovely, lovely ass. He guesses he'll have to get him another pair. Maybe for Christmas.
Does Tim even celebrate Christmas? Hanukkah then. Or for his birthday? Maybe he should get him
more than one…

Whatever, all these thoughts leave Armie as he quickly slicks himself up, grabs Tim’s hips and
pushes in.

“Take it. Take it all.”

Tim is so fucking tight! Yet his muscles relax and give, thanks to his previous orgasm. He only
grunts as Armie slides all the way in until he bottoms out. Tim clutches the duvet, breathing through
his nose, fast, faster. Armie bends forward, covering his back to kiss him between his shoulder
blades, tasting salt.
When he feels that Tim’s body stops shaking Armie starts to fuck into him, thrusting hard and deep. It feels so good. He doesn't spare Tim as he chases his own orgasm. He has one hand on Tim's waist and the other planted between his shoulder blades, holding him down. Tim groans, only half-conscious, eyes closed, a frown on his face. Armie slams him into the mattress with every snap of his hips and his limbs flail, his legs sliding further and further apart, boneless, pliant, without resistance. As if he’s been made to take Armie’s cock.

Armie comes way too fast. But this is just the beginning, to take the edge off. The best is yet to come.

He pulls out and doesn't give Tim a break as he instantly starts to finger him to keep him loose and open. His other hand strokes his sweaty curls from his face before his fingers invade Tim’s mouth to remove the gag. The panties are soaked with saliva, piss and cum. Armie drops them next to Tim’s left knee.

“You know what you deserve, don't you?”

“Yes.” Tim chokes out, his voice broken, husky.

He takes two fingers easily. At the third, he groans.

Armie stills. “You still want that?” His free hand massages the small of Tim’s back, his thumb rubbing soothing circles into his hot, damp skin.

Tim nods, blinking slowly. His gaze is clouded, unfocused.

Armie gives him a break, removes his fingers from his hole and pushes him further up onto the bed.

“Lie on your back. Pull your knees up to your chest.”

Tim rolls over, his sweet little ass hanging over the edge of the mattress, as he awkwardly grabs the back of his knees.

Armie crouches in front of him and places Tim's feet on his shoulder to steady him. Tim's gaping hole is on eye-level, wet and leaking. Armie stares at his red, swollen rim and licks his lips. But instead of starting to suck his cum from Tim's anus he takes the lube and squirts it all over his right hand.

“Oh, where were we?”

He pushes three fingers back inside, rotates them. Tim hisses but presses down against Armie's knuckles.

“Easy. Relax.”

His pinkie fits easily after a few minutes. Armie watches, mesmerized. “Okay, that's four.”

Tim moans. The usually red muscle is stretched almost white.

“Oh god, I'm so full.” Tim gasps.

“I want you to take them all. My whole hand.” Armie spears his fingers, presses in further. But his broad knuckles seem to be an insurmountable obstacle. He fears he might hurt Tim if he forcefully breaches him. But at the same time this looks so fucking hot that Armie feels himself getting hard again.
“I don’t know if I—” Tim whispers.

“That wasn’t a question. Remember, you pissed yourself back in the bathroom. I could have made you lick that up.”

Tim makes a sound between a moan and a sob and throws an arm over his head. Armie chuckles. “Yeah, I thought you’d like that.”

“Please... go gentle.” It’s just a huff of breath.

Armie leans forward, kisses the inside of Tim’s thigh. “Of course, baby.”

It takes ages. And almost all their lube. Armie’s fingers, hand, wrist, arm starts to hurt but he doesn’t stop. Slick whitish droplets well up from Tim’s abused hole, dripping down onto the duvet, surely ruining the silk but finally, finally, the knuckle of Armie’s thumb slides past Tim’s rim.

“Hngghgnn.” Tim is nonverbal, sweaty, flushed all over. His legs tremble. His cock is hard again, leaking, lying against his belly in a pool of translucent precome covering his new scars.

“Wow, baby. Wow. You’re so good.” Armie has never seen anything like this. Tim’s usually wrinkled rim is smooth and taut as it hugs Armie’s wrist, sucking him in. Like the most lewd bracelet ever designed.

Armie rotates his arm carefully a little to the left, then a little to the right. Tim’s cock twitches. The muscles in his thighs contract.

Armie stills, squeezes more lube on his forearm and starts to move, so very slowly pumping in and out, his free hand tenderly stroking Tim’s hip before he touches his fingertips to Tim’s impossibly stretched rim. It’s so soft.

“Ugh... God... Yeah... Please.” Timmy moans and gasps, throwing his head from left to right, short sweaty curls sticking to his temples. Armie imagines he can see his hand move beneath Tim’s skin, right inside his flat belly. He imagines he can feel his own hot cum. He’s inside him in a way he’s never been before. No one has ever been inside Tim like this before. His insides feel warm and velvety and Armie’s the first to touch them.

“Make yourself come.” Armie whispers and Tim doesn’t need to be told twice. He’s stroking himself fast, arrhythmic, but he seems to be past finesse. When Armie slides deeper and balls his fingers into a fist inside him Tim comes with a surprised shout. Armie can feel his internal muscles clench and work and it’s enough for his own cock to spurt untouched onto the fluffy carpet.

He almost passes out but remembers that he needs to be careful. Slowly, he pulls out. Tim’s hole makes an obscenely wet sound and gapes open, allowing lube and cum to seep out. Armie holds him open with his thumbs just a little longer. Tim’s internal walls oscillate from pale pink to bright red. Armie leans in, touches his tongue to the still strained muscle and Tim squirms, rotates his hips, but doesn’t flinch. Armie tastes sweat, musk, spunk, salt, piss and lube. He laps it greedily up, twirling his tongue around and around, pressing his face against Tim’s taint.

They are disgusting. They are sick. God, it’s glorious.

Eventually, Tim makes a faint noise. His chest is heaving, his shoulders are shaking. Armie climbs onto the bed and pulls a totally exhausted Tim up against his chest. He kisses his sweaty hair, his wet temple.

“You okay, babe?”
“Yeah.” Tim's voice is weak. His limbs seem to be made of jelly. Armie holds him, strokes his back, his hair, and it takes a moment for him to realize that he has his lube-slick fingers pushed into Tim's curls. It doesn't really matter after all they've done tonight.

It's pretty clear that Tim just wants to rest, fall asleep. But they need to clean up first.

“I'll run you a bath.” Armie whispers into Tim's hair.

“Don't leave me.” Tim clings to him. He needs him now. This might have been too much.

“Hey, come on, let go.” Armie nudges him but Tim doesn't move.

In the end, Armie carries him over into the bathroom and sits him on the closed toilet seat (Tim winces), wrapping him in a huge fluffy towel as he runs the water. He lifts him like a bride, then lowers him into the tub. Tim sighs.

Armie lathers him with a sponge before gently washing his hair. Tim hums, his eyes falling shut every few minutes. Afterwards, Armie tenderly dries him off and puts him back to bed. Tim's eyes blink lazily open for a moment and he smiles before he falls asleep.

Armie watches him. He's tired but too hyped to sleep. He doesn't want to miss a moment of their last night together. He knows he should clean up the bathroom, the bedroom, but can't be bothered. Let them see.

The sun starts to rise over the lake, bathing their room in soft pink light. Tim looks rosy, very young – and happy.

At eight, Armie kisses his forehead, his eyelids, his nose. “Hey, wake up.”

Tim groans. Opens his eyes. Groans some more.

“Oh god.”

Armie smiles. “I have to get up.” He doesn't want to say that he has to go, that Liz is waiting. That Tim has a flight to catch tomorrow. Despite himself wanting nothing more than to stay a little while longer in their bubble, it's not to be.

“I can't.” Tim whines.

“You can stay. The room is paid until tomorrow.”

“Not without you.” Tim snuggles closer. “Just a moment.”

So they stay in bed, just holding each other, touching, kissing, stroking, skipping breakfast. But Armie has to check out by eleven. Tim can barely walk. A car takes them back to Crema. They hold hands during the whole journey but don't say a word. Armie has no idea what he could possibly say to soothe the pain, sorrow and heartbreak of good-bye. Tim keeps his sunglasses on but his face contorts at every bump in the road they hit. Armie doesn't know why he finds this so funny and just squeezes Tim's hand in silent sympathy.

When they reach the Piazza del Duomo and get out of the car Tim is still limping. Passers-by bustle around them, children, housewives on bikes, old men. It's surreal. How can their lives go on when something so fundamental is happening in their midst?

“Oh, That's it.” Tim puts his hand under his chin.
Armie can only nod.

“I guess Liz is waiting.”

Armie nods again, finds his voice. “There's a train bound for Rome at three. I have to pack first, then I go over to their hotel.”

“I have to clean out the apartment. Maybe visit Luca tonight. Then Brian takes me to the airport tomorrow.”

Armie’s glad that Tim won't be alone.

“Let's not... let's not make this into a teary scene. Okay? I'll call you. I'll see you soon.”

“Later.” Tim grins but it looks a little forced. They hug briefly; Armie inhales Tim's scent one last time before they part. He watches Tim turn and walk over to his building at the corner of the square, never looking back. And Armie understands. That doesn't mean he's not disappointed.

He stares at Tim's back until he disappears in the crowd of shoppers, tourists, schoolchildren on an outing.

Armie stands there for a moment, trying to commit it all to memory. Suddenly, the church bells chime twelve and he looks up at the tower of the Duomo. God, he’ll miss this. The sounds, the smells, the warm breeze, the sun. The safety. The freedom. Tim.

He slowly turns around, gazing up at the ancient buildings. There's the newsstand they filmed in. The cafe he and Tim used to have breakfast. The bar he got shitfaced and where Ferdinando found him.

He's been alive here. Not always happy. But in love.

Now he has to move on. But he already misses all of this.

Armie takes a deep breath before walking over to his apartment. He hesitates opening the huge, squeaking front door and crossing the threshold because he's aware that he's stepping into a new, undiscovered part of his life.

Is this the end or a new beginning?

Only time will tell.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone for reading.

The film Armie thinks about is called 'Damage' by Louis Malle.

Well, this is obviously not the end of the story. I'll be posting three epilogues over the next week. The first one will deal with the time period summer 2016-spring 2019. The other two are each set roughly ten years apart.

Each epilogue will have a proper ending. That means you can leave the story there, depending on how you want the boys to end up. Just believe me when I say that the
angst increases with each epilogue. You've been warned.
Epilogue I - Wondering

Chapter Summary

This chapter tells their story post CMBYN until Oscars 2019. It's obviously fiction. Like Timmy, I also might have started to mix up awards and red carpet events. All errors are mine. Chalk it up to creative license.

TW for use of antisemitic language - I'm really, really sorry, of course it does not express my opinion, but is used here for narrative purposes and also based on true events. I actually saw stuff like that around the WA discussion and regarding CMBYN to smear the movie. It's vile and evil but it's also something both Timmy - and Armie - sadly have to face or are confronted with on social media.

Chapter Notes

The title's from Wondering by Good Charlotte

If you want me to wait
I would wait for you
If you tell me to stay
I would stay right through
If you don't want to say
Anything at all
I'm happy wondering

There's a great playlist put together by the lovely Morna for SATSOY on YouTube.
Check it out here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Being dropped back into New York feels like being exiled. Timmy needs some time to adjust. Giulian and Will take him out to a few places (pizza New York style, Mud, Supreme store) during the first week but even they have to realize that Timmy's still far away, somewhere in Northern Italy.

The city's noise, once his familiar background crackle, is too much. As are all those people. The smells. The heat. The concrete. New York never sleeps and neither does Timmy the first few days and nights. Instead, he lies awake in his tiny, stuffy room and stares at the walls, tinted violet and orange from a flickering neon sign on the opposite building. He smokes too much and eats too little and desperately avoids to look at his IG where he gets a notification every time Armie posts a happy holiday pic with his Hammily.

God, he wants to sew his eyelids shut so he doesn’t have to see those smiles and hugs and cuddles – maybe it would even help him sleep.

It’s good to have Will around because he knows, he's been there, in Crema – but even he can only
take so much of Timmy's melancholia at three in the morning.

His mom tries to talk to him as does Pauline. His dad takes him out to dinner at a French restaurant. It's comforting but nothing more. All their sympathy and care doesn’t fill the void inside him.

Timmy lives for the few minutes a day he talks to Armie on the phone. He stayed in Italy with Liz for two weeks, then went back to LA. In August, he leaves for India, later Australia, the time difference making contact difficult.

Tim's anxiety attacks return. But he's able to refrain from cutting. Most of the times.

It gets a little better when Timmy goes to Canada to film a Western. He can ride a horse again and discovers how much he missed it. It's freedom. He loves it.

His colleagues are renowned actors but somehow word has got around that he did an exceptional movie during the summer.

“You worked with Guadagnino? Cool.” Christian Bale says to him in passing on his second day. Timmy walks a little taller afterwards.

They only meet briefly in October when Armie’s in New York, filming some pick-ups. They disguise the private visit with a GQ photo-shoot.

It's Timmy's first time on such a big glossy magazine shoot and he feels nervous, fidgeting, talking too much until Armie puts an arm around his shoulder. When the lights are switched on and the photographer calls for action he actually enjoys posing. The photographer seems enthralled by them. The tension between them is palpable. The clothes are beautiful. Timmy’s only objection is the slicked-back hair. He hates it and washes it as soon as he and Armie arrive back at his apartment.

His flatmates have gone out, Giullian winking at him before giving him a hug. They won't be back until tomorrow.

They fuck on every available surface. Armie apparently loves his longer hair, carding his big hands through it, pulling it hard until Timmy whimpers with need and desperation.

When they’re about to leave for the airport the next day, Timmy almost breaks down despite his best intentions. He simply can't accompany Armie to JFK. Armie says he understands.

Timmy watches him get into a cab, hiding his eyes behind sunglasses. He wants to throw himself against his broad chest, wants to hug him, to kiss him, beg him to stay a few days longer. But he doesn’t. Because he knows he shouldn't. And he won't be a nuisance.

He finds a hair tie in his trouser pocket they'd used on yesterday's shooting. He puts it around his wrist and snaps it rhythmically until he feels a little better. Until the taxi has pulled away from the curb. The rest of the day passes in a haze as Timmy lies on their battered couch, listening to his flatmates laughing, cooking, playing XBox. He can still feel Armie inside him, his body screaming to be touched like that again.

If it always hurts like that to let Armie go Timmy’s not sure he wants to meet him again any time soon.

Hanukkah comes, then Christmas. Armie sends him a huge collection of rather raunchy lingerie that he stuffs in the bottom drawer of his closet. The frilly garments must have cost a fortune Timmy muses as he munches on a two days old slice of Margherita. He’s back to his usual downtime in between movies diet. It makes him look pale but Giullian calls it artsy.
Despite having shot yet another movie in the meantime he’s still broke. Pay was a bit better than for Call Me By Your Name (which he did literally for board and lodging) but not enough to afford living in the Bronx and eat healthy. So he has to compromise.

He really liked Saoirse and Greta but isn’t sure what they thought of him. He tried, though. They went out a few times. Saoirse isn’t much older than him but already well established, with Oscars noms to her name. He learned a lot from her.

Life goes on. He goes to auditions, some of which he hates, some of which he thinks he’s done alright. Brian’s still trying to land him a part as supporting actor in one of Hollywood’s hottest upcoming films about a meth addicted kid and his dad, directed by a Belgian newbie. At least he might be able to speak French on set.

He even meets Felix a few times but Timmy’s not sure because the director seems undecided, lacking a vision of what he wants to get across. But beggars can’t be choosers. When Brian tells Timmy that Felix and Amazon want him and he signs.

Armie sends him a thick, fur-lined parka for his birthday to wrap up warm at Sundance.

The day he boards his flight to Utah an embossed card arrives by post, announcing the birth of Ford Armand Douglas Hammer.

India's fucking hot. Australia's fucking hot and there are deadly spiders. For Armie, most of the second half of 2016 turns into a kind of nightmare.

He misses Tim so much it hurts. As usual, he numbs his loneliness with booze – until Dev eventually talks to him, asking if everything’s alright. It almost ends in a fist fight.

It gets worse after meeting Tim in October. The boy looks outright ethereal during their photoshoot. Armie fucks him so hard afterwards he's surprised Tim can still walk the next day. He'll feel him for days and that consoles Armie a little as he has to leave.

His arrangement with Liz works surprisingly well. She visits in Australia and the press obediently takes pictures of the happy family. To make up for it he spends a fortune on black and dark green lingerie he has delivered to Tim for Hanukkah before returning to LA for Christmas.

Their house isn't that big but they still manage to live in separate quarters, Armie occupying the guest room. Nick already knows. When he tells Ashton during Christmas barbecue he's not surprised either.

Armie continues to drink himself to sleep at night. On December 27th he nearly drowns in his pool because he decides to float around a bit after downing a bottle of tequila, staring at the stars, thinking of Tim. It's pure coincidence that it's Tim's birthday and all they've managed was a quick phone-call in the early afternoon LA time. Armie had asked for pics with his presents (not the parka, obviously). Tim had said they were at his gran. Tim had said later. Tim had said maybe. Armie had worked his way up from beer to wine to hard liquor (and why shouldn't he finish the bottle, it would be such a waste otherwise?) waiting for snapshots that never came.

Pure coincidence, really.

Luckily, Lily realizes what's happening when she steps outside to have a smoke. She alerts Liz. How the two women (one nine months pregnant, the other just 5'1) manage to drag him from the pool Armie doesn't know. All he remembers later is Liz screaming and punching him, crying so hard that
Lily has to get her inside and take care of her while Armie coughs up water by the poolside, tasting chlorine, tequila and bile.

It's been a while since he felt this shit. He has stopped purging. Because he hopes it will stop Tim from cutting. Instead, he intensified his training to keep in shape, especially with all the alcohol he drinks now on a regular basis. He always loved running and boxing but now it's swimming and weightlifting as well – anything that tires him and quiets his mind, exhausts his body enough to shut down and prevent him from thinking too much.

Maybe he overdoes it a bit. Because it gets increasingly harder to keep his fears and loneliness at bay. So he does more heavy weights. Runs faster. Mile after mile. Until everything hurts and he feels almost high.

On New Years Day, his body snaps. Literally. He'll never forget the sharp pang with which his pectoral muscle tears from the bone. A heavily pregnant Liz first gets him ice, then a bowl to vomit into before calling an ambulance.

It will take at least four month to heal. He's been in talks for a DC movie but now it's called off. He's not sure if it's the injury, the drinking, or the rumors still flying around. No one has called him a fag to his face yet but he's aware that there is talk. And that this talk will probably intensify after Sundance when people will actually have seen their movie, witnessed their chemistry.

His son is born three days before he has to leave for the festival. Due to his arm in a sling he can't even hold him.

He watches their film the first and only time while snowed in at Sundance. By the end of it he's shocked what Luca has captured. He's catapulted back to early summer, the smells of Italy, the tastes of strong coffee and red wine. The taste of Tim, who sits next to him now but smells different, hunching his shoulders, so pale he looks otherworldly.

When the lights come on again there's stunned silence before the audience breaks into standing ovations.

During the Q & A Armie's still kind of dumbstruck, unable to give intelligent answers, blaming his painkillers. Tim looks at him with a strange expression on his face. He forgot the parka Armie had sent him and will surely freeze his ass off during the festival.

Armie doesn't fully comprehend what they've created and where this is going until someone from the audience gets up and says he wishes he'd had a father like Mr Perlman. Their story is truly touching people's lives. Armie quietly agrees. He also wishes he had a dad like Mr Perlman. Or like Luca.

That evening over dinner Tim shows him a tweet from someone saying he went straight home after seeing the movie, coming out to his family. Armie feels tears well up in his eyes and decides to go outside and have a cigarette.

He wishes it was him who'd send that message. But he's just a coward – and perhaps a traitor.

Over the whole run of the festival, they never spend a night together out of fear of getting caught. They just cuddle and hold each other, snogging like teenagers on the couch until one leaves the other's room early. Armie's aware of a subtle shift between them. Being apart for so long has left a mark. It makes Armie seek closeness over intimacy. They have to get accustomed to one another again. For Armie, it would be too much to just fuck each other blind.

Besides, he has his arm in a sling.
But maybe Armie feels also a little shy?

During press junkets, the obvious questions come up and they stick to their strategy.

*How did you built that incredible chemistry?* - It was easy. We fell in love. We love each other so much.

Do we still, though? Armie wants to ask Tim but keeps his mouth shut.

Armie leads in those interviews. Tim follows.

Two days after the screening, Luca informs them that Sony acquired the distribution rights. They are set for something big. Sony believes in it, Luca tells them. It's been a long while since Armie has heard that about a movie he starred in.

When they meet the Sony officials to celebrate one executive tells him that he really admires the openness with which Armie talks about their first rehearsal. Tim blushes next to him. Armie wants to take his hand and squeeze it but doesn't.

“Keep that up. We really want to go new ways promoting this. I know you're both straight but this is not Brokeback Mountain anymore. Men can talk about mutual affection these days. Especially actors. Congrats to the new baby by the way, Armie. Finally, a son and heir for the Hammer clan.”

Evelyn smiles next to him.

He'll tell the story of their ten minute steamy make-out session so often over the coming months that in the end it will ring true even to him. Yet it's the toned down version. The public isn't ready for what really happened. That's just between him and Tim.

After Sundance, it's just endless physiotherapy for Armie. His injury prevents him even from auditioning. With nothing to do, he's bored out of his mind. To lighten the mood, he starts mixing booze with painkillers until Liz puts her foot down. Apparently, he fell asleep with Harper in the bath while cuddling with Ford on his bed.

His daughter could have drowned. He could have smothered his new-born son.

When Liz insists that Nick accompanies him to Berlin to keep an eye on him he can do nothing but agree.

Tim is different in Berlin. More self-assured. He seems to get the hang of it, talking more freely. Yet just before their first big press conference Armie finds him in the gents, fighting for air. He's come down here to calm his own nerves with a small flask of Vodka but seeing Tim almost suffocating while crouching on the tiled floor has Armie forget the drink. He manages to help him up in a sitting position, rubbing soothing circles into his back while Tim touches a black hair tie around his wrist, snaps it with shaky fingers. Around the other arm he still wears his bracelet.

“Hey, Tim, it's okay. We can do this together. Just count to five. Inhale. Count to five. Exhale.” They breathe together until Tim is able to get up again.

“Sorry, I... it hadn't been this bad since...,” Tim trails off, splashing cold water into his face.

“Come on. It'll be fine.” Armie takes his hand and leads him through long corridors until they reach the hall. He doesn't care if anyone notices.

They enter the podium with their hands still almost touching, Tim reaching out behind himself for
Armie to squeeze his hand reassuringly.

There are cuts on Tim's arms the next morning. Armie just gets a glimpse of them at breakfast before Tim pulls the sleeve of his jumper down.

He makes sure to kiss every inch of his body that night, refusing to leave when Tim suggests he sleeps in his own room.

“No. It's okay. It'll be fine.”

It simply has to be.


Timmy stays at Armie's when he shoots Beautiful Boy in Spring.

They'd met once again at SXSW and Armie had insisted that he lives with him when Timmy had told him that they were filming mostly around LA. Maybe it's because the cutting has got worse? He's not hiding it anymore from Armie. But maybe he should?

“And Liz?”

“She'll be in Austin most of the time, taking care of the bakery. Her family lives there so it's easier with Ford.”

Timmy doesn’t ask why Armie isn’t helping with the new baby. Still the arm? Or is something else going on here? Because Armie's face is redder than usual and he almost never sleeps...

His meds, he says.

It's strange, living in Armie's house. Liz's presence is palpable everywhere: the décor, the smells, even the content of the fridge. Armie seems nervous, caged, a guest in his own home.

On his first day there, they flee, driving around. Armie wants to go shopping. They end up at Brentwood Country Mart. It's a nice place.”Best meat in town.” Armie tells him. Timmy laughs. Armie gets him a cap to protect his face against the bright Californian sun because Timmy forgot to take his sunglasses.

They have lots of barbecues with Ashton and Nick but Timmy has to stick to salad. He's already thin but the role of a junkie demands he loses yet more weight. In the end, he resorts to Armie's MO, making use of the supplies he finds in the bathroom. When Armie finds out he yells at him for solid ten minutes before forcing him to drink two protein shakes. It's a struggle to keep them down. Armie strokes his back, his hair, until it's done.

A few days later he has to do a take under a rain machine in nothing but a thin t-shirt. That night back at Armie's he can't stop shaking and shivering, his teeth chattering so hard his jaw hurts. His chest burns as breathing becomes more difficult by the minute. Armie eventually gets him to hospital. He has double pneumonia and suffers from vitamin deficiency and anemia. They keep him in over the weekend.

When Timmy returns to set on Monday, held upright only by heavy doses of antibiotics and painkillers, his director refuses to talk to him. It stays like that for the rest of the shoot. Now an interpreter is conveying Felix's artistic thoughts to Timmy. He's made to do scenes over and over again until he's so exhausted he wants to cry.
He doesn't tell Armie, though. Armie has enough on his plate. His arm is only slowly healing. He had to pass up at least two projects. He's climbing the walls at home and Timmy discovers why Elizabeth preferred to have her parents take care of her newborn and her daughter: Armie drinks.

For real. He's already drunk at breakfast sometimes, pouring Vodka into his coffee when he thinks Timmy isn't looking. It's even worse when Timmy comes back in the evenings. And he hides bottles. Timmy finds his stash all over the house. He's also aware that Armie is still on heavy medication.

When he dares to confront him after Armie's half-way through a bottle of Scotch one evening, popping Vicodin like candy, Armie yells at him: “You're worse than Liz! At least she let me fuck her!”

Because Timmy's too knackered most days when he returns from set to engage in anything even remotely amorous. Up until now Armie had reassured him it doesn't matter. A lie, apparently. Fuck this!

“As if you would get it up, Armie. You're too drunk most times to even find your own dick!”

Armie throws the bottle at him, almost falling out of his armchair.

Tim packs his bags and moves into a hotel.

Armie apologizes two days later by sending him a crate of peaches. It makes Timmy smile. But it doesn't make him reconsider.

Armie calls the next day and tells him he needs his opinion on a script he got.

“Please? It's totally crazy but also fucking cool and I need to talk to someone.” He sounds calm, sober.

Timmy agrees to visit the next evening.

The day is again very demanding. Their director has completely lost track of the story. Timmy tries his best but feels his co-stars have given up. They all just seem to wish this would already be over. Felix yells at everyone in the end, kicking over his chair before storming off. Timmy misses Luca's guidance, his trust. Just thinking of Italy makes his chest ache. Could also be the still lingering pneumonia, though.

That night, Armie stays sober. They read a script by Boots Riley and just a few pages in Timmy is rolling on the floor of Armie's patio, laughing so hard he has to hold his belly not to piss himself, while Armie almost falls out of one of the deckchairs, this time because he's hollering.

“You have to do that.” Timmy tells him later, his head resting against Armie's chest while they smoke a joint, gazing at the stars.

“I have another film after that, it'll film in Toronto in autumn.”

“I'll be in New York by then, working with Woody Allan.”

Timmy had wanted for it to be a surprise but now it's out. Must be the weed. It makes his chest hurt again, but in a good way.

Yet Armie stays quiet for too long. When Timmy looks at him, he asks: “You sure about that?”

“Why not?”
“Well, the rumors...”

“What rumors?”

“Maybe you're too young for that, forget it. That's a fantastic opportunity.” Armie smiles at him, squeezing his shoulder.

“And New York is rather close to Toronto.”

Timmy tells himself to look up those rumors Armie mentioned but then he forgets because of the weed and some rather spectacular make-up sex.

^^^^^^

When Tim returns to New York to prepare for his Woody Allan shoot Armie feels lost again.

More than once, he's tempted to drive downtown, pick up some nice, skinny boy, shag his brains out.

Luckily, he gets offered some voice work for which he repeatedly has to travel to London. After his last recording session he decides on a whim to go to Italy.

He arrives in Crema precisely one year after filming ended. Luca is surprised to see him – Armie didn't even check if he was free – but puts him up for a few days. They talk a lot.

Tim is their main subject.

“He was unhappy at his last set. That director was some psycho.”

“And besides the work?”

Armie shrugs. “It's complicated.”

“And Liz?”

“Sometimes it's difficult, with the baby and all...”

“But are you getting along?”

“Mostly.”

Which is true. The baby offers the perfect excuse for them not to attend too many events together. Their relationship might have ended but to Armie's surprise they are still a good team when it comes to their kids – if Armie stays sober.

After his fight with Tim, Armie now tries to stay off the booze. He hopes that his life will get back into balance once he starts shooting another film.

But when Armie had hoped that returning to Crema would help him to move on and come to terms with his situation, the constant loneliness, the bleak emptiness inside himself, the contrary happens. He feels stuck in syrupy nostalgia. Their Italian summer becomes more and more of a distant dream. The realities of their lives as working actors take their tolls.

Besides, it's still one year to go before they can start to slowly go public. Their film has not even been released. Sometimes it all seems so far away, like another country...
Armie throws himself into his new project. Boots' film is hilarious. He feels a bit like the odd one out on set but covers it up by supplying weed for all. It also helps him sleep at night and cures the pain he still feels in his shoulder. His physiotherapist had said it's too early to return to work, that Armie could do permanent damage to his body, but he doesn't care. If he has to sit at home one day more he'll put a bullet through his brain.

It's not just talk. He owns a gun. He took it out a few times over the past couple months.

For a week during that summer he records the Call Me By Your Name audiobook. It takes him back. The longing grows. He calls Tim and Luca every day, talking about last year, reminiscing their shoot. Luca listens, explains, gives advice. With Tim, it's awkward silence and stammering.

He moves on to Toronto. It's a prestigious, important project and Armie's proud doing it. A week in, pictures emerge of Timmy from the Allan set. He looks... different. Grown up. Where is the boy he fell in love with in Italy?

It's this new Tim who comes visit. The trailer for their film is out by now and the buzz is starting. Armie had hoped they would go unnoticed but apparently a few people recognize them and ask for pictures. Tim seems baffled while Armie deals with it professionally, smiling, shaking hands, hugging strangers.

But it means that again they can't spend the nights together. Someone might see something. It's okay for friends to visit each other on set – but sharing a hotel room would be too much. There's some stolen kisses behind closed doors and some urgent, clumsy fumbling but that's all.

It leaves Armie dissatisfied and hollow. He has the feeling he's losing Tim.

It's getting a little better when they return a few weeks later for TIFF. Tim has finished his film but all he tells Armie about it is that it felt like standing for weeks on end on New York street corners, dressed in tweed, looking melancholic while holding an umbrella.

"Well, the title is Rainy Days In New York..."

"Fuck off!" Tim punches his good shoulder and they end up rolling around on the big double bed in Armie's room, their wrestling quickly evolving into something more. Tim fucks him slowly from behind and Armie repays him later in the shower.

He really needed that to get him through the first press junket. It's all new for Tim, who watches wide-eyed as he becomes aware how many journalists are queuing for a soundbite. He's endearingly awkward at first, nervous, playing with the hair tie again and again in between.

"I admire you." He tells Armie that evening. "You tell the same anecdotes over and over and it doesn't get boring, not even for me. And I was there."

They're lying on Armie's bed, snacking grapes, watching Netflix to come down after a day filled with interviews. Armie ruffles his hair and kisses him. "And I admire you. To watch you doing this, learning, adapting. It's a privilege. You are on the cusp of something big."

Tim snorts. "I really hope so." He says, grabbing Armie's crotch, and that's an even better way to wind down.

The reviews their film gets are studded with superlatives. “Amazing” - “Spectacular” – “Stellar”

They are riding the wave. And it's suddenly easy to enjoy and believe in success with Tim by his side. Maybe it makes Armie a little careless.
Because right before their screening at New York Film Festival, they are told by Brian and their publicists to be more careful. People might talk. The internet is already wagging its tongue. Armie gets so irrationally angry that he drinks everything he finds in his minibar. Maybe that's why he gives the press a good show that evening, hugging Tim from behind, holding him close, sniffing his hair. Even Tim seems a little shocked but Armie doesn't care.

Brian tries to talk to him afterwards but he just walks past him, slamming the door to his room so hard the windowpanes vibrate. Tim doesn't come over that night.

They go to London later in October. Over in Europe Armie feels freer. There are a few incidents when they almost get caught but The Claridge’s is really discreet.

But then Tim kisses him during an interview. That's when Sony steps in. They are told very politely to tone it down. There's already Oscar buzz going. Acting 'too gay' could be seen as queerbaiting, diminishing their chances. Or just make them look plainly gay. Which the Academy doesn't honor, despite Moonlight.

Armie wants to scream but stays quiet. He's still married. He promised Liz two years and has to admit that she's having his back, dealing with the kids, keeping up the facade of the happy family (though he has his suspicions when it comes to her new fitness instructor but who is he to argue?).

So they refrain from touching in public and Armie sneaks out of Tim's room early every morning.

In November they return to New York for the US premiere. Sony insists that Liz attends as well. Apparently, the rumors are getting louder and louder. As more and more people see the movie more and more wonder how a rookie like Tim and box-office poison Armie Hammer could have pulled off such an astounding, unique performance?

And then some start thinking that maybe it wasn't a performance.

It's at that event that Armie meets Cody for the first time. He arrives with Tim and leaves with him.

“We've known each other for ages, Armie, I can't even remember if I met him at school or on a project. He's a very good friend.”

Then why has he never mentioned him?

They plan to spend Thanksgiving together but when Tim has already arrived in LA Liz insistst to attend a family gathering (maybe for the last time as a couple, she tells Armie, so what can he say?). Armie invites Tim as well but he declines.

“I don't think strangling your mother on Thanksgiving would be appropriate.” Tim smiles, all teeth. Armie doesn't understand Tim's fierce hatred for his mother but feels touched nevertheless. So Tim stays behind at their house because there's another award or screening or whatever in a few days anyway. Liz is okay with it.

When they return to LA Armie accepts the offer to do a Broadway play next summer. It's called Straight White Man and he's sure his mother will hate it. It also gets him to New York to work. And New York means Tim. That's enough to silence Armie's fears that he won't be up to it. He's never done theater before. But nothing ventured, nothing gained.

His love for Tim gives him strength, makes him brave. And it might be good to branch out for when the shit will hit the fan.

By the end of November awards season starts and with it the beginning of the end.
It's easier for Timmy to attend functions in New York because some of his friends can come too. It gives him security to know some familiar faces are around. It's mostly Giullian, Will - and Cody. Armie has his own minders so Timmy feels entitled to some of his posse in attendance as well.

He missed Cody. He's done some great music videos over the past years, traveling Europe.

“You should've come to Italy, man.” Timmy grins.

“Nah, that would have been... inappropriate.” Cody smiles.

They had a thing, on and off, a few years past. Nothing serious. Cody never demanded anything.

“So, you and Armie...?”

“Yeah, me and Armie.” Timmy answers. Because it's still him and Armie, right? Right.

Cody nods, smiles again.

They meet at their New York premiere when Armie's drunk as always and Timmy leaves early. Cody joins him and they spend the rest of the night at Timmy's place, playing XBox.

Timmy wins at the Gotham Awards and can't believe it. Then he's nominated for a Golden Globe. As is Armie. And their movie. He's so happy and excited he cries during the whole call to his sister.

“Timmy, calm down.”

He gets invited to things now. For example to a Knicks game. He brings Cody as his plus one. He's giddy with excitement and so they slide into the gents afterwards to snog a little. No big deal. They did that before. But next day there appears a blind item about them. Things are changing fast.

With his rising fame he feels the pressure mount. Mid-December he's alone in the flat when a panic attack hits. He's been flying back and forth from California to New York for weeks now. He's exhausted. He doesn't sleep enough, doesn't eat enough, drinks too much and smokes too much.

It's triggered by a comment he reads about himself and the Woody Allan movie he did. The shooting experience had been way better compared to Beautiful Boy. Allan truly knew what he wanted. But sometimes it had been so boring Timmy might have cried. And he never really connected with Selena. Though meeting her friends had been kinda surreal fun.

But now he's suddenly tarred and feathered for doing his job – acting. He hadn't known about the accusations. No one has told him. Well, Armie had tried but then Timmy forgot. He's not sure what he'd done even if he had known. It was a job, a role, a great director. And Timmy's just an aspiring actor. He needs to work.

Well, now it's apparently too late for regret or justifications. People are starting to spit vitriol. He makes the mistake to go online.

He's told to kill himself.

People want him castrated.

People wish he catches AIDS.

Apparently, he's ugly, his eyebrows are a joke, he's too thin, a freak, on meth, on heroin, fucking
Selena, fucking Saoirse.

They call him a Jewish fag without an ounce of talent who should be gassed.

Timmy closes the tabs but he can’t unsee that. He also can't breathe. It's only luck he finds a bag and curls up on the bathroom floor. Later, when he can sit up again, he cuts both his arms and legs open with Will's razor blade (Fuck you, Will, why can’t you shave electric?).

When he calls Armie he's busy with the kids. He promises to call back later but never does.

Next day Timmy moves back into his old room at his parent's flat. He needs to be close to people who know him and don't see the rising star in him. Who love him and take care of him.

Armie eventually calls on his birthday. He's in the Cayman's with his family. It might be their last holiday together and he wanted to show his kids the place he grew up. Timmy understands. But he hates it nonetheless.

“Next year it’ll be just us two, here, baby.” Armie says.

But instead about their future together they end up talking about Allan, #Me too and Weinstein. Armie's Indian movie has been shelved. Timmy's looks like meeting the same fate.

“What do you want to do about it?” Armie asks.

“I've read up on those stories... That whole family seems fucked up but... god, I really don't want to profit from it. I want to donate the money. It's the least I can do.” They decide on charities helping sexual assault victims and gay teens. The last one is Timmy's idea.

He celebrates the night with Will, Giullian, Cody and a bunch of girls from LaGuardia. Cody takes him home in the early hours and Timmy's drunk enough to ponder kissing him again. No harm in that. It's just nice. He's sure Cody would say yes if he asked. But then he falls asleep on his couch and that is that.

In January, it starts to get really crazy. He does his first Late Night TV shows. He feels uncomfortable but apparently the viewers love him. They call him an awkward noodle. Timmy locks himself inside his parent’s bathroom while they watch. His mum hugs him afterwards and his dad offers him a glass of the good Cognac.

The Allan mudslinging has the rumor mill in full flow. Some get dangerously close to the truth. Sony calls a meeting.

It's decided that Liz will attend all public events from now on together with Armie. Timmy is urged to get some female company too.

“A beard.” Brian offers.

Timmy decides on his mom or sister. That's as far as he'll go with self-denial.

He now has appearances scheduled almost every day. It's ridiculous. When Armie is snowed in in New York just before the Golden Globes, Timmy isn't even in town to meet him but in Yonkers, shooting for GQ, almost freezing to death. The pics are worth it, though.

They don't win anything at the Globes and Timmy is disappointed. Both for himself and Armie.

Armie gets so drunk that night he doesn't make it to bed and ends up sleeping on the bathroom floor.
Timmy calls Cody and they talk till morning while Timmy makes sure Armie doesn't choke on his own vomit. When he hears Liz get up with the kids he helps her make breakfast, changes Ford, cuts Harper's toast into small bits. They work in silence but it's not loaded. It's just the way it is now.

He starts to mix up the awards shows and red carpets he has to attend. Armie's getting tired and antsy, dragging along, watching Timmy win. But there's no joy in his eyes anymore.

It becomes more and more apparent during their European promo tour. Liz is initially not coming with them because of the kids. Timmy's not sure if he's happy about it.

But Armie insists they take the opportunity of being finally alone together and make out in the rest room of the first class waiting lounge at LAX. Grinding against him, Armie sucks Timmy's neck until he comes right into his sweat pants before dropping to his knees, his mouth preventing Armie from the same fate.

They giggle as they clean up superficially before boarding. Timmy wears his neck pillow to hide the hickey.

This moment turns out to be the best of the whole trip. As they are mid-flight, the Oscar nominations are announced. Best movie, best adapted screenplay for James, best song for Sufjan and best actor for Timmy– but nothing for Armie.

“Fuck!” Timmy exclaims. “Are they blind? This is so unfair.”

“It doesn't matter.” Armie says, ordering a Scotch. He keeps them coming. He barely manages to change flights in London. When they arrive in Rome in the morning, Timmy and Luca literally have to carry him into the waiting car.

They meet with Sony officials in the afternoon to plan their future campaign. It's there that they learn that Sony has championed both Michael and Armie for a supporting actor's nom – resulting in neither of them being considered.

When Armie hears that he storms off. Timmy goes after him.

“You know what I sacrificed for this movie?! Those bloody fuckers!”

“I know that, yes.” Timmy feels just tired. And hurt. So Armie feels he sacrificed his marriage? Nice. Watching Armie drown in self-pity isn't Timmy’s favorite pastime. Yet it seems he's increasingly forced to do so.

“The fucking academy-”

“Maybe you should have kept your mouth shut?” Timmy bites out. Armie has given some controversial interviews lately.

“Don't tell me what to do, darling. You only escaped the mob by a hairs breadth with the Allan movie.” Armie goes straight for the mini-bar.

“Please, don't do that.” Timmy tries to stop him. He knows how the evening will end otherwise.

“Fuck off, Tim.”

“Armie... please. It's getting out of hand! Just stop for a day or two.”

“Why?” Armie shrugs, downing the fist small bottle of Vodka.
“Because I need you. Because I'm terrified. This is all new for me. You already have a name but I have nothing.”

“And nothing to lose.”

“That's not true.”

“It is.”

“What, then?”

“You.”

Armie just laughs, ugly and a little mean. “Nice try, boy. Did Sony send you or is this just about your chances at the Oscars and your career, hm?”

Now Timmy storms off, slamming the door so hard it even makes himself jump.

In the end Luca calls Liz, who flies in the next day and stays with them during the whole tour, reigning Armie in. He's mostly drunk, high or both, not talking for hours before trying to apologize to Timmy, teary-eyed and maudlin.

It's getting boring.

In Paris, Timmy has enough. He realizes that Armie stares at him more and more inappropriately during interviews and he doesn't like it anymore. He goes out with Pauline and her friend, locks his hotel room at night. Armie tries once or twice and then keeps away.

He starts wearing track suits.

In London, Timmy meets Cody for an afternoon, who's in England to shoot a short film. They walk through Hide Park, almost freezing their fingers off. But Timmy doesn't mind because he can talk to someone who listens to him. They end up at the National Portrait Gallery, wandering the rooms. Timmy feels a little better afterwards.

When they arrive in Crema, it's in the middle of winter. It's cold, foggy. The magic of summer is gone. To make matters worse, Liz posts an IG-story in which Armie boosts siring Ford at the apartment he fucked Timmy so many nights during their stay. In which he told Timmy he loved him.

Timmy wants to vomit. He wants to hurt himself. But then he picks up a beautiful young stranger at the street party and let's him fuck him all night. They part in the morning. Timmy never learns his name.

Armie leaves while Timmy stays on at Luca's for a few days. They don't even say good-bye.

Luca looks at him from time to time as Timmy mopes about his house.

“Call him.” He says one evening. Timmy shakes his head and curls up on the sofa, staring at the abstract painting on the wall opposite.

Armie's the one to break the silence after a couple weeks. He calls Timmy when he's just landed in New York after another few days of promotion in LA during which they met but did barely speak.

“Hey.”

There's music in the background, loud voices.
“What do you want?”
“I miss you.” Armie whispers, almost inaudible over the noise.
“You just saw me.”
“Not like that. I mean-”
“Ha!” Timmy lays all the sarcasm he feels in this one syllable.
“Where are you?”
“JFK, I just arrived.”
“I'm downtown. Can you come?”
Timmy hesitates. “Is Liz with you?”
“Yes, she's here. But you know her at parties, she's... networking.” Armie sounds bored and a little drunk.

Timmy doesn't want to go but goes anyway. He simply can't say no to Armie. When Armie pats the seat next to himself Timmy sinks down as if drawn to him by some magnetic force.

Twenty minutes later Armie fucks him in the gents, hard and fast. It hurts.

Everything hurts.

Armie leaves with Liz. Paparazzi snap some pictures with the three of them. Timmy feels hollow, empty, not even sad or third-wheeling anymore, just numb and forlorn. Armie's cum still leaks out of him as the happy couple poses for the cameras. They all grin. Timmy's glad he smoked a spliff with Armie on the terrace.

He's sick a few blocks down, vomiting into the grimy February snow. Yet when he arrives at his parents around three am he's restless. To come down he smokes another joint and calls Cody. They talk till Timmy eventually falls asleep in his old bedroom, Kid Cudi posters still decorating the walls.

He's glad when he can fly to London. The Baftas provide a much needed break. Timmy goes alone.

In defiance of Sony's order he takes Stephane with him. He's in London anyway, working on a movie. No one bats an eyelid, the press stays quiet and Timmy gets his hopes up.

Armie calls him late that night, hurt and angry, demanding to know what's going on.

“He's a friend.” Timmy assures him.

“Don't give me shit, Tim. It wouldn't be the first time you-” Timmy presses disconnect, switches his phone off and drinks everything from the mini-bar until he vomits into the bathtub.

Armie hates awards season but this year it's apocalyptic. Everyone seems to want a piece of Tim. All he can do to dampen his jealousy is to resort to drink. The disappointment at the Globes, the missed Oscar nom and eventually Tim attending the Baftas with a beautiful young 'friend' are just too much for him to handle. Add to that mix Liz constantly by his side and it's just a question of when, not if he
goes off and breaks.

He's surprised it takes until the Independent Spirits Awards, the day before the Oscars. Liz has been making a fuzz over it for the whole week, even calling their lawyer as some impostor tried to steal her invitation. Armie had just laughed it off. It hadn't helped to calm Liz down.

She's been criticizing him for days now, nagging, pointing out the weight he's gained, his ill-fitting suit. “You'll simply look old and wasted next to Timothy.”

In the end, Armie locks himself in the bathroom on Thursday night. But he's out of practice. So he overdoses. Luckily, Liz finds him and calls an ambulance. He's dehydrated and shows signs of cardiac arrhythmia. The paramedics want to get him to hospital for monitoring. But he refuses. He has to attend the Oscars. With Tim.

So he settles for IVs and hopes to get back on track.

Tim calls via FaceTime from his way to the awards.

“Fuck, man, you look like shit.” They have barely spoken since London.

“I love you too, babe.”

“Fuck, Armie, this isn't funny.”

“I'm not laughing.”

He can see Tim fidgeting, snapping his hair tie. He looks very young in his oversized white shirt.

“I need you tonight.” He whispers, eyes wide, touching his throat.

“I can't. I promise to be there tomorrow.”

Silence. Tim looks up from his phone, then back down.

“What happened?”

Armie thinks about lying but feels too drained. “I relapsed. It was the first time since Crema, I swear. It's all a bit much, right now.”

Tim bites his lip, frowns, shakes his head. “Shit, Armie. Do you have any idea...? I'm so... lost-”

“We can facetime during the awards.” Armie feels weak but understands that Tim needs him.

They do facetime, much to the delight of the internet.

Luckily, Armie manages to get up the next day. He still feels shaky but he pulls himself together. And it's worth it.

Tim looks angelic at the Oscars, in all white, the most beautiful person on the whole red carpet. Armie is still on heavy medication but his dazed state might actually be a good thing. Otherwise he won't be able to control himself and drag Tim into the nearest broom cupboard.

Liz is nervous. She frantically wants to make the most of this night as it might be her last chance to attend such a high-profile event as his wife. And as is always the case with her, she overdoses it. She's short of pushing Tim to the side, inserting herself between him and Armie as some kind of wedge. Armie had thought she did come to terms with Tim's presence in his life but tonight she stares
Tim has brought his mum. Armie likes her, even though she gives him a stern look. They've only met once before, at an award in New York. She welcomed him, friendly and open, but Armie got the distinct impression that she didn't trust him. He desperately wants to reassure her that he'll take good care of her precious son.

Armie and Liz are seated behind Tim and his mum. During a break, Nicole suddenly turns and talks quietly to Liz, leaving his wife deep in thought. Armie stares at Tim's nape and wants nothing more than to suck bruises all over his pale, milky skin.

Tim doesn't win – again, but it doesn't matter anymore. He's the most photographed person that evening. Everyone wants his or her picture taken with the radiant, ethereal newcomer. Armie keeps in the background.

He wants to go home after the ceremony but Liz insists on attending a few parties to mingle. Armie sticks to water and tries his best not to collapse.

They eventually meet at Madonna's party. Tim seems to be outright fleeing the attention of two middle-aged A-listers as he bumps into Armie who's been leaning against the wall behind a large palm tree, hoping for some peace and quiet.

“Hey.” Tim greets him, raking his hand through his hair, smiling sheepishly. He looks absolutely beautiful. His bow tie is gone but apart from that his white suit is still immaculate.

“Hey, gorgeous. How are you?”

“I think these two just offered me a threesome.” He tilts his head back towards the two women sipping daiquiris, sounding genuinely shocked.

“Welcome to Hollywood.” Armie laughs and then winces because it makes his head hurt. He has to grab the wall to steady himself.

“Let’s go.” Timmy sighs.

“But it's your night.”

“And I rather want to spend it with you than with all these... strangers.” Tim smiles.

Armie's heart flutters in his chest and he hopes it's not his arrhythmia.

They can't leave together but Armie knows at which hotel Tim is staying as they did an interview there earlier this week.

They are both too tired to do much that night. They just fall into bed in their underwear, Tim spooning Armie. It feels good. Safe. Next day they have breakfast together on the balcony before slowly making love the whole morning, Tim riding Armie like he used to do in Crema almost two years ago.

It's nearly over. They fulfilled their agreement. Now they can indulge a little.

“I'm starting to shoot a movie in a few weeks in New Orleans. But before that, I get an award in Austin and I really want you there, Tim.”

“Okay.” Tim smiles and kisses him.
“And then we can talk about the summer and New York.”

Tim smiles even more and kisses him again.

When Timmy arrives in Austin he's nervous. Not just because he will meet Armie's family – but because of the news he brings.

They get to hang out in a park together and shop for clothes, getting matching shirts before he delivers the most heart-felt and embarrassing speech of his entire life in front of a bunch of hostile or at least indifferent strangers, praising Armie until his voice breaks. If anyone has any doubts left what he feels for this man they must be blind and deaf.

He can't hide anymore. He feels like bursting.

Armie has already revealed during his press conference that the Asian promo tour has been canceled. After the Oscars, Sony doesn't see the need for it. It's fine with Timmy. They are both exhausted and need to recharge.

Armie will start filming in New Orleans soon. And Timmy has just been told that he has to leave for Europe earlier to prep for a new role. He'd hoped to be able to spend some time with Armie in New York in May or June but apparently he needs to train riding and sword fighting and attend elocution class. He's not sure Armie will be pleased by that. It sounded like he made plans for their summer together in New York. It would have been an ideal time to announce the split.

Liz is holding court at the family table when Timmy walks up to them for the gala dinner. It's Armie who introduces him to his mother.

When Timmy hugs her he can’t stop himself from whispering into her ear: “Hi Dru, I'm the Jewish boy who's been fucking your son for about two years now. And he likes it.”

He has to give her credit for keeping her composure, the only sign she heard him being a low gasp she utters. But she doesn't talk to him or Armie the whole evening, not even shaking her son's hand as they leave.

Armie comes over to his hotel room later.

“What did you tell my mother?”


“You just outed me to my mother?”

“Sorry, I thought she knew by now. Or at least she should, don't you think?”

“Our family lawyer called me ten minutes ago. Apparently, he needs to talk to me. It's my mother who controls the Hammer money, didn't you know? She somehow got my grandfather to grant her proxy and here we are.”

“I didn't know that.” Timmy suddenly feels stupid. Did he really have to act that juvenile?

“Nevermind. I'll be disinherited anyway the day she learns I'm leaving Liz – or, more specifically, why.” Armie looks at him unwavering.

“Yeah, about that... did you two make any concrete plans for that? What does your lawyer say?”
Timmy snaps his hair tie again.

“We thought maybe after the play is over. I wanted to talk to you about that anyway-”

“Yeah, me too. I'm leaving end of March for England. I won't return before September. Sorry.”


“Yeah, fuck. They need me to learn the accent, sword fighting...”

“I thought you told them you could do that already?”

“Yeah, but somehow they saw through me.” Timmy grins sheepishly.

Armie shakes his head, smiles, but it's tinged with sadness. “At least we both have work.” He sighs.

Timmy hugs him. “I'm really sorry. I wanted to show you my city.”

“Later.” Armie whispers in his hair.

At least they spend a dirty weekend away from it all in Mexico before Armie moves to New Orleans and Timmy goes to London.

It's lonely there. He goes riding, trains, practices his accent – but he has no friends here. Stephane comes over for a weekend, as does Pauline. Brian sends his assistant over to discuss Armie.

Apparently, Armie's two films are hot for awards season. Sorry To Bother You is hilarious and On The Basis Of Sex performed promising at early screenings – as did Beautiful Boy. Now everyone fears that them coming out might ruin their chances of winning anything, aka making money for their movies.

It's the same old song from two years ago.

“So, what you're saying is that we can only be openly together if we're making shitty movies? That we can't be honest and successful? ” Timmy is fed up.

“Just give it a little more time. Get more established.”

He talks it over with Armie. He's adamant that he and Liz will split up after the summer. It feels good. And yet… Timmy is worried. He has been offered interesting projects. He wants them. Badly. But will his fledgling career survive such a scandal? Is it a scandal?

“That doesn't mean we have to declare... anything, Tim.”

“Don't you want me anymore?” He sounds small, hurt. Why does this have to be so complicated? They are just two men in love.

“It's not that but... it's been a long time hiding. We both did shitty things. With me it's the booze and you... do you think I don't know about that boy in Crema. Maybe there were others... I'm not blaming you, you're young and gorgeous and I'm never there... but that won't really change, would it? We'll always be apart for many months a year, working...”

“What are you saying?”

“Maybe we need a break? Maybe you need a break?”
“A break from what? I'm already barely seeing you.”

“See, that's what I mean.”

“So we're breaking up?” Timmy feels dizzy.

“I don't know, are we?”

Timmy hangs up, stares at the blank wall of his blank London apartment. He desperately wants to cut himself but with all the riding and fighting he doesn't know where. He can't even cry.

The next weekend Timmy goes to Coachella. It had been arranged sometime last year and he had hoped Armie could come too. But he has to film. So Brian sets him up with Selena's ex, whom he'd met during filming the Allan movie. He's not particularly keen on his music but it's Coachella, they chill, hang out and get high. It's okay.

Is it coincidence that it's also the day they started shooting Call Me By Your Name two years back? Timmy posts an IG story, playing some of Sufjan's songs in the background. He hopes Armie will see it and understand that he thinks of him – of them. That he remembers everything.

Armie calls him late that night when he's at a gig, already wasted.

“Sorry, man, I can't hear you...!!!???”

“Tim, are you okay?”

“What? What! Yeah…”

“Jesus, I love you! I didn't forget-”

“What? Man, I can't… let's talk later. Love you.”

The line goes dead. Timmy sleeps at Abel's that night. The house feels strangely empty, too grand. When he leaves the next morning there are barely dressed young girls lying on the couches next to magnum champagne bottles. This is just not his kind of lifestyle.

He meets Abel again in Cannes where he negotiates a few new projects a couple weeks later. They smoke a few and he ends up losing the cap Armie bought him when he stayed with him last year.

He's so high he doesn't say no when a blond boy is suddenly all over him, sticking his tongue down his throat (or is it the other way around? Timmy isn’t sure.). Someone tweets about it. Thank god, Brian is quick enough to produce a girl who's willing to be his cyber-beard. He's just not ready right now to come out. He doesn't even see the need for it. It's nobody's business whom he fucks.

Except Armie's.

And Armie's not amused.

“Again, Tim?”

“Sorry, I was high and bored.”

“Seems to be your default setting lately.”

Timmy could say so much but swallows it. “I miss you.”
“I miss you too but I don't go around hooking up with random guys.”

Don't you, Timmy wonders? Aloud he says: “It meant nothing.”

“It means something to me.”

Armie sounds hurt. Timmy can't deal with it. He's glad when filming starts and he finally has something to do.

When Armie moves to New York they facetime regularly. Which means daily. Timmy senses that Armie's nervous about the play. He says it's hard. It's totally different from film work. He looks tired. Armie tells him he's lonely, which is never a good thing. Liz visits during previews but doesn't attend the premiere.

Timmy receives a parcel as he’s just about to leave for Hungary. A new cap. ‘I heard you lost the other one. Take care, babe.’

Timmy wears it on the flight. It helps counter his aerophobia.

The reviews for Straight White Men are really good. Timmy is so happy for Armie! The WiFi is patchy in the Hungarian countryside but he still manages to catch up with Armie.

*I'm so proud of you.’ He texts.

He returns to New York shortly before the derniere but sadly misses Armie's birthday. To make up for it they go out after Timmy attends one of the last performances, celebrating, dancing.

They kiss in the middle of the dancefloor at Therapy, around the corner where Timmy grew up, and it feels like coming full circle.

Armie wakes up the next day, hung-over but happy. Tim just grunts when he nudges him. He's sprawled over him, drooling on his chest.

“Hey, love! Jesus, Tim, I need to piss.”

Tim just hugs him tighter.

“Don't care. Don't move.”

“We can discuss you fetishes later, okay. We have a lifetime ahead of us for that. But right now, let me get up.”

Tim giggles as he rolls over. Armie hears him following him into the bathroom.

“This is just a little weird.”

“Get used to it.” Tim hugs him from behind as he pisses into the toilet. “I'm not letting you go.”

It's taken them so long. Armie doesn't really mind. Especially as Tim makes coffee afterwards, real Italian espresso.

“So?” Tim asks, munching on a slice of toast.

“What?”
“Will you stay?” Tim is toying with the bracelet he's still wearing.

“Will you stay?”

Tim shrugs. “I have to go to TIFF on the weekend. Next, I'll be in Boston in two weeks, shooting with Greta. After that it's directly to Spain and Morocco to film Dune way into the new year…”

“That’s not really what I meant.”

“Me neither.”

They gaze at each other until Armie grins. “Give me my phone.”

“Get it yourself, I'm not your maid.”

“You could at least do something for me.”

“I made coffee.”

They lie in bed later, naked, when Armie finally gets hold of his phone. He's propped up against Tim's chest, who looks over his shoulder as he types. He can still feel Tim's cum leak out of him.

'It is with great regret that I want to inform all of my fans and foes that my marriage to the beautiful Elizabeth Chambers has ended. Believe me, we tried, but there are things happening in peoples lives you can neither foresee nor control. We'll stay friends and I love her dearly but that's just not enough to keep going. We've both outgrown our relationship but it graced us with two beautiful children we will take care of. Peace and love.'

He posts it on his IG, then turns his phone off.

“You talked about that?” Tim asks.

“Yes, with Liz and with Evelyn.”

“But not with your mum?”

Armie shakes his head. “She doesn't matter.”

Tim's phone starts to ring.

“I didn't even mention you.” Armie chuckles.

Tim leans over to switch his phone off as well.

“You didn't have to.” He grins before kissing Armie, eager and open-mouthed.

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Hollywood Reporter, 25th February 2019

In the long and colorful history of the Academy Awards, this was a first: two nominees in the Best Supporting Actor category walking down the red carpet side by side – holding hands!

No other than Ken-doll hunk Armie Hammer, previously married to TV personality Elizabeth Chambers, with whom he has two kids, and maverick Timothée Chalamet turned up at the 91st
Academy Awards ceremony together, as each other's plus one. Both were nominated for an award in the same category: Hammer for 'On The Basis Of Sex', Chalamet for 'Beautiful Boy'.

What a nightmare for the seating plan.

There have been rumors floating around since both actors filmed the much acclaimed 'Call Me By Your Name' in 2016, for which Chalamet was nominated as Best Actor last year, missing out against Gary Oldman. Those rumors were fueled by Hammer announcing the split from his wife for eight years late last summer. But not until now did the two actors acknowledged their relationship.

Which got evident last night as Hammer won his first Oscar, thanking Chalamet in his speech for encouraging him to take risks – both on and off screen – ending it with a line from the book they filmed together: 'Perhaps we were friends first and lovers second. But then perhaps that's what lovers are.'

This (new) love might also explain their choice of roles lately: Hammer will star next in the Off-Broadway premiere of 'Homos, or Everyone in America' by Jordan Seavey, while Chalamet will return to the stage in 'The Inheritance' at its Broadway premiere in June this year.

Neither actor was available for a statement but both were reported looking quite smitten at the Governor's Ball they attended together.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, two more chapters to come. The next is set roughly ten years after this one. If you want the boys to be together, for better or worse, you can exit here and dream up a happy future for them.

Thank you for reading. I love you! Peace and love!
Epilogue II - You Just Keep Me Hanging On

Chapter Summary

This is set roughly ten years later...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Harper Grace Hammer!” Armie thunders.

“It's just blue. You had blue hair yourself, dad. Tim showed me the picture.”

Tim grins into his Chocolate Pops. Armie hates him even more for being able to eat this shit at his age and still stay thin as a willow.

“That was different! And I didn't tear my clothes, dye them black, shave half my hair off, pierce my ears and nose... What's next, a tattoo?”

Hops just throws her hands up while Tim chokes on his cereal, obviously suppressing a giggle.

“Oh no, you didn't. How the hell...?”

“Tim went with me. He allowed it.”

Tim puts his bowl down, wipes chocolate milk from his chin with the back of his hand. “We talked about it before. The place looked clean. And it's just a very small tattoo.”

If he’s trying to calm Armie down with this reassurance he’s failing spectacularly.

“You talked about it with Tim? Why not with me? I'm your father!”

“Because you would've said no!” His daughter shouts, throwing herself back onto a kitchen chair, crossing her arms over her chest.

(Of course I would've said no. You're fifteen, Harper. Fifteen!”

He looks his daughter up and down and wonders what happened to his little girl. No more frilly dresses for this young lady. The teenager opposite him wears black denim shorts even tinier than the ones Armie wore in Italy over ten years ago, combined with black fishnet stockings. Her black crop top barely covers her breasts. God, his little girl has breasts! He doesn't want to think about it!

He asks himself where on earth she might hide a tattoo he hasn't discovered yet when she runs around clad virtually like some Gothic stripper but then decides he doesn't really want to know.

Her clothes are one thing but her earrings, nose and eyebrow piercings are quite another. And her hair! What's left of it is dyed bright blue this morning.

“For god’s sake, at least put a jacket on. And maybe a cap or something to cover that… smurf mop.”

“Jesus Christ, you're worse than mum!” Harper pouts. She knows his weak spots well.
That hurt.

Armie gets up from the breakfast table, walks over to the counter and pours himself another coffee in a helpless attempt not to rise to the bait. Behind his back the kitchen is eerily silent.

Armie takes a deep breath, sets his mug down, counts to ten. Still feels angry. Stares at the black coffee stains on the worktop. They might ruin the oak. Why is Tim such a slob? Can’t he clean up after himself like an adult? Why is it always Armie's job? It’s not that hard to take a damp cloth and wipe that fucking counter after brewing one of his fancy espressos.

He rubs his neck. His head starts pounding.

God, the girl drives him nuts sometimes.

“Harper, I think you should say sorry to your dad and then hurry for school.” Tim's voice is full of warmth and kind understanding.

‘Ha, good luck with that!’ If his daughter’s having a strop she’s really stroppy.

But after a moment Armie hears to his utter surprise. “Sorry, dad.” It still sounds somewhat petulant but it's a huge step nonetheless.

He turns around. Wants to tell her that he loves her. That she's the most precious person in his life – well, apart from Tim and Ford – that he knows it's just blue hair and not really worth fighting over but the stern parent in him wins: “We'll talk about this later.”

God, he sounds like his own father sometimes. He hates himself in moments like this. No wonder his daughter sometimes hates him too. Good for her, she's right hating obnoxious middle-aged white men. Kick ass, darling, Armie wants to tell her, don't take shit from no one, not even from me, but his tongue is tied. It's hard to break free and shake off habits deeply ingrained.

Harper shrugs but gives him a quick kiss nonetheless, so they might be good. He gets a whiff of her perfume before she pecks Tim on the cheek as well, throws her backpack over one shoulder and hurries out the door – without either jacket or cap.

Harper attends LaGuardia like Tim did. She studies music. Armie is tremendously proud of her.

She's been living with them for two years now. It had been a rainy afternoon in March when Armie got that fateful phonecall. He’d been working in London for some years then, doing theater after his film career in the US had dried up – possibly due to his relationship with Tim, which they neither hid nor advertised but which wasn't a secret in the industry.

It was Cedars-Sinai Hospital, informing him that his daughter had been admitted to ER, apparently drunk and under the influence of barbiturates. She'd been found wandering in the middle of Hollywood Boulevard at two in the morning, shouting obscenities, wearing only a t-shirt and Doc Martens.

As they couldn’t reach her mother they contacted him.

Armie canceled his next performances and took the earliest flight to LA.

Liz was in the middle of planning her third wedding, surveying hotels in Las Vegas. She simply couldn't cope with Harper anymore, she confessed over the phone, and called their daughter among other things obstinate, ungrateful, manipulative and attention-seeking.
Armie bit his tongue not to ask where Harper could possibly got that attitude from. They now had other problems than their petty war of the roses.

He and Liz had barely spoken after the divorce. The kids had stayed with her in LA, but visited him in New York during holidays if he wasn't filming. Which he'd done less and less.

It had been difficult at first but they'd managed somehow.

Then the contact withered when he'd moved to London. Armie had always loved England, since school in the Caymans. When the offer came to bring *Straight White Men* to the Westend he didn’t hesitate. Tim had been okay with it. He was regularly filming both in the US and in Europe anyway.

Apparently, Tim's career was thriving, though he stuck to indie films, doing more and more ambitious projects that brought him high critical acclaim but earned almost no money. As if he'd ever cared.

Some of the more experimental films Armie didn't really understand (for example, the one where Tim played an entomologist in a Carpathian forest, cataloging beetles for two hours without saying a word, slowly going mad until he thought he was a bug as well and rammed a wooden peg through his sternum. 'Kafka', Tim explained, but Armie still didn't get it. All he knew was that Tim had been exhausted after shooting, wiry thin, suffering from a vicious rash because he'd been allergic to some plants on location in Romania). But as long as those projects kept Tim happy and curious everything was fine. He just worked with the directors he really wanted to. After winning his second Oscar he could afford to be picky.

As it happened, Armie was offered a part in *Follies* in London after *Straight White Men* ended, gaining him rave reviews. And so he stayed. One season became five. The kids visited during summer and he came over for Christmas after celebrating Hanukkah with Tim if possible. He lived in a terraced house in Islington, drank tea and started to write street food recs on his Instagram.

He still did that, now for *The New Yorker*, where he had a weekly column.

Because after what had happened to Harper, he couldn't go back to the UK. He had to take care of her. The three of them now lived in the small apartment Tim had bought a few years back in the West Village.

And as much as Armie is annoyed with his teenage daughter sometimes, their relationship is still way better than with Ford.

Armie had never felt close to the boy. He tried but maybe it was doomed from the beginning, the circumstances of his conception and everything surrounding it standing in the way?

Maybe he'd worked too much when his son had been small?

Maybe he simply hadn’t wanted him?

It is sad, he has to admit it, but somehow they interact like polite strangers. He offered Ford to live with him in New York as well but the boy refused. He didn’t visit for the last three school holidays and Armie had to try a few times to get hold of him for his birthday before he eventually answered his calls.

Armie’s really sorry that they are kind of estranged - but maybe that's the price he has to pay for being with Tim?

Tim.
Still. And always. Forever Tim.

They aren't married. Armie doesn't believe in marriage anymore. He still bears the scars on his ring finger where his tattoo has been. Besides, Tim means so much more to him than an administrative act. As for his faith in god, he lost that a while ago.

His mother hasn't spoken to him in almost ten years, not after a teary phone call in which she'd asked him if it was true that he'd decided to leave his beautiful wife to live in sin. His last words to her had been: “I'm with Tim. I love him. There’s no sin in that love.” Her last words to him had been that he'll burn in hell and she wouldn’t even pray for his soul anymore.

So a religious ceremony is out if the question.

Tim doesn't seem to mind. He never spoke of marriage or a civil union, though they had a few documents drawn up after Harper moved in with them, regarding her guardianship and Tim's legal standing.

Tim seems content with the situation. Armie knows he saw a therapist after they officially got together. The two years before in hiding had nearly broken him. On bad days, Armie’s still not over feeling guilty for the things he’d demanded from Tim during those months.

He tried to make up for it, though. They talked a lot during their first year. They really had to get to know each other all over, learning the other’s little quirks and strange habits. It wasn’t always easy but so worth it. Armie’s never been happier.

And now it'll be ten years in September.

Tim is still beautiful. No, cut that, he's even more beautiful than when they met. The years have given him a calm serenity; his success has made him self-assured. He's not the awkward boy anymore Armie met in Italy, but a thoughtful, gentle, polite, intelligent man. Despite being almost ten years younger he's often the mature one in their relationship.

Now Armie watches the love of his life sit at the breakfast table, drinking coffee, looking mildly annoyed and a little amused.

“What?” Armie asks.

“Nothing.” Tim turns his mug in his long, elegant hands.

“Oh, come on… I know you’ve something to say. Spit it out.” Armie tilts his head to the side and waits.

Tim sighs, puts his mug down. “It's just hair, Armie. It grows back.”

“Yeah, I know, a phase.” Armie rakes a hand through his hair before he sits down. “But she came to you for the tattoo.”

“I saw it as a token of her trust. You know it hasn't been exactly easy between her and me.” That’s the understatement of the century. When Harper initially learned that she would be living with her dad and his boyfriend she threw an epic fit. Apparently, she'd been blaming Tim for stealing her father from her life since she’d been a little girl. It took time and many late-night talks to explain to her that this hadn't been the case. Armie still doesn’t know if Liz planted that thought in his daughter’s mind or if she came up with it all by herself.

After the incident with Harper, however, his and Liz's strained relationship had slowly gotten better.
They can talk now without starting to scream or blaming each other. Liz is quite happy with husband number three, an art dealer.

But back in the early days, Harper outright refused to speak to Tim. On good days, she ignored him. On bad days, she yelled, banged doors, and called Tim some really ugly names until Armie started to yell back, ending in more door banging and tears. On really bad days Harper said nothing at all and locked herself in her room.

They had feared it might get even worse when Armie would have to leave for work. He’d landed a role with a Netflix series, forcing him to film in Toronto two weeks a month for half a year. He’d been so anxious to go he’d almost canceled, despite needing the part, both for their financial security and his sanity.

They discussed it back and forth until Tim reassured him that he would manage. And, miraculously, when Armie came back from his first stint Timmy and Hops were inseparable, hand in glove. When he asked how, why, Tim only shrugged. “We went for Pizza. To the movies.” He smiled and Armie kissed him. “We talked. It's fine now.”

Armie trusts him. But now he wonders what's the price he has to pay. Is Tim cutting him out when it comes to his daughter's affection?

“Is it... something tasteful? The tattoo, I mean.” Armie asks apprehensively.

Tim grins. “It's her last name in Cyrillic letters on the inside of her upper arm.”

Armie melts a little. That's his girl!

“You shouldn't have said yes nonetheless.” But he's not really angry anymore.

Tim blows on his coffee. “Maybe you should reprimand me?” He looks up at Armie from under his dark lashes and Armie suddenly feels heat pool in his belly – no, not his belly, a little lower.

He leans forward, takes the mug from Tim’s hands and raises his face with two fingers under his chin. “Maybe I should.”

They stare at each other for a moment before Tim sinks onto the floor, arms at his side, his silk dressing gown sliding off one shoulder. He's still pale and bony, with milky skin that bruises easily.

“How much time do we have?” Tim asks, his voice a little husky.

“I'm meeting that casting agent at eleven.”

“Good.” Tim licks his lips and Armie pushes a hand into his mop of curls, pulling Tim’s face closer to his crotch.

“Okay, baby, let's put that beautiful mouth of yours to some good use.”

Tim smiles up at him as his lips brush Armie’s cock, his eyes eventually fluttering shut as Armie starts to thrust deep into his willing mouth.

^^^^^^

When Armie moved back to New York two years ago Timmy did have a hard time to adapt at first. They'd never lived together for more than a few weeks and after several years spent mostly apart it wasn't only Armie he had to get used to on a daily basis but a sulky teenager as well.
Harper ignored Timmy at first when she didn't make snide remarks. Timmy tried to talk to Armie about it but he always came to his daughter's defense. Timmy understood why but that didn't mean he liked being treated as an intruder. As weeks went by it annoyed and hurt him.

He'd never been especially keen on kids. In his opinion, children don’t fit with the life of an actor. Over the last ten years he's been traveling constantly, filming all over the world. Their apartment in New York he'd bought a few years back for tax reasons had previously been just as place he stored some of his stuff in. It stood mostly empty, a cubbyhole at best or somewhere he crashed when passing through. It had never been a home, just a flat.

Timmy truly loves the vagrancy of his job. He doesn’t need a permanent home, he likes to be on the run. He easily connects with a certain energy that develops on a film set when everything falls into place during a production. That’s what he craves and needs to do a good job. He's been lucky in that aspect. He’s chosen wisely in the past, which has given him many special experiences.

It’s just a little sad that their sequel never happened. It had been scheduled at least three times but always something undermined the project. First, Luca fell ill and both Armie and Timmy refused to work with someone else. The next year, Timmy broke a leg while filming in Katmandu and almost died of sepsis. Two years back Armie pulled out due to Harper.

Now they are a little too old for the script Andre wrote. Well, maybe for the better. Timmy doubts it would have been the same. They had found the stars twelve years back – and this is given once only.

Timmy’s strong sense of freedom more than once clashed with Armie in the beginning. It took a little time until he understood that Armie needed to belong. He often visited in New York but his homebase stayed in LA, close to his kids, even after he left Liz and got divorced.

Timmy, on the other hand, came to loath Hollywood. The roles he got offered where mostly in romantic comedies. “I don’t want to end up like Hugh Grant.” He told Armie when he asked why he turned them all down.

Instead, he decided to work with European directors. He flourished, truly finding his way as an artist.

Armie didn’t.

At first, it made Timmy sad to see that Armie couldn't get the roles he wanted and deserved in Hollywood – despite being an Academy Award winner. Timmy felt guilty for being more successful, getting all the hot parts. It put a strain on their relationship.

Armie started to drink again. It didn't help with auditions and casting directors. Rumors spread. It wasn't so much about Armie being gay or bi, them being together – the same applied to Timmy and he wasn't suffering from backlash – but Armie developed a reputation of being difficult. Choleric. Unreliable.

They argued. More and more often. Timmy's sympathy gradually became detachment. When it got too much he took projects on the other side of the globe, fleeing Armie's proximity for a few weeks.

He had affairs on set. Nothing serious, but if Armie had his drink as an escape Timmy had his promiscuity. Casual fucks. When they wanted more he always told them he was taken. He had no intentions to leave Armie. Yet there were times they simply couldn't be together.

He has no idea if Armie knows or suspects. He never asked. Timmy never told him. Because whatever happened during shooting, when he was back with Armie it was just them. Nothing else mattered.
Things got a little better when Armie moved to London. Timmy often stayed there with him, using Armie's house as his European base. But he always stayed a visitor. He didn't live there.

He didn't want to settle down. He was always on the move. It kept him on his toes. He feared nothing more than to become settled, sated, to lose his curiosity.

Armie, in contrast, needed consistency, permanence. He loved his small terraced house. He loved London. He said it somehow reminded him of his youth in the Caymans. Except the weather.

Timmy never saw Armie's mother again. To the few family gatherings Armie couldn't skip – funerals, weddings – he went alone. Timmy wasn't invited. It didn't bother him.

But it bothered Armie. Timmy could see that. He felt touched that Armie wanted his family to acknowledge him but it wasn't important to him if a bunch of obscenely rich bigots approved of him.

Surprisingly, it had been Liz who reached out to him. She invited them both to her third wedding. Maybe because Timmy was famous. Maybe because Liz had a strong sense of family. Maybe because they now took care of Harper.

Since Harper lived with them, Timmy talked to Liz on a regular basis. He was better with her than Armie, who still got mad quickly. Timmy stayed calm. He wasn't as involved. He was the somewhat neutral element they all needed. Despite having never wanted the responsibility of caring for a child, the responsibility had somehow found him nonetheless.

By now, Harper's on a good way. She's going to his old high school, plays double bass and saxophone. She's really good. Timmy has seen all of her performances. She'll go far.

Ford is another matter. He knows Armie misses his son but doesn't want to force himself on him. Armie still feels guilty for leaving his family and sometimes it shows. For example, when Harper first arrived, Armie became increasingly impatient with Timmy, brusque, irritated. On one occasion, after another noisy row with his daughter, Timmy had feared Armie would outright punch him. He'd been so angry, mostly at himself, and Timmy, as always, functioned as the lightning rod. They didn't sleep together for almost three months afterwards.

Until Timmy greeted him late one evening kneeling naked by their bed, offering Armie his belt to use on him. He allowed Armie to punish him, to take it out on him in a controlled scene, to channel his self-loathing and fear of failure in a way that would make him feel better afterwards. Armie whipped him so hard Timmy bit into his forearm until it bled. But it was worth it: Armie came all over his abused back, held him and cried into his hair. When he eventually fell asleep Timmy lay next to him, watching him. Armie was still very handsome, his hair not touched by silver, his body lean, strong. He had a few more lines around his eyes and on his forehead, but those gave him a suave look.

Nevertheless, that night had been the first time when Timmy seriously thought about leaving Armie.

But then things got better. Harper accepted them, settled in. Timmy got used to having a teenager around. Armie was cast in a Netflix series (that just got commissioned for its third season), playing a factory owner in 1920s New York. The plot wasn't too stupid and the role suited Army really fine. Reviews praised him and his nuanced acting. Producers started contacting him, offering him film work again.

Timmy eventually accepted a part in a Marvel franchise. He had to support a family now.

Things are... good. Yeah. Good.
But if Timmy's honest, he feels trapped. Not always, but sometimes. He can't decide just for himself anymore. He has to be an adult. He has responsibilities. Armie relies on him. Harper relies on him. Only, no one ever asked him if that's the life he wants.

Well, he'll soon turn 33. Time to grow up. People always tell him he's mature beyond his years. But he's also a clown, a pretender, a jester. He doesn't want to carry all this weight. He needs a certain lightheartedness to his life to be able to give the performances he demands of himself.

He remembers his way of dealing with problems when he was younger. Armie eventually insisted that he saw a therapist. Surprisingly, she could help him, offering him other coping mechanisms for his anxiety: running, writing, talking. It worked. He stopped cutting, because, for a while, his life felt pretty good and he felt no need for self-destructive behavior. He had all he ever dreamed of, made the movies he’d always wanted to make, he was loved… it should have been enough.

But now he wonders more and more often – is this everything? Will there be nothing... more? Most of the time they are coordinating shopping, appointments, events, work schedules, Harper's school... Timmy fears they are losing themselves as lovers while pretending to be responsible adults. There are no spontaneous dirty weekends away in Mexico anymore. Armie always hated industry gatherings so they rarely attend a premiere or any other red carpet event, though Timmy really enjoys dressing up, partying with his colleagues.

They never went hiking at Mount Rainer.

Instead, they struggle to get home every evening to eat dinner together; taking turns to take time off during Harper's school holidays. Their down time is spent mostly on the couch, watching TV.

Timmy knows it's important to give Harper a stable, accepting, supportive surrounding. That's apparently what she lacked with Liz. Timmy remembers being fifteen himself and shudders.

He discovered that Harper isn't so different from him after all the first time Armie went to Toronto to work. He found razor blades in her room when he'd been looking for her passport to book a flight to Cannes for the film festival last year. It was a shock. Of course he knew exactly what she used them for.

He sat her down, they talked. It turned out that she desperately wanted attention but had never learned to ask for it in a healthy way. Her mother had always just revolved around herself. Harper had been an accessory, forced to conform to Liz’s beauty standards. When she rebelled against that her mother punished her by ignoring her completely. So Harper had started to scream for help in silence.

Timmy understood. He told her about his own cutting. She cried and begged him not to tell her dad. He promised not to. He knows Armie would be unable to deal with it. He would blame himself for failing as a parent. Timmy doesn’t want to see him hurting eve more than he does already.

He agreed on the tattoo if Harper would see his therapist. She goes there once a week after school. Armie doesn't know. He thinks she's with friends. She stopped cutting. Timmy’s proud of her, so proud. He knows how hard it is.

Thank god Armie's oblivious to so many things.

For example, that Timmy is seeking satisfaction elsewhere. Since Harper moved in Armie's very reluctant when it comes to kinky stuff. He says it's because they now have a child in the house. Beating Timmy raw has been an exception. But Timmy misses their intense sessions. To him, it’s an
integral part of their lovemaking. He’s a sensuous person. He needs stimulation.

After trying to get it on a few times with Armie and getting rebuked he resorted to his usual tactic, a casual affair. But it turned out that he doesn't like to be tied up and fucked by strangers. He doesn’t trust them. He can’t let go with them.

Thank god for old friends. He's been seeing Cody on and off for almost a year now. They go back so long Timmy doesn't even remember when they met. But he trusts him. Completely.

Cody gives him what he needs. Without asking anything than mutual satisfaction in return. It's so easy. It's what Timmy needs.

Yet he still feels like shit sometimes. When Armie holds him tenderly and whispers that he's his whole life, the only one... when Armie strokes his back and tells him that he's beautiful; when Armie kisses him hard and says that he loves him.

He knows he's loved Armie for a long time. But things are changing.

Right now, as he kneels between his thighs, he doesn't think about leaving. He doesn't think about the shoot next month that will take him to Brazil for eight weeks. Or his project afterwards that will film in Berlin. Armie hadn't been happy about it. But Timmy said it can't be helped.

He needs space. Otherwise, he fears he'll suffocate.

For now, all he wants is Armie choking him with his huge cock. Fucking him so hard that he'll be able to forget all his doubts. Pain has always been an aphrodisiac for him.

When Armie bends him over the table he's begging for it. He wants it hard and dirty. And for once, Armie is giving him what he needs, Timmy feels it again, that spark of intense passion that brought them together all those years ago. They've been through so much and can still have this. As his half-empty bowl of soggy Kellogg’s shatters on the ground and no one cares or runs to wipe it up he laughs out loud, giddy, happy – they are suddenly young again, careless, and anything is possible.

Afterwards, they shower together. Timmy suggests they'll go out tonight, nothing fancy, just dinner, and Armie agrees, kissing him open-mouthed, looking ten years younger with his short wet hair and the bright smile on his face.

When he's left to see a casting agent over an off-Broadway production, Timmy books a table. He takes out one of his Alexander McQueen suits and irons a black shirt he knows Armie likes.

Only, in the end, Armie runs late because the agent wanted to talk him through the whole play. Then there's some trouble at school. Harper's teacher calls, it's about her grades deteriorating, and when they try to talk to her she tells them they have no idea AT ALL and slams the door to her room. Armie's suddenly not in the mood and Timmy feels a headache coming.

He sighs before canceling their dinner. They settle in for a frozen meal and TV. Armie opens his first beer of the night. It won't be his last.

Timmy wants to scream. He wants to run. He wants the man back he fell in love with all those years ago in Italy. The careless, ruthless, crazy, passionate, ecstatic Armie who swept him off his feet.

Timmy remembers a line from the book: 'Maybe it's because of time that we suffer...'

The next day he calls Cody and asks him if he's ever been to Brazil.
Okay, so happy and proud you made it till here! Thank you all for reading and commenting! Last chapter tomorrow. Prepare for heartbreak.
Armie can’t think. He can’t look at anyone. He just sits in the air-conditioned hall, staring down at the mosaic floor between his feet. He’s sure something’s depicted there but he can’t focus. Something calming, soothing, inoffensive he assumes.

The cool air is filled with the sweet scent of flowers. Armie can’t remember any of their names as he allows his eyes to wander over the floral arrangements. They are everywhere: bouquets, wreaths, sometimes just a single flower in a vase. Warm sunlight streams through the high windows. It’s a beautiful day.

The colors are too bright, almost blinding.

They’ve decided against formal wear. Everybody should just dress comfortable. And no black, Armie had insisted.

The small group gathered looks rather jolly. It’s just his next of kin, a few friends. This is not a society event. This is private. They decided against a religious ceremony. Armie’s mother wouldn’t have approved but she died two years ago.

Armie coughs and lowers his head again. Stares at his phone. It’s silent. It’s already ten past.

“I’m sure he’ll be here any minute now, dad.” Harper sinks on the chair next to him. She’s wearing a bright red dress. Her girlfriend is somewhere around. He last saw her talking to Nick. Her name’s Mia, Armie remembers. She’s beautiful. He’s happy for his daughter.

Suddenly, Liz is by his side. She looks worn. Husband number five hands her a program and she fans herself with it. She’s kept her sunglasses on.

“You sure he’s coming?”

“Oh course.” Armie sighs. He desperately wants a drink. But he quit a year ago. What for? He asks himself now.

An attendee shuffles over. “I’m sorry Mr Hammer, Mrs Hammer – but we have to start.” He looks nervously at his watch. Liz doesn’t correct him. It tells Armie how tired she is.

He just nods. “Of course.”
Tim opens the door just as the music sets in. Armie turns, thankful for the distraction. He’ll rather look at Tim skidding down the isle, nodding at some well-known faces, than look at the casket dominating the room.

Not all the flowers in the world could hide the white coffin in which rests what’s left of his only son.

The call came in the middle of the night. Never a good sign. Armie had actually been asleep. After he’d stopped drinking he slept so much better. He should have done it years ago. Maybe it would have prevented what he was about to learn?

“Mr Armand Douglas Hammer? Your contact number was found in a flat in Queens, rented by a Ford Hammer.”

“Yes.” Armie felt a little dizzy, still half asleep.

“You know Mr Ford Hammer, Sir?” The voice asked.

‘Not really’, Armie thought. But the correct answer was: “He’s my son. Who am I speaking to?”

The voice didn’t sound like the people who usually rang him from time to time, asking about Ford.

“New York City’s coroner’s office.”

Armie jolted upright, suddenly wide awake. He heard the next words through a fog.

“I’m sorry, Sir, but we have to ask you to identify a body.”

He fell. That had been two weeks ago. Somehow, he hadn't found firm ground beneath his feet since.

Ford had been lying dead in his flat for five days before he had been found. In the end they needed Armie's and Liz's DNA to identify him, as it was a hot summer and apparently the whole building swarmed with rats.

Armie still remembers the remains he had to look at. He will never forget the sight. But he’s also thankful that they'd called him and not Liz.

The first twenty-four hours after the call were a blur. The pain was simply overwhelming, shutting down every thought apart from 'Ford' and 'Why?' and 'This is my fault'.

But someone had to make the necessary arrangement.

In the end it was Harper who called Tim.

She got hold of him somewhere in Belarus where he was currently working with Cody on one of their weird yet fascinating projects.

Armie reluctantly took the phone from his daughter as she passed it with an anxious expression, her eyes red-rimmed. They hadn’t talked for almost four years. Yet his voice sounded eerily familiar.

“Armie?”

“Tim.” He sighed, suddenly unable to hold back his tears.

“I have no words. I... I can’t imagine what you’re going through. This is-,” Armie heard him choke as well. It felt good just to cry together, even thousands of miles apart. “I don’t want to tell you any
more platitudes, I'm sure you're already sick of it, but this simply shouldn’t happen.” Tim’s voice broke.

“Yeah…,” Armie tried to say something appropriate, suitable for the occasion. There was nothing. In the end they just breathed together.

“I just booked a flight back to New York.” Tim told him after some minutes, audibly trying to get some control back over his voice.

“Tim…”

“Or don’t you want me to come? Harper said… sorry, Armie, I think I should be there, despite-“

“Yes, please, of course-“

“No, not when you don’t want to see me. This is hard enough for you without all of my shit and those past-“

“Why do you think I don't want to see you?” Armie almost laughed, the first time in days. As if that would ever happen. Even after all the things they went through, Tim was still one of the most important persons in his life. “The funeral’s on Friday.”

“I’ll be there.”

“Yeah, okay…,” Armie felt his shoulders relax a bit. The headache that plagued him since the fateful call subsided a little. “I don’t know what to say right now so-“

“Armie, this is not your fault.” Tim spoke with conviction. He was still able to read Armie's mind.

“Ha!” He made a bitter, ugly sound.

“No, stop that. I know you! I know what you’re thinking right now. I… sorry, but this has nothing to do with us. With what we did.”

“I really admire you for being so sure about this.” Armie’s voice was rough. Why had Tim to twist the knife? He gripped his phone tighter. “I hope it helps you sleep at night. When I close my eyes I just see-“

“Stop.It.”

“There were rats, Tim. And it was so bloody hot in there. His face... he had no face, Tim-“

“Armie, don’t! Don’t do this. You know he had problems-“

“Because of me!”

“How do you know that? You two never really saw each other!”

“If I’d been there for him-“

“You were there for him! I remember all those emails, the calls you made. I remember you paying his debts, the lawyers. I remember you securing him a place in rehab, pulling all those strings, and he just didn’t take that chance. You did everything you could. You made a difference, gave him a choice!“

“It might have been different if I never left him. If I’d loved him instead of-,“ Armie bit his tongue
but of course it was too late.

“Instead of me?” Silence. More silence. Armie could hear Tim breathe. “You really think staying with Liz, cheating on her with all those boys, drinking yourself to sleep every night, puking your guts out once a week... you think that would have made Ford a happy, healthy child? Really?”

Armie sighed Tim was the only person in the world to talk to him like that. Still the only one who knew him well enough, inside out.

“I know, I should never have married Liz. I should have been honest from the start.” He cleared his throat. “God, what a mess I’ve made.”

“Stop pitying yourself! Then you wouldn’t have Harper either. Is that really what you want? Listen, Armie, I’m coming back to New York and I want you to keep your shit together until I arrive. No bullshit. No drinking, no-“

“I stopped.”

There was stunned silence on the other end of the line.

“Good. That’s… good.”

“Yeah.” Armie felt a little proud.

“So, okay. I see you on Friday then.” Tim sounded... pleased?

“Thank you, Tim, I-” But Tim hung up before he could say anything more.

Now he’s sliding into the reserved chair next to Armie, squeezing Harper’s hand. Liz just turns and tilts her head. Tim mouths ‘sorry’ in her direction.

The service doesn’t register much with Armie. Harper tries to read a poem but just bursts into tears after the first line. Nick saves the day by giving a heartfelt speech, even making the congregation laugh a little as he tells some funny anecdotes about young Ford.

Armie stills when he feels it’s his turn to walk up and say a few words. He didn’t prepare anything, so he just stands there for a moment, looking the crowd over. He didn’t even invite his brother or his father. Today, he shares his grief just with the people he wants to see on a day like this: a few dear colleagues, his PA, Evelyn, some old friends of Liz and him, Liz’s mum and dad.

They didn’t know any of Ford’s friends and Armie doubts he even had some in the end.

His eyes come to rest on Tim.

He’s dressed in a dark green jumper, gray slacks, a ridiculous pair of pink sneakers. Just beneath his sleeve Armie can see the dark beads of a bracelet. He swallows. It hurts.

“I never really knew my son. Ford. But I knew he had problems. I tried… we all tried. But sometimes... sometimes that’s all you can do, isn’t it? And it doesn’t always help. Sometimes, there’s no healing, no answer. Sometimes, you can't win, no matter how hard you fight.” Armie takes a deep breath. He sees Tim touching his bracelet, his eyes meeting Armie’s, a sad smile on his face. “Liz and I are now living every parent’s nightmare: having to bury a child. The pain is... It really fucking hurts. The feeling of having failed him hurts. The knowledge that he’s not here anymore hurts. That he can't see how much he was... is... loved. I have no idea how to deal with his death yet but I appreciate that you all came today and I hope that, with your help, my family will be able to cope.”
He looks down onto his hands clasping the lectern, then back up again. “I just want to say… I vividly remember a funeral, long ago, at which it was all hushed voices and lies. Her name was Tina.” He sees Tim nod, wipe his eyes. “We don’t want that. You’re family and friends. We have to be honest with each other.” He swallows. “Ford died of an overdose. No one knows if he administered it accidentally or on purpose. Please, don’t think you have to spare us.” At this, Liz takes her dark glasses off. Her eyes are puffy. Tim takes her hand. “We have to talk about what happened. Openly. Secrets once nearly ruined Liz’s and my life and we have agreed not to go down that road ever again. We kindly ask you for a donation to a drug prevention program in the name of Ford Hammer. Thank you.”

His legs are shaking as he sits down again. He doesn’t hide his tears. Harper passes him a tissue.

To his great surprise, Tim walks up in front of the congregation next. Armie blows his nose, stares at the lean figure standing next to the coffin, watches Tim touch the white wood, closing his eyes. When he opens them again he says: “Hi. Long time no see.” Some chuckle, even Liz.

“Yeah, I know. Sorry. I just thought I should say a few words.” He looks at Harper who nods, smiling through her tears. “I was still with Armie when Ford came to New York. I witnessed how much he cared for his son. I also know that Liz had tried everything she could before.” He swallows. “Sometimes, bad things happen. Pointless thing. And we don’t understand why. But someone once said to me, and I still carry those words in my heart,” - now he looks directly at Armie - “‘Right now, there's sorrow, pain. Don't kill it and with it the joy you've felt. Because to make yourself feel nothing so as not to feel anything - what a waste!’”

Tim seems on the brink of tears. “I'm not a parent. I can't imagine what this loss means to Armie and Liz. Or to Harper. But... I'm willing to be there, to listen. Pain can be something that makes us better, that helps us grow. It's an essential part of life. Like joy. There's no happiness without hurt. Today, we need to remember that. And we have to allow for it. I'm willing to share that pain with you, to carry your burden if you let me. I'll be there for you. I promise.”

When he sits down again he clasps Armie’s hand briefly and squeezes it. Armie squeezes back. It’s suddenly more than twenty years ago and he just arrived in a tiny town in Northern Italian, walking into Luca’s house to hear piano music wafting down the stairs. Armie realizes it’s the same tune that’s playing right now at his son’s funeral.

Bach's Capriccio in b flat major.

He turns to look at Tim. He’s just a little over forty and there’s still no gray in his dark, wavy hair. It’s shorter than he remembers, a bit like he looked when they first met. He’s still tall, lanky and way too thin. And still so fucking beautiful. There are a few new wrinkles around his eyes but that’s the only visible sign he’s aged.

Armie remembers those green eyes gazing up at him in a mixture of fear and excitement. He remembers them dark with arousal. Or red-rimmed. Later only annoyed and a little tired. Before Tim stopped looking at him altogether. Their relationship had died a very slow death.

Would he have done anything different if he’d known what was to come for him when he went to Italy?

With what he knows now, if he walked up those stairs again today, would he stop himself from falling in love with Tim?

Could he?

A little laughs bubbles up inside him. Who’s he kidding?
Eventually, the funeral's over. Timmy forces himself to walk up to the coffin again, to touch it one last time before it's taken away for cremation.

When he turns he sees Armie watching him. He's waiting, talking to Harper and a beautiful Asian girl. But his eyes rest on Timmy.

He still looks good. Better even than Timmy remembers. Fit and slim. So tall, his hair still full despite just turning fifty. It shows that he did quit drinking.

Timmy's so glad about it.

During their last months, Armie had been almost constantly drunk. It had been so bad that Timmy avoided going home. Because at home Armie would wait for him, throwing accusations, wallowing in self-pity. It became insufferable.

Harper had left for university by then. Without her, it turned out that they had nothing left to talk about. After his brief stint with Marvel, Timmy had decided to do more and more experimental films with Cody while Armie worked his ass off for Netflix. It paid the bills. He won two Emmys.

That didn't stop him from lamenting that he wasn't taken serious as an artist, as an actor. Timmy grew sick of reassuring him. To avoid fights and sulks they stopped talking about their job.

Which left them only with small talk until even that died as well.

Silence stretched between them.

Timmy hoped there would at least be more sex after Harper left. But Armie seemed to have lost interest. Maybe it was the alcohol. Maybe he just didn't find Timmy attractive anymore.

At parties and awards Timmy caught him flirting with women. When he asked, Armie just grinned sheepishly and shrugged.

When Armie was meeting his female co-stars, Timmy and Cody started going out to dinner. Or having lunch. Visiting exhibitions. Cody was into all the exciting experimental stuff Armie found ridiculous: performances, street art, Off-Off Broadway shows, poetry. He made strange video installations and indie documentaries. He didn't have a pot to piss in but Timmy didn't care. Cody was lit, alive, enthusiastic, but also modest, quiet, sensitive.

In the end it was him who asked Timmy: if they were fucking and going out why shouldn't they be dating? Timmy wanted to say because of Armie but he couldn't. He realized he didn't cared anymore.

When Timmy came home late that night Armie was asleep on the couch, two empty bottles of red wine on the low table in front of it.

Timmy sat on the floor, leaning against the opposite wall until the sun rose and Armie stirred.

"I'm leaving you." He told him as Armie opened his eyes. Still so very blue. Timmy once could drowned in them. Not anymore.

Despite the downward spiral they'd been in for years, Armie seemed surprised.

"Why?" He asked, sounding small, lost.
“Because it’s over. We don't talk. We don't fuck. There's nothing left.”

Armie nodded. “Because you're never here.”

“Because you're always drunk.”

They stared at each other for a long moment.

“Is it Cody?” Armie asked.

“Yes. It's Cody.” It was a relief.

“Since when?”

“A few years now. Or always. Does it matter?”

Armie just nodded. Timmy got up to pack.

That had been five years ago. A year later he founded his own production company with Cody and they started to travel the world, shooting their experimental films in Borneo, Madagascar, Venezuela, now Belarus.

He still followed Armie's career, bought the books he wrote on food and cooking. But after a few drunken phone calls Timmy felt the need to change his number. They hadn't spoken for four years.

That's why Timmy is taken by surprise when, at the reception after the funeral at a posh restaurant in Cypress Hills, a tall, dark-haired man sidles up to Armie.

“Miles.” Harper whispers in his ear. Timmy arches an eyebrow.

“Oh.”

“He's nice. He's a model.”

“He certainly looks nice.”

“You can't say dad doesn't have a type.” Harper grins, hugging him. “You have to meet my girlfriend later.” She knocks back a Scotch and walks over to the bar to get another. Timmy smiles. Like father, like daughter.

Liz, as always, is holding court at a large table at the center of the restaurant. Timmy bows down to kiss her cheek and say a few words of heartfelt condolence before he moves on to greet some colleagues. He feels embarrassed to accept their congratulations for the Palm d'Or they just won at Cannes at such an occasion like Ford's wake. But Cody has made it. He's still poor and they live out of their suitcases but who cares about money anyway? At the moment, he's in Minsk.

Looking around, Timmy feels somewhat superfluous. The acquaintances leave as the core family gathers. And he doesn't belong with them anymore. He has forfeited that privilege the day he left Armie.

He quickly finishes his coffee and makes for the door. Where did he leave his coat? As he turns and searches for it when he sees Armie's.

He looks sad, but there's also a kind of solemn relief on his face. He's surrounded by people who love him – Nick, Ashton, his daughter, her girlfriend, and his new partner - sipping a glass of sparkling water. His face is flushed as he moves his large hand up and down in an eloquent gesture
before Miles takes hold of it and pulls him close for a soft kiss.

Despite everything, Timmy suddenly knows Armie will be fine.

They both will be fine.

Timmy smiles, touches the bracelet Armie gave to him over twenty years ago. He still wears it every day. It reminds him of good and bad things. It reminds him of Armie and a love so all-consuming it nearly burned them both. It's much quieter with Cody. Much more healthy.

Just when Timmy wants to turn around and leave, Armie suddenly looks up and over. Their eyes meet. It's not like the electric current of the past passing between them. Instead, it's a deep, calm understanding that transpires. They know each other inside out. Every weakness, every fear, every flaw. There are no secrets left.

Timmy knows he'll always love him. But they've both moved on. It's for the better.

A lifetime ago Armie showed him what it meant to love unconditionally, without holding back. Now it's Timmy's turn to show him that he'll always be there, without regrets, without accusations. He just wants to be there for Armie, not just for old time's sake but because he truly, genuinely loves him.

Timmy knows he wouldn't be who he is without Armie. He grew up while he was with him, became an adult, a true artist. He now sees how much they hurt each other but also understands how much they loved each other.

Timmy misses him. He hopes they can be friends now. They never were before.

He doesn't know what the future holds for them. At the moment, he's pretty happy with Cody. Armie seems pretty happy with Miles.

But as their eyes meet over the crowd they exchange more than just a look. What passes between them is a knowledge as old as mankind itself. They recognize each other. They really see each other. And that won't change. Even in a room full of people there's right now just the two of them.

'I remember everything.'

Suddenly, Timmy smells chamomile, freshly mowed grass, peaches. He can hear a guitar playing a familiar tune. For a moment, he's back in an enchanted, sunlit orchard and a young blond man walks up to him, smiling, reaching out. There's a sweet taste in his mouth.

He blinks, touches his bracelet around his wrist. The veils part. He forgets about the funeral. He forgets about his coat or New York or Cody or Miles.

It's just them, in the shade of a sun-soaked Italian garden, laughing, kissing, holding hands, sharing a smoke.

They are back there, together. They will be there together. Always. Forever. Two young men who found love.

But love isn't something you can keep. It's fleeting. Timmy knows that by now.

But he doesn't regret anything.

He remembers Armie's words when he won an Oscar. But no. They were never friends. They were always lovers. But maybe it's time to change that?
Suddenly, Armie's standing in front of him.

“You're leaving?”

“Yeah. I... I don't like funerals.”

“Who does?”

They smile at each other despite everything.

“Miles seems nice.” Timmy says.

“Yes, he is.” Armie nods, just once.

They stare at each other in silence.

“I have to go.” Timmy says eventually. He's not moving.

“Yeah. Thank you for... everything.”

“It was good to see you.”

They stare each other some more, apparently neither of them able to cut the connection.

“How long are you staying?” Armie asks eventually.

“As long as you want me to.” Timmy feels surprisingly calm admitting it.

Armie doesn't smile when he leans in. Instead, there's an intense expression on his face. “I really want to see you again.”

“Maybe we can get breakfast tomorrow? Do you remember that Bagel place we used to go to?” Please, remember, Timmy prays.

“What about Cody?” Armie asks instead of an answer.

Timmy shrugs, huffs. “What about Miles?”

Armie doesn't look away. His gaze is sharp, piercing. “You're still wearing it.” He touches Timmy's wrist lightly. It's a shock to feel his fingers on his skin.

“Yeah.” Timmy holds his breath.

Armie licks his lips. “I miss you. And I still love you, you know?”

“Yeah, me too, but...,” Timmy touches his neck. Are they really doing this here, now, at Ford's funeral?

“Yeah. But.” Armie's fingertips graze his palm as he withdraws his hand.

They smile at each other for a moment before Timmy looks away. He spots his coat over the back of a chair, walks over, grabs it and shrugs it on.

“Take care.” Timmy whispers against Armie's neck as he hugs him to say good-bye. Armie's familiar scent almost floors him.

“See you at Tal Bagels tomorrow.” Armie presses a fleeting kiss to Timmy's cheek, holding both his
hands for a moment.

Timmy has to force himself to leave.

Tomorrow.

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Breaking News, TMZ

In the early hours of Saturday morning a car crashed near Mount Judah Cemetery at Highland Park, Queens, as a truck veered off the street, ramming a passing Range Rover. The driver was instantly killed. It is believed to be the well-loved actor Armie Hammer, who just returned from a family funeral at the nearby cemetery. Hammer, 50, leaves one daughter with his ex-wife Elizabeth Chambers. The family has not been available for a statement.

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Timmy lies in a hotel bed in the city he grew up in, staring at the ceiling, waiting to fall asleep. He fiddles with an old chocolate gold coin – the chocolate must have expired long ago but this sweet is not for eating anyway. It's a token, a reminder of a place of yearning, removed from time and seeming almost unreal if Timmy hadn't spend a summer there a lifetime ago.

Their Arcadia.

He knows it's real yet unreachable. They've both been expelled from this Garden of Eden, their paradise eroded between too much and not enough closeness. Somehow, they never found the right balance, always wanting too much, too fast, too soon, never content with what they had.

Patience has always been alien to them. Perhaps because, when they met, there never seemed to be enough time.

Midnight passes and he wonders where Armie is right now.

He smiles, remembering his touch, his smell.

Tomorrow.

They'll see each other tomorrow. They'll talk. Maybe more than talk.

Lying in this unfamiliar bed, he realizes how long he's waited for Armie. Realizes that he'll always wait for him. He already understood a while ago that no matter how far he ran away, he'll never be able to fully let him go.

It doesn't matter if he has to wait a little longer for him. They are meant to be.

Timmy snuggles deeper into the blanket, breathing in the clean smell of generic hotel sheets. He's naked but for the bracelet Armie bought for him. He loves to wear it when he touches himself.

They have a future now. After all they've been through, maybe this time they'll get it right.

His phone starts ringing. He smiles. He still recognizes the number.

“Armie.”

“Hey, Tim, thank god you're still awake. Listen, I just wanted to tell you that-”
There's a loud noise. A bang. Metal scraping on metal. Then the line goes dead.

Timmy stares at his silent phone for a long time until it starts to ring again.

^^^^^^

_There's warm sunlight. There's soft grass beneath his feet. He's at the villa again. A breeze ruffles the leaves of the peach trees. He can hear Tim laugh, high-pitched and giddy. He's carrying a happily screaming Ford on his shoulders as he looks up and over at Armie and waves._

_It smells like summer._

_They're finally together. They're home._

Chapter End Notes

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Thank you for all your kind words, the kudos, the hits. Thank you for reading!
I might write some outtakes over the next few weeks. But right now, I need a vacation.
This has been a crazy ride. I hope you enjoyed. I did!

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!