Early Mornings and Busy Days

by 8ami

Summary

Garrett and Cal meet up before school and things go well, bad, and great all in a very short amount of time that feels like forever - a roller coaster of emotions.

Notes

This occurs the day after "It's Not as Overwhelming..."

No beta as usually.
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Chapter 1

Tuesday, September 19th

I park my car in the almost barren student parking lot at just past six despite classes not starting for another two hours, but I don’t shut off the car to allow my air condition to stay on. This September has ended up being a hotter one than normal, the heat’s holding onto the days despite the nights growing longer. I’m more awake than I normally am this early out of soccer season, though I still find myself yawning into my hand. Sleep wasn’t something I got a lot of last night, but my excitement at seeing Cal again after yesterday is stronger than my need for sleep.

I grab my phone, unplug the AUX cable in the process causing the music to cut off leaving the car in relative silence. I hesitant just a second staring at my lock screen - the logo of my favorite soccer team - before pulling up my messages to Cal. I’m trying to figure out what to type - let him know I’m there, morning, what? - when someone taps on my window.

I do not jump. I don’t.

I have no idea why Cal is smirking.

I go to open my door, but he stops me with a shake of his head and a hand pressed to the door. I watch as he walks around my truck and gets in on the passenger side. “Morning.” He greets, adjusting his open flannel as it catches on the seat.

He wears layers pretty often, so really it shouldn’t be odd to me to see him wearing this black and white plaid flannel, but it’s striking me as weird the moment I register it. It’s thin, good for this weather, but also curves along his frame highlighting the lines of his shoulders and waist in a way that a T-shirt would only blend together and a heavier jacket would hide. It certainly makes me take notice anyway, and for a moment I think that’s why it’s sticking out to me so strongly - that it just looks really good on him, but I realize that’s not it the moment I draw my eyes up towards his face, stopping at the collar.

I grin as I reach out and trace a finger along the collar’s edge, pulling down at it until I find the hickey on his neck I left yesterday evening too high to cover up by just a shirt. It’s thrilling to know I did that, left that on his skin because he wanted me to - hidden and insight, kinda like my feelings for Cal in general. When I look up to catch his eyes, he’s more smug than I am about the mark, arching an eyebrow as if asking me if I like what I see. Which I do. In more than one way.

“Were you watching for my truck?” I ask dropping my hand from his collar to move my seat back completely so that I can turn to face him more comfortably. It’s an exciting idea - that he would be doing that. And he totally was, because Cal gets a little flush at the question, ducking his head just enough to hide under his bangs. He can be all teasing looks and words when it’s about anyone else, but when the focus is on his own sentimental actions he gets bashful. He does the same whenever he gets a serious compliment. “That’s adorable.” I tease as he looks at me sideways, all soft and bemused from beneath his bangs.

I want to lean over and kiss him, so I do just that. Except, I don’t, because I stop short of doing just that as the knowledge of people possibly walking past my car comes to the front of my mind. I swallow hard, look from Cal’s lips up to his eyes and I know he knows what I’m thinking. The guy
can read my mind, I’m serious. He knows and I can see this look of hurt and blended understanding start to form on his face - I’ve seen it often enough to know it. I hate it and I hate that I’m the one that puts it there so damn often.

Then I think about how Abby walking in yesterday, about how the first time Cal kissed me it was in a room full of people too caught up in themselves to notice that important moment, about what I talked to Bram about at the beginning of term, about what I said yesterday, but mostly I think about how I want to be less scared.

“Fuck it,” I say closing the distance between us.

He’s genuinely surprised and I really like how I can feel him smile first before he starts kissing me back. It’s a press of closed lips, a sureness that feels right. Too quickly for my taste, Cal starts to pull back. I really don’t want to stop kissing him, so I chase after him putting a hand on the back of his neck to pull him back into me. He chuckles breathlessly against my lips and I take the opportunity to slip my tongue into his mouth. He doesn’t try to pull back again, instead, he falls into the kiss, hands tangling in my shirt to keep me close.

Unfortunately, we can’t kiss forever. Air and all that, so we do eventually break apart, slowly with smiles, dark looks, and heavy breaths. A few more short kisses, none any more chaste, follow until our hands leave the other and we both lean back into our own seats as if the only way we’re able to stop is if we just aren’t close enough to touch each other.

My heart is pounding in my chest and it’s not all just from kissing Cal, some of it is fear hanging onto my nerves. I make myself focus on Cal, don’t let myself look past him or out the window. Just him which isn’t that hard. He’s always a sight and today is no different. Between the flannel covering the hickey, I gave him, this dark blue shirt that seems to take away all the green of his eyes, and a smile that can make me light-headed it’s pretty easy to focus on him.

“That was unexpected.” Cal finally says.

“I’m a surprising guy.”

“That you are.” He catches my eyes when he agrees and reaches over the console to take my hand. I don’t know if he’s talking about today or yesterday or in general, I wonder if it’s important. I squeeze his hand, looking at him expecting to be told which one he’s referring to as he looks like there’s something more on his mind and I assume it’s what we’re talking about.

While Bram always seem to have just the right word and Spier has a habit of putting all his emotions in his words for your understanding, and Leah only speaks in sarcasm so you have dig to hear what she’s really saying, Cal makes a few words mean so much, sometimes with long pauses between sentences. It’s why he appears so quiet - he talks in short sentences with subtext and footnotes attached as if each sentence is its own chapter. I don’t really understand how he does it, because while he can say enough with a few words, I have to use a dozen words just to get the meaning for one across to someone, and sometimes I don’t even stop to breath between sentences. I’ve had to learn to read in between his words and check to see if I can tell if he has more to say or not. I don’t always succeed on either front.

Sometimes, I talk before I know what’s happening leaving my thoughts to play catch up with my actions. Bram tells me I’m impulsive, but Nicole has told me that since I was a kid, and it’s one thing I definitely see in myself without anyone’s help, thank you. I mean, I can’t go through a checkout line without grabbing something from the shelves right there for impulsive buyers.

I can’t just not talk sometimes, not fill the air with whatever comes to mind. But sometimes, I can see
something is on Cal’s mind like right now and I want to hear it, so I fill my head with thoughts about yesterday in order to stay quiet while I wait on him to speak.

About what was going to happen if we weren't interrupted. About how hard we were. About how he sounded while I had him against the wall. About how his skin felt under my hands. About how he kissed me until I couldn’t breathe. About how he looked when he smiled when I first showed up. About what I said. About what he said. How he didn’t believe it was me saying such things. How he looked like he believed me when I said them, believed me without question.

And he should, because if fucking meant them, but I’ve ran away, pushed him away more than not in this thing we have going on so it would have totally made sense that he would doubt me. And yet, he wants to keep this going between us and he’s willing to wait on me. I don’t know how I’m supposed to feel about it. I’m so fucking happy that he’s still here and that I get to hold his hand, but I’m worried about what it means, what it could mean. Like what does he think of himself kind of thing? And I don’t know maybe I’m just overthinking this and he just has the patience of a saint and for some reason really likes me, but I stay up at night sometimes just feeling like it’s not the best thing - for either of us - that he’s so accepting of me hiding this, hiding him away.

It’s a train of thought that usually has me thinking I shouldn’t be holding onto him like this.

But I also think someone is going to have break my hand first before I let go.

It’s selfish, I know that. It’s why I’m going to change that. I’m not going to run from this, not if I want more from Cal. I can’t let him keep doing this for me. I need to start doing things for him - the right things instead of letting greed and fear run my decisions.

These thoughts are always startling in the same way that’s reaching the top of a roller coaster’s climb is. Where there’s that jerk when the chains pulling the cars up detach and you’re sitting there at the peak right before you drop. It’s not long that you’re there, just long enough for you to really take in the view, register how high you really are, and for that excitement that only comes from knowing that there’s no turning back now to settle along your skin. And then you plummet downwards.

Sometimes it’s worth it - the drop. You make it off the ride in one piece, adrenaline keeping you high with a great picture to take with you to remember it all. Other times, you throw up and get pale and dizzy and kinda wish you’d die for a few seconds before everything settles back. Of course, you get a picture to remember that one by too.

And the scary thing here with Cal at the top of the roller coaster is, well, I don't really know which picture I'm going to end up with, but I know which one I want. So, I curl my toes inside my shoes trying to anchor myself so that I don’t run and bite my lip so that I don’t say something I don’t want to.

“I’m just thinking,” Cal finally says breaking my thoughts, “about yesterday.”

“So am I. Which part?” I ask, anticipation building with each heartbeat that progresses while I wait for his next answer.

“It’s sort of about Abby,” And I’m ready to jump in and tell him I’m okay with that. It’s terrifying, but it’s okay that she knows, but he must see that on my face, because he squeezes my hand to keep me from talking, “It’s not in that way. It’s...she thought you were straight. I thought you told your friends.” He says it gently and when I drop my gaze, he leans over the console and lifts my chin with his free hand so that I have to meet his eyes.

I shut my eyes instead of really looking, take a deep breath, and then laugh, though, it doesn’t sound
very joyous just like I’m ashamed of my mistake. Which I am. “Well, Bram knows. About me being pansexual anyways, not, not this.” I say opening my eyes to see how he’s reacting to this.

“No one else?” Cal doesn’t look nor sound disappointed, just like this isn’t a surprise like this is just how things are. Like being wrong would have been nice, but he doesn’t have those expectations.

“No.” I admit, “well, I mean you know.” Cal finally drops his hand from my face, smiling just a little and shaking his head at my stupid joke.

“Do you want anyone else to know?” He means about me, I’m sure, but it sounds like the question is about us. I think it should be about us.

“That’s what I was thinking about actually.”

“You were?” Cal sounds surprised and looks a little like he did when I kissed him despite registering the fact that people could walk by could see.

“Well, not exactly, but yeah. I was thinking,” my mouth goes dry and I have to look down at our hands, “...I was thinking that I need to stop being so scared. I meant it yesterday, I want to hold your hand and kiss you no matter who’s around. I want to get there. And I thought, well, I thought telling our friends would be a good step to take.” God, my chest hurts and I don’t realize I’m shaking until Cal puts his other hand on top of mine that he’s already holding in support.

“Garrett.” And I don’t know what’s in his tone, but it makes me look up at him. Cal looks really pleased, almost hopeful, and I can see something light in his eyes amongst the fondness that is apparently directed at me. But he also looks like he’s trying not to be so excited while also being concerned about me, “why don’t you start with just telling them about you first?” He suggests. I don’t know if that would make it easier, but it’s not what I want to do regardless. “And then we can tell them about...well we can move on from there.”

It takes me more than a minute of silence to figure out why he skipped there in his sentence. And I start laughing a little rough and giddy with a hard smile, clapping my hand on top of his adding to the pile. I’m so unbelievable, really. All of this has been such a mess and out of order and we really don’t talk like we should. There’s a lot of unsaid things between us, sometimes they’re obvious and are fine just being in the air, but there are other things that really need to be spoken.

I calm down dismissing the laughter, but leave the smile and the shaking. Disentangling our hands, I lean forward to cup his face. He must have connected the dots too because he speaks as soon as my hands touch his cool skin. “Garrett, will you go out with me? Actually, go out with me that is.”

“I was going to ask that.” I chide kissing him and it quickly gets out of hand which seems to be a common occurrence between us. Not that I’m complaining. Keeping my hands where they are, I press into the kiss, leaning more and more of my body across the console until I have to sit on the uneven surface, back towards the hood glad that the gear shift is behind the steering wheel and not along the console where I would without a doubt have knocked my car into neutral or drive. Cal holds onto my shirt with one hand and the other is blocking my waist helping me keep balance in my precarious position.

One of my hands slides back into his hair as he slides his tongue into my mouth. I don’t try to stop the moan I let out then, that he swallows down hungrily. I let my other hand trail down his chest until it’s resting on his hip and I can slide it under his shirt to have skin beneath my hand. I bite his lip and I think I might have done so too hard when he pulls back quickly, but I realize it’s just so that he can speak. “Just so we’re clear you still own me an actually answer.”
“An answer? Because I could give you the answer to,” I respond eagerly going back in for a kiss - on his lips, “the chemistry homework,” down his jawline, “or who won the last world cup,” to right below his ear, “or even the wrong answer for economy take-home test,” and down his neck, “what about that? Would those work as an answer?” He’s laughing, but it’s broken up by pretty sounds I cause, until he’s all breath.

“Those would not be,” Cal’s voice cuts off with a sharp intake of air that sounds like he’s trying not to moan - which isn’t very fair I think - when I bite at an area at the base of his neck. It’s as far down as I can get without removing or tearing his shirt. “Those would not be acceptable answers.” His drawl is more prominent right now. “Are you trying to leave another mark?”

I chuckle against his skin before softly kissing the area I was just abusing. I draw back far enough to see his face and give a half smile, “You’d be able to hide this one.” Cal rolls his eyes, shaking his head at me. He removes his fingers from my shirt, slides it up to rest there on my shoulder as if to do a formal dance. I don’t know why but that seems meaningful. I look up from his hand to his blue-green eyes which are dilated so that there’s half as much blue-green as normal. Slowly, he returns my gaze.

Really now, he needs to stop looking like I should kiss him “Yes.”

“Yes?”

“Yes, dude. Yes.” At my answer, he pulls me into a powerful kiss that takes the breath right out of me and I’m pretty sure stops my heart for a minute. Which leaves me really light headed, because I haven’t been able to keep a lot of air in my lungs since I started talking, nerves pressing it and him stealing it all, and I’m pretty sure you’re heart is supposed to be beating around the clock.

When he pulls apart, Cal scoots forward in his seat to rest his head on the shoulder opposite of where his hand finds its home again. I respond by wrapping my arms around him as well as I can. It’s a little awkward for me, but I decide I don’t care fairly quickly.

“What changed your mind?”

I almost don’t hear him. Cal’s talking down towards my chest and my heart is still pretty quick, blood pumping in my ears. The cliche answer is him. Cal changed my mind. I want him way more than I’m scared, and I’m finally able to admit that to myself, to act on it like I should have earlier. But I only shrug, detach myself from him and move back into my own seat.

“How long have you wanted to ask me out?” I counter and he ducks his head, looking away from me out towards the parking lot as he settles back into his seat.

“Since the beginning of the summer.” He admits with a bit of blush that I think would be darker if we hadn’t been making out a few minutes ago.

“What? Dude, seriously?” I think I should have known that, but it hits me as a surprise. Hard. “That’s so long.” He chuckles at how obvious my statement is, looking back towards me unamused and playfully agitated, while I can’t look away from him bewildered. I think he realizes that I didn’t mean it as a play - it was just a fact hitting me because his eyes become less guarded relieving a sadness that cuts me deeper the longer he looks at me. With a quiet voice and a frown, I ask, “why didn’t you say anything?”

He gives me a small shrug, “I was okay with what we had.”

“Were you?” I challenge because I need to know.
Looking at me through his bangs I can see the answer to that question. “I didn’t want to date someone that wasn’t out, wasn’t planning to be, and I got the impression that your parents wouldn’t be that accepting of you coming out, so I was willing to take what I could get.” Cal sounds steady, but I can see the unease and distaste on his face in the lines around his eyes and his jaw tightens. “Was I wrong?” I wish he was, but I can only shake my head no as I can’t get the word itself off my tongue.

A silence settles between us. It feels heavy like we’re underwater but in separate tanks. Visible, but unable to touch. I cringe, hesitantly breaking the tanks, “When...when I told them about Bram - being gay, I mean, about when he came out publicly - they both got real quiet and then my mom says I have to stop being his friend. Just like that and she did it in this tone like it was a fact, like it was a chore I was just expected to do without...without any resistance.” I’m alternating between from talking at the speed of light and barely any words at all “Obviously despite what she wanted and what they said, that didn’t work...of course, it didn't work.” I lose my breath there, and for a minute I want to leave it there. Turn off my car and get out, just go in, but this is already started and this is Cal and so I make myself stay, shutting my eyes in order to focus on just getting words past my tongue.

“I was completely blindsided by their reaction; it was the last thing I expected - but that’s what it was. A complete 180 from liking Bram and thinking he’s a good influence on me to that ‘homo needs to be out of our lives’.” Not for the first time I try to go through my memories of my parents looking for any sort of sign, anything at all that I should have noticed with my parents in order to have known what they thought, to have prepared for this. I wonder what sort of difference that would have made.

“And you’re scared that will happen to you - that their opinion of you will change in such a manner?” Cal asks excepts we both know it’s not really a question so I don’t answer it.

My breath hitches and I can’t get enough air into my lungs much less manage any more words. I jump, just a bit, when I feel Cal’s fingers slide over my hand in order to hold it, but once he’s actually holding mine, I hold on probably hard enough to hurt. There are more things I want to say, I think, things that would make him understand - how much shit they talk about my best friend, how they make it sound like not being straight is some kind of sickness, how my mom gets all passive aggressive about things, saying things like ‘I hope your friend appreciates your loyalty. I would if your father and I had it’ as if I’m the problem choosing my friends over family, how they keep leaving articles about sin around even though none of us are really religious, how my dad hold his hands like he wants to act more than talk when we get into arguments. Things that make my blood boil, things that let me focus on being angry right now in hopes to use it - but I can’t get any of that out of my head and into the truck leaving the outrage buried under a mountain of fear and sadness.

Cal must have moved closer, leaned across the console, I think, because I’m leaning against my car door needing it to keep me up when his other hand cradles my cheek. It’s not until I feel his thumb swipe under my eye that I realize I’m crying. “Hey…” He starts and I think he wants me to open my eyes. I screw my eyes shut tighter and shake my head before settling back into the hand still there. “They’re my parents.” I say finally, it’s all desperation and rough air straight from my bones, “They’re wrong - unbelievably wrong about this! ...but they’re my parents....I don’t want them to hate me. I don’t want to lose them and that’s so stupid because apparently, they’re not as great of people as I thought they were…” Fear flares up in my chest, while a bunch of other emotions I can’t decipher fill my stomach in order to start a circus there until I want to throw them all up.

“You aren’t stupid for not wanting to lose your parents, Garrett.” Cal’s voice sounds wet. It makes me open my eyes having to adjust to the light, let the blur fade into focus. His voice might sound like he’s crying, but his eyes are dry. I lock eyes with him. I want to fall into the ocean of his eyes, just float until I can’t, until I sink beneath the surface where I don’t have to think about or face these
things.

Cal’s all apologetic in form and offering of help, with something hard under all of that which I don’t have myself together enough to understand right now. I worry that it’s pity or something self-sacrificing. None of this is his fault and none of this justifies how I treated him. It might explain it, but I…and him…and I don’t know anything right now more than what I feel which is that I’m shaking, I don’t want to let go of his hand, and I’m not sure how to deal with any of this involving us, much less the two things separately as evident by the last several months.

“What does it make me then?” I whisper.

Cal takes a deep breath as I watch him form his answer and I instinctively mimic the breath feeling a little bit more stable. “I think it makes you seventeen. It means you think they’ll change - can change and you want them to, but you’re scared they won’t. They’re your parents, Garrett, wanting them in your life does not make you a bad person or a bad friend...just hopeful.” I don’t know what to say to that, so I just let the words sink in so that I can work them out later. I want to agree, but I don’t know if I do, but I struggle to just dismiss it too. Maybe I’m just being hopeful that it's true.

It goes a little quiet as I try to process it all, the whole conversation, this whole morning. Then Cal leans over even further, he has to let go of my hand - my hand balls up instantly, nails digging into my palm - to brace himself on the car door behind me, to kiss my cheek while still holding the other side of my face. It kinda feels like understanding. Honestly though, I don’t want him to understand right now or to deal with it all of this still - I want to lean a little forward and try to swallow his lips, I want to grab his shirt and pull him over the console no matter how awkward a position that might put us in, but when I drag my eyes back to his eyes, I get what he’s being understanding about instantly.

“I’m still going to tell them.” I’m sure and I hope my voice depicts that. This, them, it doesn’t change what’s happening now. “I already said yes to you. No, take backs.” Cal’s eyes widen and he looks like he’s immediately going to protest, completely doesn’t register my joke, so I continue, “If we tell our friends, my parents will find out eventually anyway. They’re pretty active in the school and interact with other parents often enough that it would get back to them. They can’t hear about this from someone else.” It’s what I have to do, but knowing that doesn’t stop my nerves from lighting up like fire.

“Besides, it’s not like they’re going to hate me any less the longer I wait. Might as well get something good out of it.” I offer up a shaky smile. “You’re the something good, by the way,” I add flushing some when he doesn’t say anything right away. Slowly, Cal does return my smile, even if it doesn’t make it’s way all the way up to his eyes. It’s almost like it will be okay and I start to get back to breathing correctly, settling into his presence.

ew “I’m sorry, by the way, for how long this took me to figure all this out.”

Cal shakes his head, “you absolutely do not need to be sorry for any of this.”

“Yes, I do. They made their decisions and I made mine, the only person to blame for my actions is myself and I know I hurt you. I probably have no idea how much or how often I really have hurt you these last few months. You deserve an apology at the very least, and I promise to do a lot more than just apologize.” I explain, getting at least one more thing out of my head, one more thing that he needs to know. I try to sound adamant because I’m absolutely sure of this, but I don’t know if it actually comes across that way, or at least enough to break through his own beliefs with my breathing finally evening itself out leaving me light headed with this buzzing whirlwind of thoughts in my head that will not settle down. Saying I’m going to deal with my fear and really, out loud, committing to it are two different things.
I’m sure I need to do this though, I want to do this, but it’s no longer just in my head, now it’s out in the real world. It’s real and can be dealt with. I’m trying to think, but I can’t catch or hold onto any of the thoughts and feelings floating around in my spinning head long enough to make any sort of proper sentence out of it. I tell myself that that’s okay. I have time. I have more opportunities to talk, see, and kiss Cal from now on. More than what I’ve been living off of. I can do this and it’s worth it.

A deep breath to get rid of the heaviness of my voice and shoulders, slowing it all down until it’s been several minutes since either one of us has talked or moved. Calm in the way one is when emotional exhaustion settles in, “So, yeah, I’m going to tell my parents and I think we should go for broke with our friends. I mean Bram, Abby, and Taylor know bits and pieces so we might as well just lay it all out for everyone.” I lay it all out, pause and then add, “Does Taylor actually know - I just kinda assumed?”

“I didn’t tell her.” I hear what he’s saying and I believe him. Taylor knows, we both know that, but it’s not because anyone told her. She’s probably known since the beginning, honestly.

“Well, now you can.”

Cal is shaking his head when he closes the distance between us so that he can kiss me like it’s the middle of the afternoon, laying in the sun, all warm, lazy, and solid and totally making this conversation worth it. ”It’s kind of all or nothing for you, huh?” I laugh roughly and a little wetly still at his words before kissing him again.

I do get to pull him nearly completely over the console then, having him laying on me rather than beside me as we just kiss. The hand he had been using to lean on folds so it’s laying over my heart, while he keeps the one on my face there. I just hold him, keeping him as close as I can. The kisses are slow, a little messy with placement, but hardly anything calling for more. It all just tastes like this moment now, like promises, shaking smiles, and something pulled from the center of our cores.

Slowly the kisses end. When Cal becomes aware of things that aren’t me, he realizes his strained position and moves to sit back correctly taking my hand with him. When I’m a little more aware of the world besides him, I realize the parking lot isn’t so barren. A glance at the clock shows it’s only fifteen after seven and for a heartbeat I can’t believe that this whole morning has only lasted a little over an hour when it felt like it wouldn’t end.

“We should probably head in?” I suggest even though I don’t mean a single word of it. I don’t know how I’m supposed to deal with school after this conversation, after feeling like this. The school bell isn’t going to magically vanish all of this from my mind. “Unless you want to skip.” I offer with a small smile not completely joking.

Cal looks like he actually considers it for a moment but ultimately shakes his head. “Not today.” Another kiss, “but text me if you need to leave.” He adds seriously, worried, and honestly, I feel a little better at that, knowing that not only I can do that if things get out of hand for me, but also that he wants me to do that so that he can help.

I nod, swallowing down the emotions bubbling up my throat, feeling a little hot. “I’ll sit with you at lunch.” And the smile he gives me at that makes me a little more confident and unable not to lean over and steal another kiss, except neither of us break it quick enough and he catches my face with his hands while I drag my tongue across his bottom lip until he parts his lips so that our tongues can tangle.

Surprisingly enough I’m the one that breaks the kiss - usually, I’m the last person to want to stop kissing or touching Cal. “Class right?” I ask not quite moving out of his space.
A little slowly, Cal does nod. “Yes, we’re not skipping. Not the first day I can officially say your mine.” And I would laugh at that if it didn't sound ridiculously hot coming from him. One more kiss. And just one more, we keep saying until we’re left smiling, lips swollen, and for once on the same page of the same book.

Chapter End Notes

I've redone this one over and over and over again. I like this version the most, this back and forth, up and down in conversation felt the most realistic to me even if I still feel unsure about this.

The next chapters are them telling their friends and such.

I've been busy getting ready to start work again as I've been on vacation and traveling lately. This means that my time to write is going to decrease, that does not mean I'm going to stop writing. I have a few more chapters for this one and more things planned including for fluffy things as well as less fluffy things.
Eventually, though I’m not completely sure how, Cal and I get out of my truck unattached. No one really seems to pay attention to us getting out of the same car or even that we’re walking next to each other probably a little closer than needed. I only partly notice or even worry as I keep stealing glances at Cal beside me breaking up my intake of the rest of the world. Neither one of us is talking, but when either one of catches the other one looking our way I’m all quiet laughter and he’s abashed smiles.

It’s not until we step out of the parking lot and onto the sidewalk in front of the school that we really start to slide out of the bubble that was the events that occurred in my truck to actual school life. It leaves a weird sensation in the back of my mind as if all of that - all the good, all the bad, just all of it - is just waiting to come crashing back in, threatening and visible, but ultimately quiet. I don’t know if I like it any better or any worse than having all the fear and the nerves and the hope right there, attempting to pull me under the tide. It’s like being stuck on a raft in the middle of the ocean. The chance of survival is small and the threat of drowning is right there, separated by a thin sheet of plastic. Would it really be all that much worse to just jump overboard than letting the raft fall apart beneath you?

I look at Cal, thinking of oceans and boats and drowning, and remind myself that I kinda hate English and I really like Cal.

"You're staring."

I blink rapidly, embarrassment hitting my cheeks, turning back into the now to find Cal fidgeting in front of me, both of us stopped. He’s looking at me from under his bangs and he has this turn of lips that wants to be a smile but isn’t quite there yet. "Uh, sorry. I was just... thinking. It's good thinking."

Cal nods, relief finding the smile that was hidden on his lips. He then hikes a thumb back to where the choir and music rooms are away from the cafeteria where most students are before the bell. "I left my bag with Taylor, so I have to go meet her in the choir room."

"I'll come with you,” I say before I think about it, but I also don’t attempt to take it back. “I'm sure,” I add when I can see him about to offer me an out. “She already knows anyway, right?”

“Right.” He agrees and I follow after him when he starts off in the right direction.

I'm more aware of just how close I am to Cal now that there are more students milling about, but rafts are stupid and I can totally swim. Still, my heart is beating a little quick, and I'm a little more than just relieved that I only have to come out to our friends.

I alternate between focusing on my heartbeats and Cal and the text conversation that Bram's started up asking, as predicted, about me dashing off the moment I could yesterday. I almost text him about Cal, but I know I shouldn’t tell him this over text. He would definitely yell at me, Cal might too. I slide my phone back into my pocket.

When we hit the choir room, Taylor is on the other side of the room doing what I think are vocal scale exercise maybe? I'm like twenty percent sure I just made that up, but I bet I'd be able to sell it as true. Cal stops at the door, but I don’t register that quick enough so as I walk across the threshold,
Cal reaches out to grab my arm. Except, he doesn’t really grab me, just puts his hand right in front of my arm so that I become aware of him before contact is made. The hair on my arm stands up and it feels like a shock rather than a just a brush like it is.

It makes me look at him instead of the room. I don’t even know what it is, but I’m hit by the fact that we are dating now. We’re not just sneaking around anymore, hiding anymore. Cal is my boyfriend - and that is not a term I’ve used before for someone I was dating. I’m swept up by that notion a little astonished at it all really. Not only am I in a relationship, but I have a boyfriend and that boyfriend is Cal Price. I get that despite all this other shit that's occurred. It kinda takes my breath away in that cliche romantic movie sort of way.

Cal finally notices I’m staring - again - and arches an eyebrow in question at me, but I'm not lost in thought this time, just lost in him so I catch it right away. I grin, wanting to run my fingers through his hair, swept him up, kiss him, and I think he can tell because he takes this deep breath that leaves his lips parted just enough and he keeps looking at my lips. I really wish I had convinced him to stay in the car.

We both come to the realization at the same time, jerking our attention back to the room so that it's not on each other.

Taylor heading our way with what I assume are her and Cal’s bags. She’s beaming at Cal and the moment she sees he has his attention launches into telling him about practice or the play maybe? I kinda missed the important bits coming back to the situation at hand that doesn't involve putting my hands on Cal. I'm on just a bit of autopilot as I follow Cal into the room so that he can take his bag from Taylor. It's only then that Taylor acknowledges my presences, but it's not to greet me in any way. She looks me up and down in what is pure sour judgment and then turns to Cal crossing her arms.

For most of high school, the only thing I knew about Taylor Metternich was that she's in theater and that she's full of herself. Then I heard about her lashing out at some homophobic assholes that went to bother Spier at theater practice last year. Then I went to the cast party at her house and saw a house proclaiming the accomplishments of her brother but none of her’s. Then I started messing around with her best friend. Then I started dating her best friend. And while I can totally make assumptions and they might even be right, I realize that the only thing I really know for sure about Taylor is that her opinion of me is going to matter from this point forward.

“Taylor,” Cal says, voice unamused, in response to whatever silent conversation Taylor and him are apparently having.

Taylor scoffs, but does pivots just so to face me, “Hello there.” Despite the fact that I have her attention, the comment comes off as offhanded, an afterthought really. I wonder if that’s some sort of actor thing. Whatever it is, it’s a little unsettling to look someone in the eye when they’re totally not seeing you.

Still. Cal’s best friend.

“Hey, Metternich. How was...your voice practice thing?” I ask waving at the room around us. When I let my hands drop back to my side, Cal’s knuckles brush against mine. I hook out pinkies together instantly and I hear him let out a small breath of air he was no doubt holding on to, unsure if I would take the chance he offered.

Taylor looks down only for a second to look at my and Cal’s hands, before answering my question. “I’m a natural talent, Garrett, so it, of course, it went well.” In another situation, I would have rolled my eyes at the size of her ego, even if it was well-deserved. “How was your morning?”
And this is it, I think. What I say now doesn’t only affect how Taylor sees me, but it also affects Cal’s trust and my promises. “Actually, yeah. It was pretty awesome.” Some of it actually sucked majorly, but a good amount of it was also really great, so I focus on those parts while talking to Taylor. I spare a glance at Cal to find he’s sneaking glances at me as well in anticipation. I meet Taylor’s eyes. “Cal asked me out.” I declare moving from just hooking pinkies to full on holding of hands.

“And you said what?”

“No.” I deadline, “I’m just holding his hand and talking to his best friend for no reason.” Cal elbows me at that, but he looks amused when I swing my head to look at him. I don’t want to look away and it’s not just because I don’t want to look at Taylor. He’s just really pretty and completely unbelievable and my boyfriend. “Yes, Metternich, I said yes. I’d be crazy to say no. I might be a lot of things, but crazy isn’t one of them.” Cal blushes, the smile he’s wearing turning soft in the process.

Taylor doesn’t say anything until I give her my attention again a few seconds later. She has a hand on her hip and she has all her weight on the foot closest to Cal, causing her to lean away from me in which I think is not at all by happenstance. She’s keeping her face pretty neutral, maybe a small smile hidden at the corners of her lips that is most certainly not for me. “Well… we’ll see if crazy would have been better.” And then she walks through our hands, breaking them, looping her arm around Cal’s in order to lead both of them to the door. I can hear Cal sigh at her, say something I can’t make out to her.

I want to know what he’s saying to her. He looks back at me twice which I return with a smile despite my frustration with Taylor. They aren’t at the door yet when other students start coming in and I realize that Taylor probably kept them from seeing me and Cal holding hands. And even though I don’t believe for a second she did that on purpose, I have to be grateful at least partly.

Well, at least I know for sure now that Taylor totally knew what was going on this whole time and, okay it sorta looks like she’s not too pleased about it. Which I’m torn between understanding she probably got to actually see a lot of things Cal kept from me this summer and thinking she has no idea what’s happening, she doesn’t get to judge me like that. I run a hand through my hair, before ducking out of the room.

Bram’s texts me again and I stop to lean against a set of lockers in order to hide my phone out of sight of teachers or the vice-principal walking the halls. I know that Bram’s just worried and not trying to unintentionally add to the irritation I’m feeling, so I get myself to just type out that I’ll see him in class, before putting my phone back away with no intention of getting it back out. I don’t move from the lockers right away though. Instead, I stay there leaned against the cool metal among the passing student body lost in my head.

Cal isn’t beside me anymore, he’s not in my line of sight. He’s still my boyfriend and I still want to tell people that. Taylor’s known since the beginning, so if she really disapproved as much as it looked like, then she would have said something to Cal long before now. Right? I think of course that’s right because this isn’t the place for me to overthink this, despite feeling the weight of this morning rising up. There’s a lot of things to freak out about right now, but in the middle of the hallway at my school is not the place to do so. Taylor just gotten a bit under my skin, is all. Still, what if more of our friends act like Taylor rather than more celebratory like I was sure they’d react up until a few minutes ago?

Fuck Taylor, getting me worried like this. My friends’ reactions was not something I was truly worried about - I mean, I was, but in the way that I knew was just me thinking the worst, because I
know my friends and who they are. And that's still true. That's still true. That's still true.

At least I upset Taylor as much as she upsets me.

Cal's best friend. She's not nearly as bad as the rest of the shit that's happened in relation to Cal and I. I can deal with this and she can deal with me because I'm sticking around. Because Cal and I are dating. Because Cal is my boyfriend. Boyfriend. I repeat the lines to myself like a mantra as I push myself off my lockers and head towards English.

It took fucking months for me to process, deal, and accept that dating Cal was something I wanted, something I could have. Cal had to deal with that process and he stuck around and now I get the chance to repay some of that patience and trust by coming out to our friends, being public with him to our friends. I get to do that for myself and him. And it's going to go fine, better than fine even. How my friends react is not something I need to be worried about.

No, what I should really be thinking about is how I'm going to get the words out and when. Shit. I hit my seat just as the bell rings signaling the start of the school day with wide eyes and a worrying headspace. I tell myself not to get worked up, that if I need it I can text Cal, I can step out. I tell myself I can handle this.

Bram, Spier, and Nick have once again won the claim to the worn down and weary couch Mr. Wise keeps in the room while Leah and Abby are taking up the closest desks on the side near Nick and Spier.

I have both Abby’s and Bram’s attention the moment I enter the classroom, though I don't realize it until I sit down. I look at Abby first, she's a safer bet. She's obviously looking for any sign that what she walked in on yesterday really did happen. Wow, that was only yesterday. This is going to be a really long week, I think with a shake of my head a little more amused than any bothered by the thought. Abby comes up short - Cal's the one with anything visible, after all - but her suspicions aren't cleared if the way she narrows her eyes at me means anything. I just shrug at her, smiling and feeling a little more solid. Abby knows, after all, and she was fine with it all even considering how she found out. It's all going to be fine.

I look away from her to my best friend. I'm not at all to find Bram studying me with concern on his features, but there must be something on my face because when I match his gaze the concern disappears and something made of curiosity finds its home in the vacancy. Bram starts to lean forward, but I shake my head as I pull my notes for this class out, “I'll tell you later.” I promise instead of just blurting it out to him that I'm actually dating Cal along with everything else that has happened these past months with Cal, because the words are hard to find and right now really isn't a good time, I tell myself. After all, it's not long before Mr. Wise starts class giving me something else to take up my mind.

Chapter End Notes

I ended up adding to like three other stories in this verse I have planned circling back to this one only when I figured out how it's actually going to work out. I have the next chapter mostly written and moving in the right direction so that should be out sooner rather than later. I'm not entirely sure how long this will be - four or five chapters I think. So enjoy!!
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Cal is bad for Garrett's GPA and takes really awful notes for chemistry.

Chapter Notes

This is a short one that works more as a transition than actual progress on Garrett's part. The next chapter will be much longer and things happen. Things also happen in this chapter, don't let me fool you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cal is really bad for my GPA.

He’s in my second class, along with Taylor, but we have assigned seats so I’m at the back of the class with Cal across the room in the front. I’ve paid more attention to him than anything my teacher has said today. I’d bet it has something to do with math, but that’s only because I’m currently in math so I think it’s a pretty safe bet. If I thought not being able to touch Cal was hard before, I don’t know how I’m going to get through the rest of my classes now.

Which is something I’m going to have to get over even if I don’t really want to because I’m aware, sort of, that even if I was next to him right now, I couldn’t just grab his hand. And not just because our friends don’t know yet.

Seeing Bram and Spier in English reminded me of how careful they are around each other in public, especially with physical affection, even though they’re both out and official. I’ve talked to Bram about it before, listened to him when he gets upset about it. Even if Bram and Spier prefer not to be that physical in public with each other, the fact that they don’t really get that choice is completely unfair.

And now it’s something I’m going to have to deal with, figure out with Cal. I’m a pretty tactile person in general but even more so in a relationship. I know it would be somewhat safer to be physical in public with both Cal and I being white where Bram and Spier along with being gay also have to deal with being a mixed race couple, especially in Georgia, but it’s still something be conscious of.

It wasn’t something I had thought about before now though. Not applied to myself anyways. I think about all the stupid shit Bram has to deal with from ignorant assholes pretty regularly, especially with how often I hear ignorance from my own parents regarding him. But it was never something I thought I would be able to really understand, I could only be sympathetic to the situation.

I’ve been dealing with a whole lot of other things that this coming up has me wondering what other shit I haven’t thought about yet that’s going to come up now that things with Cal are finally set right.

It’s hard to think about it, especially when I can see Cal right now and still remember this morning
where I had his lips on mine. My thoughts and feelings are kinda all over the place, jumping around and causing my leg to shake with nerves. I’ve been really high and low, concerned, scared, sure, irritated, and out of my mind, all in a really short amount of time today and I know it’s not going to even out anytime soon today. So I need to not fight my feelings on this, just ride them out and do what I need to do.

And right now that’s math.

I try to focus as much as I can on the math going on at the front of the class, letting everything else simmer at the back of my thoughts. I’m really glad math isn’t a subject I have a lot of trouble in, because otherwise I’d be really screwed. By the end of the lesson, I at least know what chapter we’re on in the book, so I count that as a win as I gather up my things.

Cal is waiting outside in the hall after class, of course, he’s talking to Taylor. I only hesitant for a second before joining them. “I’ll see you at lunch.” I hear Taylor say before I actually make it to them. She gives me a smile that’s not really friendly before departing for good. I worry my lip as I watch as she passes, before leaning on the lockers in front of Cal.

“She hates me, right?” I ask looking from where I lose her in the crowd to Cal. He smiles like this is really funny, which it’s not, thank you. At least, she knows about Cal and me, I think. That’s done with. Getting her to like me is something that can be dealt with later on. That’s not what I need to deal with today.

“I don’t.” Cal sideways the conversation, and it’s really hard not to smile at that while looking at him. Hearing him say that also helps back up my decision not to worry about Taylor today. Her not liking me isn’t that big of a deal - it’s not changing Cal’s opinion of me. “Now come on, we have class.” He says pushing off the lockers, I follow without saying anything. We head to our chemistry class, and if I’m closer than I need to be to him well I’ll blame it on the number of students in the hallways. Cal doesn’t seem to mind.

As usual, Spier is already in the classroom and is sitting at the back table with an empty seat beside him when we walk in. I can see Cal looking at me, how he’s gotten half a step behind me, as he waits once again on me. I shake my head, leaning back to tap his elbow to encourage him to follow me to the table in front of Spier. Cal taking the seat next to me leaves me a little like I’m going to faint despite wanting him there.

It’s just that seeing Spier makes me think of about him and Bram again and how Cal and I should probably figure out where we stand on things like that and how this is hard and that I want to take his hand but I need to tell our friends first, not announce it to everyone in the room. It leaves me hyper-aware of Cal and myself, trying not to give anything away by overcompensating what I think is normal behavior for me.

It’s not strange that Cal is sitting next to me.

His friends Claire and Ethan also share this class and the three of them seem to alternate which one of them sits at a different, but usually nearby table, since the lab tables are set up for partners. And unless I steal Bram from Spier there’s no system for who sits next to me. After all, I get along with most people in the class. Well, not Spencer, but who would want him to sit next to them, really? Mostly it’s one of the student trainers, Melanie Hampton, that I interact with at practice and games that shares a table with me. But it’s not like other people don’t sit next to me, it’s not like Cal hasn’t sat next to me before in this class.

So it’s not weird. It’s a totally everyday occurrence, except for where it totally isn’t because it’s definitely on purpose that Cal - that my boyfriend is sitting next to me. I duck my head to get my
things for the class out, though really it’s to hide the heat I feel rising in my face because I’m sure it would give away everything in my head.

I catch a glance from Cal it’s a little calming and a little overwhelming but is ultimately fleeting as his friends enter the classroom taking the table in front of us, taking up his attention to greet them. Cal leans forward on his forearms, making the lines of his back more prominent in my vision, and Claire moves her chair closer to Ethan and Cal as they fall into some conversation that I want to be part of. I also want to trace down his spine. I stay out of the conversation and keep my hands to myself.

It’s not new that Cal is sitting next to me, I repeat to myself, realizing it’s also not new that I want him there.

“Garrett?” I jump, a little embarrassed at being taken by surprise and probably at being caught staring. Bram is shaking his head when I turn to find him taking his seat beside his boyfriend. “Sorry, man.”

I wave off the apology. “Don’t worry about it. I wasn’t paying attention.” Bram gives me this look that says he totally noticed that and might have even noticed why I wasn’t paying attention. Except I’m not sure if he actually put it together, if I’m just being paranoid, or if Bram is just looking for what he wants to see and is aware of it.

Ever since the beginning of this school year when I asked Bram for advice about what to do about Cal without mentioning it being Cal that I was talking about, he’s been taking any interaction I have with a guy and skewes it until he’s sure that this is the guy I was talking about.

So, really, this look probably has nothing to do with a solved puzzle or paranoia. It’s just him playing this game. And it’s actually a rather entertaining game - one that makes my blood pressure spike and knows doesn’t really have a loser - but a game nonetheless. In fact, a little more than a week ago, we were hanging out and he just started listing any guy we know that he could think of. Some of his guesses had me both insulted and amused by what he thinks of my tastes and we had both been laughing by the time the conversation moved on. Thankfully, he hadn’t gotten to listing guys in theater at the time. I’m not sure I could have outright lied if he asked if it was Cal I was crushing on.

Actually… I don’t have to lie.

I could totally tell Bram - and Spier since he’s sitting right here - that I’m dating Cal right now. The class would probably start up before we got to the part where I have to deal with answering awkward questions, cause that’s totally going to be a thing, so that’s certainly a plus.

I totally could. But I don’t. “You need something?” I say instead frowning a bit at myself. I tell myself it’s because I don’t want to do it before class like this. I think it’s even partly true.

“I was wondering if you were going to tell me about whatever it is that’s going on with you?” Bram asks very clearly with a smile that’s all curiosity. I think he knows what I want to tell him is about the conversation we had before - about the guy I’m crushing on.

And it totally is.

And it’s totally another opening to actually tell him.

“Oh,” I grin to swallow my nerves and accidentally swallow my courage right along with it, “no.” Spier laughs as Bram tells me to just tell him already. “I will later, at lunch when we have time. Don’t worry, dude. It’s not like the end of the world or anything.” It only feels a little like that to me.

Bram leans forward to shove at me and tells me he’s not helping me with English until I do tell him
with a broad grin that I easily return.

“Cruel.” I express, in which, Spier immediately agrees with me.

“But justified.” Bram counters

“I don’t know about that, Bram. I read Garrett’s last English paper.” Spier says.

I laugh cringing as I recalled my last paper. It had been a mess that I wrote on a Monster-fueled high after remembering it was due the next day. I can’t even remember what it was supposed to have been about much less what I actually wrote about, “I feel like I should be insulted by that, but I know who I am, Spier.” I say in succession to Bram asking his boyfriend why he’s taking my side on this. I’m not really sure he is taking my side, but it’s great to see Spier try to backtrack the conversation.

I abandon them to their friendly domestic dispute with a shake of my head and a wave of my hand, turning to face the front of the room. I try to ignore the pulling at my being I feel to turn back around and just tell them. I try to ignore my want of moving closer to Cal. I try to just focus on Ms. Gilpatrick starting class.

Ten minutes. I manage a whole ten minutes of constant note taking, before I slouch forward putting my elbow on the table and my chin in my hand, my handwriting getting messier as I focus less on the words I’m writing and more on stealing glances at Cal.

He’s taking notes and for a minute I wonder how he does this. Not just the pay attention to class thing, but the whole hiding feelings thing. I have to be obvious here, always looking at him, stealing looks when I can while it doesn’t seem to be the case for him. I’m afraid of what it might say about him, about me, about us, but then I think about this summer and how I hardly knew what was going on with him feeling wise. And yeah, a lot of that was my fault, but Cal is also really good at keeping a straight face. He’s got the whole not giving anything away thing down pact. It’s easier to read him, he’s less guarded I think when there are more lips on skin verse lips forming words. He’s a lot more telling in those moments.

Maybe that’s why I like kissing him so much. I get a chance to listen to what he’s not always saying. Maybe I can start to get those moments with spoken word, now that I’m not caught up in my own head.

“Okay, everyone, these are the questions for this chapter that I want you all to work on for the rest of class. Whatever you don’t get done today will be homework. I want it tomorrow at the beginning of class.” Ms. Gilpatrick instructs listing out numbers for the questions she wants on the whiteboard drawing me away from my thoughts back to class.

I might not have been paying that much attention to the lecture, but I’m actually good at chemistry. I even like it too unlike my math class where I get the material but is bored by it all. Plus it helps that it’s still early enough in the year that we’re just expanding on topics that have been introduced in previous science courses. So, I don’t have any problem getting started with the work. I’m like seventy percent sure that I could get the problems done by the end of class, well, if it wasn’t for the fact that I can’t keep my mind straight.

I stretch, trying to pop my shoulders but don’t succeed on that or feeling more centered leaving me with a grimace. I look down at my paper, the book and my notes open above me on the table. The letters lose focus and I know they totally form words and questions, but the details are lost. This time when I look over at Cal, he’s already staring my way.
He smiles amused when I jump, startled at being caught trying to steal a glance despite the fact that if anyone got caught staring it should totally have been Cal and not me. Despite the fact that catching him looking leaves a warm pit in my gut.

“You mind helping me? Chemistry isn’t my class.” Cal asks.

“Oh, sure. Yeah, okay.” I move my chair closer to his and lean over to look at his paper. While I’m pretty sure this is just an excuse to be closer on his part, I’m aware that Cal actually does struggle with chem and I don’t want him to get a bad grade so I focus on the work and not how easy it would be to steal a kiss right now.

I end up walking him through two problems and get halfway through the third one, “uh, actually we had a similar problem like this as an example a day ago. Here, where are your notes?” Grabbing my own notes means I would have to move away from him, and I’ve decided I’m rather partial to being able to feel the heat coming off his skin, so I reach over to pick up the spiral Cal had been writing in earlier rather than turning away.

Cal tears the spiral from my fingers, clutching it to his chest as color dust across his face. We’re both a little wide-eyed though mine is due to surprise and Cal just looks apprehensive, on the verge of embarrassment I think. After a heartbeat to let the situation actually register in my head, I slowly retract my hand back to myself as I duck my head to keep myself from leaning over and kissing him right then and there. Partly as an apology for grabbing at the spiral, but mostly because he looks pretty and shook and there aren’t a lot of times when I don’t actually want to kiss him.

I make myself laugh, though it’s not too hard, playing down the situation before I look back up to him, bringing my hands up in mock surrender to find him looking relieved with a small sheepish smile. “Okay, okay. Don’t worry, dude. That’s obviously not your notes like I thought…” except that was totally the spiral he had out all class. I bite my lip, “… what is in there? Do you even have notes for this class?”

“I’m not telling you that and yes,” Cal answers putting that spiral into his bag in order to bring out a different notebook.

“Normally, you have to have that out to write in it.”

“Very funny.” He deadpans handing me the notes. I open it, trying to find the right lesson. And okay, I know Cal has problems with chem because it simply doesn’t interest him, but I’m beginning to think the major reason he’s having trouble with this class is because he takes awful notes - which I did not see coming. I’ve seen the binder he has for theater, the one with the script printed out with detailed notes, color coded, all up and down the pages.

“What’s funny is you thinking these are notes.” I tease with a shake of my head.

“They’re not that bad.”

“I disagree.” I think I’ve found the lesson I’m looking for, except the example Ms. Gilpatrick used that day is totally not there. “No, no - wait. I need to take a second, here.” Closing the spiral, I play up the idea that his version of notes are taking a physical toll on me.

“You’re being a jerk.” He shoves at me not completely lightly, but I don’t lose my balance, I just lose my control over not laughing. It’s quiet and fun and good-natured. We both settle into silly smiles and lack of personal space.

The bell for class ends before my willpower not to touch him does. I’m not entirely sure it’s a good
thing.

“Oh, uh…” I lean away, blushing as I stumble to start picking up my things. “Actually, here.” I push my notes into his hands. “You can use it for help with the homework seeing as you need it more than I do… if you want to anyways.”

Gently, Cal takes the spiral catching my fleeting eyes, “Thank you, Garrett.”

“Yeah, it’s no problem, at all.” I rush the words zipping my bag up and pulling it onto my shoulders. When I stand and pivot towards the door I find Bram and Spier are waiting for me by the door so that we can head to lunch together like normal. Thankfully they don’t seem to be paying much attention to anyone but each other, so they don’t see me freeze.

Cal steps away for our table to join his friends as they head to the door, with only one look back at me, and I’m struck with a different kind of uncertainty that I’m used to feeling today. It’s not the ‘what the fuck am I doing’, but ‘how the fuck am I doing this’ kind of uncertainty. Should I catch up with Cal or do what I normally do so that I can tell Bram and them. It kinda feels like I’m picking a side right now which is ridiculous because there aren’t sides, but I can’t help but feel like this red or blue pill situation and I’m totally colorblind.

I go over to my friends, my grip gets a little tight around my backpack’s strap, and just after they register I’m there and before they actually say anything, “Hey, I gotta run by Ms. Frompton’s room real quick. I’ll see you guys in a bit.” I lie, gritting my teeth while trying to look like I’m not.

“Oh, alright then. See you then, Garrett.” Spier says as we move out into the hallway. Bram kinda looks like he has more to say, but ultimately just nods and follows after his boyfriend as I start to walk in the opposite direction, walking right past Cal and his friends. I most certainly notice Cal’s eyes follow me for a moment, but to be honest it’s a little hard not to notice when I was already looking at him. I offer up a thin smile as I get lost in the student body.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo......the next chapter is already written and I have poor impulse control so I’ll probably post that up this week as well if I don’t just post both tonight. Also, also I hope yall enjoyed this bit. I know he hasn’t told anyone yet, but just wait next time he tries to tell people he’ll succeed, promise! And I can promise that seeing as I know what happens next.

P.S. Thank you all for your continue support!!!
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The definition of lunch is socializing levels of noise, possible heart attacks, and hand holding. Right?
Well, for Garrett it certainly is.

Chapter Notes

Seriously, no impulse control...and then CaliLunaLeila said I should post it and I give into peer pressure, guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I don’t actually go very far, just far enough and long enough to feel like I’m detached from the cafeteria and the people in it. I take a few deep breaths once I remember how to do that as I apparently had forgotten how to breathe once I left the classroom.

It’s ridiculous that I’m not in lunch right now. That I walked down the hall, around a few corners to literally circle back around to where Ms. Gilpatrick’s classroom is. It’s empty of students right now, but she’s still there going around the lab tables to picking up things students have left behind. I almost go in and ask if I can help her.

I don’t. Even I recognize that the idea is just me stalling, but I do pause.

It had all been theory and promises right up until I was standing right there and then it felt like a choice with not enough answers and none of the answers even being correct. And yeah, I want to keep my promise and not let Cal down and feel a little less like I’m lying to people all the time, but in that moment it was fucking everything and all I could do was take a step back. I had to do it, but I also have to go to the cafeteria, talk to my friends, and sit with Cal because I’m actually dating him now and I don’t get to keep running away.

I can hear the students in the cafeteria before I actually get to where I can see through the propped open doors. It’s the type of noise that comes with everyone talking loud enough so that people at their table hears them meaning that when you’re not part of the noise, surrounded by it, it just sounds too loud and physically assaulting. My stomach attempts a somersault but it doesn’t have the focus to succeed, ultimately falling hard to the floor making me almost trip. I didn’t plan on eating anyways, I think trying not to revisit the idea of turning around.

I manage. I bite down hard on the inside of my cheek, feeling the scar-like line of where this habit has worn down the tissue there, but I do manage.

However, the sound of students socializing does weigh down on my thoughts, muddling things there as my attention gets pulled and startled by snippets of conversations, so that by the time I make it to my friends at our normal table, everything I feel is more of a dissociated, compression along the inside of my skin rather than the vast everything and nothing floating around in my skull.
I sit down sideways at the end next to Eisner at the end of the table, refusing to sit properly so that I can easily get up, so that I can’t stay there. I immediately catch Bram and Spier’s attention after having taken off on them earlier.

“Hey, everything work out with your teacher, Garrett?” Bram asks all concerned like the good friend he is, which kinda makes it suck even more that I had lied to him about that and a whole bunch of other things now that I really think about it. I smile shakily at him, nodding as I try to figure out how to say the things I want to say. I probably should have thought more on how I was going to do that.

Abby is sneaking glances at me as she talks to Leah, Morgan, and Anna, the three of which who are in a deep conversation about something internet and forum related. Well, I think anyways. I can’t actually make out their words nor do I really have the brain power to try and make any of it out.

“Yes. Yeah, actually. Got it all worked out.” I finally respond, choking on the end of the sentence until I’m coughing so badly that Nick offers me his drink and my eyes water a little. I thank him and give him his water back once I get my coughing fit under control despite my throat still being dry. “I’m good. Good, just, uh…” There really isn’t a good ‘how to’ for this sort of stuff and I don’t really have the tack to not go all in right now, “and I’m dating Cal by the way.”

Nick is putting his water back down on the table but freezes with the bottle just off the table. “What?” I force myself to look at him when I hear the hitch in his voice to confirm that there are no negative emotions there. He’s just legitimately surprised which makes sense, I suppose.

“Cal Price?” Leah asks, jerking my eyesight down the table to her. I honestly wasn’t sure if the girls actually heard me or not since they had been in a conversation. Anna and Morgan are looking at each other as if to make sure they come to the same conclusion on the matter while Abby is smiling at me like she’s proud and even a little smug as if she knew this all along even though she only figured out yesterday - and we weren’t even dating then, which I kinda want to tell her, call her out on, but ultimately I don’t because good-natured teasing isn’t something I can do even if I would like to. I’m too high strung at the moment.

It doesn’t help my nerves that Leah sounds a little accusatory. Hell if I know what she might be accusing me of. It’s not like I’m making a joke or would be the type of guy to just mess around with some theater geek, someone she considers a friend. At least I hope she knows that I’m not - does she think that? Regardless of why it has me jumping to defend myself.

“Yeah. Cal Price - he’s my boyfriend.” I try for light, but judging by Abby’s grimace past Leah I don’t exactly succeed.

I don’t really care though, because that’s the first time I’ve said that word aloud, it’s the first time I’ve heard it spoken in reference to me. Boyfriend. It slams into me, disconnecting me from the conversation, as I process how… good that sounded. It loosens all the tension in my shoulders and all the defense I’m feeling drains as I find that foundation to stand on that I really need right now. Wow. Boyfriend.

I want to say it again, but Nick speaks up then bringing me back to the conversation, which kinda bites down on my good feeling I had found. “So you’re like bi then?” Nick asks as Leah stays quiet, studying me. It makes me nervous, and I start bouncing my leg as I look away from her.

“I’m going with pansexual,” I answer quieter than I’ve been speaking with so far, a slight waver in my words that make it sound like I’m flinching.

Nick nods in acknowledgment, not necessarily in agreement as he stars unfocused ahead of him.
Which I worry about for all of a second before he looks at me and follows it up with, “What’s that exactly?” I laugh wetly with relief.

“It means he likes people for the sake of them being people, regardless of something like sex.” Morgan jumps into explain and then gives me a thumbs up as Anna tacks on a, “Good for you, Garrett.” I smile thankfully at them, genuinely pleased that they answered for me and their vocalized support. It’s greatly needed right now.

“Alright, cool dude.” Nick says getting my attention back, “that sounds good, but I gotta say Cal can totally do better than you.” Fuck Eisner. I shove at him while he just waves me off to start eating his lunch again going back to normal, like this doesn't change anything which is pretty awesome. Leah agrees with Nick and I’m pretty sure she actually believes that, which okay, yeah I totally agree too so I can’t hold anything against her for that. Not if I’m not holding it against Taylor, which I’m trying really hard not to.

I think about getting up right then and going to find Cal, but I don’t. Instead, I look across the table at Spier and Bram suddenly very aware that they haven’t said anything.

Spier looks so goddamn delighted, he’s literally biting his knuckle to keep himself quiet which is probably the only reason he’s been quiet for so long now that I think about, but once he sees he has my attention drops his hand. I’m positive he almost started clapping right then. “That’s amazing! I’m so happy for you two. Like Cal is so sweet. Oh - we can go on double dates now!” I’m like fifty percent sure Spier might be happier about me dating Cal than I am about me dating Cal. Which is definitely an achievement. His grin is infectious and my shoulders sag in relief.

All the fear, all the problems up until now, Cal is totally worth it all and it’s a wave of warmth knowing I get to share that with my friends now like Bram, Spier, Nick and the rest of them. “Cal is really great, yeah.” I agree softly, still static and chuckling a little at the idea of double dates. For some reason, I don’t think Spier is going to drop the idea anytime soon. It’s not like I’m completely opposed to such an idea, it’s just Cal and I need a real official date first.

And still, I’m aware of the all those condensed emotions feeling like pins stabbing into my skin from the inside of me as I turn my focus on Bram. He’s staring at me, but I don’t think he really sees me. Slowly, the rest of the table becomes aware of what’s happening, silence settling awkwardly on everyone's shoulders. I literally don’t understand what’s going on, but it kinda feels like the ground is moving beneath me. I have to be on some prank show. Like everyone already knew because I’ve been so obvious so they’re playing some prank. Except it’s not really funny and everyone else looks way too confused for it to be a joke. They aren’t that good of actors.

“Uh...Bram?” Spier prompts some of his excitement turning to astonishment, saving me from trying to find my voice in favor of trying to get my head around what’s happening.

Bram jumps, swinging his head to look at his boyfriend, who motions over towards me silently until Bram catches on and turns to focus on me. Fucking finally Bram says, “What? No - that’s great, Garrett. Of course, I'm happy for you. It’s just - I really never guessed Cal?”

“Seriously?” I clutch my chest not nearly dramatic enough for the crashing of emotions I’m feeling, shaking my head of all the nerves as relief and hysteria settles in its place. “Seriously, Bram?”

“Seriously?” I clutch my chest not nearly dramatic enough for the crashing of emotions I’m feeling, shaking my head of all the nerves as relief and hysteria settles in its place. “Seriously, Bram?”

“Yes - of course, but wait really? I didn’t guess Cal?” Bram asks not quite back into the present to properly register how he had scared me, how I thought the fucking impossible was going to happen somehow for a really long fucking heartbeat.

I can’t stop shaking my head at him, at the others, at this situation, at myself, while getting to my feet.
I wave him off my nerves completely shot leaving me a little shaky. “No, you really didn’t. And for the record that’s what I wanted to talk to you about this morning so now you have to help me with my English.” The words might be a little short, but I’m trying to smile into them as I start to look around to get my bearings. “Also, I’m leaving you a lot.”

“Going to find your boy? Just remember to lock the door this time.” Abby teases after me causing my face to heat up and a few of the others - namely Spier and Leah - to ask what she means by that. Oh god. I run a hand through my hair, trying to get out of earshot of her response.

I slow down as I move closer and closer to where Cal is sitting with his friends near the edge of the room. He’s leaning on his hand, looking away from me as he’s listening to something Claire and another girl that I know is in theater as well as in the year above us is saying. Cal has totally mentioned her before, but I can’t recall her name. Cal’s listening, but he doesn’t look completely engaged in the conversation or lunch as he just keeps tapping the plastic fork on the top of the school provided mash potatoes and I wonder if that’s because of me or if I’m just being egotistical.

Taylor, however, does notice me walking towards them. She’s sitting by Cal’s side with Claire on the other side of him and the brunette across from Claire with Ethan beside her. Taylor disconnects from the conversation immediately and I can’t tell if she’s happy to see me or not. I’m surprised when she stands up then and for a second I think she’s going to tell me to get lost. She doesn’t. The others slowly take notice of her movement and thus follow her gaze to me. Including Cal who looks way too surprised that I’m actually there for my liking.

Taylor takes the seat next to Ethan and it’s only when she’s sitting again, slides her lunch across the table, and turns to look at me pointedly that I realized she’s letting me sit next to Cal. I really don’t know what to do with Taylor. Like I’m pretty sure she’s planning to kill me, but she’s going to be polite which is unsettling, but... reassuring?

I try very hard to ignore Taylor and Cal’s friends staring at me, focusing instead on Cal. And honestly, I don’t have to try that hard as focusing on Cal, especially since he's still wearing that shirt that makes his eyes appear a deeper blue, is damn easy.

“Uh, can I sit here?”

Cal’s surprise gives away to this pleased smile and soft gaze that sets deep into his features, hacking any other emotion off his face. “Absolutely.” He doesn’t have to tell me twice. I don’t look away from him as I take the seat, sitting close enough that our knees brush.

I have to drop my gaze so that I don’t kiss him none too chastely. “Uh, we haven’t really talked about what we’re okay with doing in public so I’m not really sure what to do here,” I admit very quietly. I register on some level that the rest of the table is just looking at us, and probably heard me despite how quiet I’m being.

Cal hums, nodding, maybe as unsure as I am, before he offers me his hand just below the table. “Well, how are you with holding my hand right now?” I know the answer before he finishes the question without a single second of doubt.

“I can do that,” I answer lacing our fingers together, feeling a million times better and all the more crazy. Like I’m at lunch with my boyfriend and his friends, holding his hand. This guy that has totally flipped my life in all the good ways. This guy that I’ve been kissing for months now. This guy that’s totally a guy when until him all my dates have been with girls.

This guy that I’m gone for.
I really don’t know how I got to this point. I don’t believe I got here. Like I should be waking up any minute now, really.

I don’t wake up - thank, God - but Ethan breaks Cal and I’s lost-in-studying-each-other-attention by clapping just lightly, it’s more of a single thud than anything else, near our faces. I jerk my head and attention to him, and I’m beyond pleased to see that Cal has to do the same apparently having been just as lost as I was.

“Excuse me, what is happening right here?” Ethan asks the moment he sees he has our attention.

Claire gingerly raises her hand to shoulder height, “I would also like to know what’s going on.” Where Ethan demanded an answer in the way only friends manage to make seem friendly, Claire sounds dumbfounded and curious, much less aggressive.

I look down to Cal, catching his gaze I shrug a little. They’re his friends, but if he wants me to tell them for some reason, some kind of proof or reassurance I would try to. I know I would try, succeeding though is a fifty-fifty percent chance. Cal doesn’t need the offer, “Garrett’s my boyfriend.” And really that sounds even better coming from him than it did saying it myself. I couldn’t stop myself from smiling at that even if I tried. I have no reason to try.

“Okay, new question,” Ethan responds without any pause, though maybe that’s a smile pulling at his features. “When did this right here start happening?” This time his words are accompanied by motioning in a circle at Cal and I with his hand.

“Officially, this morning.” Cal answers and I’m already grateful that my friends didn’t get to the point of asking questions so quickly. Though, I guess they did have more to process. Not only was there the fact that Cal was my boyfriend, but also the fact that I had a boyfriend. Plus I left as soon as I knew things were okay with all of them.

“Unofficially?” Claire asks and I think the smile she’s wearing is supposed to be a smirk, but really she looks too innocent to actually pull it off.

“Longer than that.” Cal answers and I hear the amusement in his voice, amused by his own answer, maybe not the fact that that is the answer. I squeeze his hand a little as an apology almost. Claire nor Ethan seem to think the answer is nearly as good, but Claire is still smiling and Ethan just rolls his eyes so I think it’s all good. Cal squeezes my hand back as the other girl at the table laughs a little. At least, she thinks it’s funny.

When she’s done laughing, though the glee is still in her tone, she introduces herself as Brianna and tells me it’s nice to meet me. I tell her the same, and I’m struck by the notion that before now Brianna might not have had any idea who I was. For her - this version of me is the only version there’s ever been. It’s a hard concept to wrap my head around and I don’t quite succeed, but I do file that away before Ethan has another question he just has to ask.

“Okay, but real talk, Cal - how good in bed are you to land Mr. Soccer here?” I haven’t really interacted with Ethan before - not because of his whole look, but because we just didn’t really run in the same circles. The same with Cal really. Until the whole Blue and Jacques thing, my life didn’t include a lot of people that now seem instrumental to things. But the point is, I don’t really know Ethan, but I am not at all surprised by that question coming from him.

Claire immediately starts giggling and Brianna tries not to but she’s all good laughter as she chides Ethan for the question. I can feel Taylor roll her eyes as much as I can feel my own embarrassment - is that what this is? - bubble up leaving a smile built out of good nerves on my face as I look to Cal, who does not look nearly as amused as the rest of us, as he stares Ethan down.
“To be fair,” I start and Cal’s very unamused looks snaps to me, but I continue to try and smile, “I’m pretty sure that’s a compliment to both of us.”

“You’re not helping.” He responds with fondness there at the edges of the pools in his eyes despite the flat tone.

“Oh no, he is,” Ethan assures him with a smile that’s all teasing and smug, before looking at me. “Garrett - really, when and how did this happen? I’m sorry, I just need to know.” I really don’t think he’s all that sorry, but it’s also not like he needs to be.

I open my mouth to respond out of reflex of being asked a question directly, but really I don’t have anything to say. This teasing is all in good fun, I know, and it’s like the best thing to be holding Cal’s hand and getting along with Cal’s friends right now, but I’m starting to feel reality again and between my friends and Cal’s friends and all this mess in my head I’m getting hit by how this is getting closer and closer to the limit of what I can handle from other people. I feel all four of Cal’s friends watching me, and it’s only when Cal squeezes my hand that I realize I’ve frozen. I think he wants me to look at him, but I can’t figure out how to do that.

Brianna is the one that actually saves me, “You can get all the details from Cal later, Ethan.” And then to me, “Don’t let Ethan interrogate you - he means well, I swear.” To which Ethan tsks at Brianna for saying something about squashing his enjoyment in a way that I don’t fully comprehend. A friendly smile passes between them and I think this is what being on the outside of a joke feels like which normally would be fine - I mean Leah, Spier, Nick, and Abby have tons of inside jokes - but for reasons that I don’t really break apart, right now it just seems so much more significant as if I needed a reminder on how I don’t really fit here with them, despite so far getting along, like maybe I don’t fit in this situation in general, even if I want to.

I tell myself it’s fine as long as my hand continues to fit in Cal’s.

I nod, just managing, “yeah, okay. I’ll… uh, remember that.” I’m not actually sure anyone but Cal actually hears me respond.

Between Brianna and Taylor being more directional with the topic choice and Claire and Ethan giving in, the conversation thankfully moves away from Cal and I’s relationship. Neither Cal nor I join them. Instead, Cal knocks his shoulder with mine just hard enough that I give in and look down at him this time, curving my body slightly to tune out the rest of the world.

“Well there?” He asks sweetly and genuinely concerned as usually for me.

I’m not, but also I am. I’m good enough with him here. Good enough, that I kiss him as my response, surprising both of us. It’s not a very long kiss, just long enough for both of us to register what’s happening before I pull back to find his breath a little quick and his eyes widen. I have to think it’s because of me choosing to kiss him right now with where we are, than the actual kiss that has his pupils expand every so little since it really was just a peck of lips. He drops his gaze down to my lips but doesn’t kiss me like I’m sure he’s about to for all a dozen heartbeats. Which I’m mostly glad for because he doesn’t look like the kiss would be any sort of chaste and I’m already feeling a little crazy from my own small kiss. Mostly. The rest of me is ticked off that I care so much about where we are and who can see us.

“So, how’s lunch going for you?” I ask quietly, a little puff of air at the silliness of the question, but I had to say something, keeping me planted there beside him.

Cal leans a little closer to me, which considering we aren’t that far apart to begin with, means he’s actually leaned against my side. “Couldn’t be going better really.” And god, he sounds so honest, so
sure of that which is so damn crazy to me. It hits me hard in the chest - this raw emotion from him, especially since I know he had been surprised I manage to come over. He had accepted the fact that I wasn’t going to keep my word to him. That couldn’t have been pleasant - so, really I think things could have gone better, but at least it’s still all good.

My friends know. Cal’s friends know. I’m sitting next to him holding his hand.

Yeah. It’s all good. I fumble over a smile, realizing I’ve dropped my gaze to look at our hands before looking back up to him. I want to tell him something, about how I’m feeling, about us maybe - I’m not entirely sure. I just want to tell him something but I don’t find any of the words.

“T’m really happy you came over.” Cal admits a heartbeat later, “I was worried about you when you ducked out after of chemistry.”

“Oh, yeah…” I cringe, my brow pinching, “I just needed a moment.” That even sounds like a lame excuse to me despite it being technically true. Cal’s been accepting of a lot and I feel like I owe him an explanation, a deeper one. So I drop my voice, “I know this sounds kinda weird, but I just needed to come to lunch on my own. At the end of chem, you were there and so was Bram and Spier and it just… it felt like I was having to pick a side.” I explain awkwardly cringing even harder as I rub at my neck with my free hand while grimacing. “It was no longer just a theory and it just kinda hit me how this is what I was really about to do and I needed that separation, clean start, I guess.”

Cal tilts his head just a bit as he listens - it’s something he does when he’s trying hard to focus on one thing or person. He listens to everything I say before giving me this really small smile that’s all pride and fondness and way overwhelming than most grins are. Cal raises his free hand, but stumbles and backtracks to lay it on my bicep closest to him. I think he would have put that hand somewhere else if we weren’t at lunch in the cafeteria. Still, there’s a heaviness to his touch that keeps me from floating right out of this situation.

“That’s the kinda of weird I expect from you, you know, considering your taste in movies.” Cal finally says, all good and well meant.

It makes me laugh, the seriousness of the situation falling away into something more comfortable. “First off, my taste in movies is almost as good as my taste in boyfriends.” Cal lights up at that, amused and completely happy from the looks of it. It’s a really good word. “Second, if anyone is weird in this relationship I do believe its the guy that can’t manage notes.”

There’s laughter in his voice as he immediately goes to defend himself.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I rewrote this entire chapter about half a dozen times with different endings for each one, and each of those endings had their own set of half a dozen edits. There was one where Garrett leaves after chem and wants to leave but ultimately doesn’t for Cal, one where I had him go have a panic attack where either Cal or Bram find him, one where Bram follows him after chem when he says he needs to go to his locker and he tells Bram there first. All sorts of back and forth and that’s not even considering their friends actually reactions I went through.

I decided on this one because I felt like it kept Garrett moving forward in progress with
still keeping his concerns in mind the most. Hopefully yall agree.

Also, the story isn't over yet! He told his friends, now he has to really get their reactions, answer some questions. All in all, I'll probably have like three more chapters here for this story. Next chapter while planned I have not started to write much on, but I have the next two weeks off due my place of employment being closed for a remodel so I have plenty of time to work on it. By the end of the month, if not sooner!
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Cal is more than a little pleased by Garrett's success at lunch.

Lunch ends without a bang, but I’m still pretty blown away by everything that’s happened. Cal lets our hands drop, but he keeps our pinkies hooked in order to get me to follow him through the moving mass of students lazily moving from the cafeteria towards their next class. My next class is actually in the opposite direction of the one Cal is leading me in, and I’m all but about to tell him that when he opens one of the doors in the hallway and pushes me in.

I have just enough time to register that the room isn’t that big and that Cal has shut the door before he’s kissing me so hard I actually stumbled backwards. Except there isn’t that much room and I end up entirely off balance, overcorrecting, and on my ass in the next second.

Cal groans impatiently like falling is my fault - which it totally isn’t by the way - before following me down to the floor, straddling my lap, takes my jaw in his hands and kisses me until I forget I even need oxygen sure I could just live off Cal’s touch.

I end up having to break the kiss when I start to get light headed. He catches my bottom lip with his teeth when I pull away only letting it go to duck down and bite at my neck. He finds a particularly good spot that has my eyes falling shut fairly quickly, almost as if he’s done this with me before.

“Okay, uh - fuck, Cal. Not that I’m not enjoying this - that, that in particular, aah.” I trail off into a moan as he grinds his hips down while definitely leaving a very visible mark on my neck.

I don’t even remember I was talking much less what I was saying before he started doing that and for the next few minutes my only priority is getting him to kiss my lips again, my hands feeling up and down his back under his shirt. When I do remember, I set my hands around his rib cage and actually push him back to put distance between us. “To, uh, what I was saying - what is going on?”

Cal looks as dazed I feel, and I’m not totally sure he’s going to be able to answer me. “Oh.” He finally says connecting back to things. “It’s just - you doing all that despite everything - I mean you kissed me, and I just found it really attractive.” He explains his drawl slowing the pace of heated words, each word dropping lower in tone than the one before it, as his hands move up and down my chest, slow and firm and admiring.

Heat swells up low in me, and it takes everything in me not to act on it. “You were surprised I did that.” I barely manage to stay on track even with the short statement, but the statement must sound like a question because he goes to answer it.

“Oh, I mean… you were surprised I showed up. I saw it on your face.” I barely manage to stay on track even with the short statement, but the statement must sound like a question because he goes to answer it.

“I didn’t think you’d be okay to kiss in public, even quick like that, right off the bat.”

I shake my head, “No, I mean… you were surprised I showed up. I saw it on your face.” I don’t know how I sound right now, but I hope it’s not accusatory because I’m not mad - not remotely - and I don’t want him to think that I am. I just want him to know that it won’t be a surprise next time.
“Ah.” That sounds a little off color and he stops moving his hands, awkwardly settling them in the small space between our chests, and I’m worried he’s thinking the worst. He even straightens up in order to move away from such an intimate position. I want to pull him back. “I was…” He trails off, eyes pinching at either whatever thought he’s having or the frustration at trying to find the right words. I’m not sure which, but neither reaction is normal for him.

“I’m sorry.”

Cal’s gaze finds my face again, the lines around his eyes smoothing out as he laughs a little at my apology, it sounds more like disbelief than anything and he kisses me quick and lightly in the middle of it. “Don’t be. You tend to do the things you say.” A little quieter that makes it sounds distant he continues, “It’s just something I have to get used to.”

He says things like that sometimes, things that hit me in the chest.

I don’t even try to stop myself from frowning at hearing that. Gently, I trace his face starting at just above his eye to swipe my fingers through his bangs moving down to along his jaw. I don’t know what to say really. I don’t know if I should ask him to explain that, if now is the right time for that kind of talk. I don’t know if I should make him some sort of promise that I might break on accident. So I don’t say anything, just trace his face with as much care as I can muster, before letting my hand settle so that his ear is resting between my thumb and forefinger, so that my palm rests on his cheek, so that my fingers curl around his neck, and press up to kiss him soft and with as much adoration and hope and amazement that I feel when I’m with him, hoping even just part of it manages to cross over to him.

When the kiss breaks we’re both a little breathless and found, a little more together, recognized, home. Cal presses his forehead to mine, eyes closed. I wrap my arms around his middle, pulling him back closer to me. We sit like that for a few minutes, I think anyways. It’s not like I’m actually keeping track of time right now. I don’t even know if the bell for fifth period has rung. I don’t recall hearing it, but I kinda had my hands full.

Still do.

“Cal.” I break the silence and he leans back just enough so that he can look at me comfortably, regarding me with this weightless smile across his features. “I really just want to continue making out with you, but I want to ask something first.”

He hums as a response, resting his arms on my shoulders, and I take it for what it is - permission to continue. I want him to explain more why we’re in this room, why he says things like that, if he’ll leave with me if I skip out on the rest of school, what levels of affection we’re both okay with in public, if he’d go on an actual date with me. I don’t say any of that though. Instead, I say, “you’re pretty goddamn amazing.”

Cal laughs, really laughs, all good emotions soaking through to his words. “That’s not a question.”

I join him in laughing. “I know. I had one - I swear, but I just… I want you to hear that.” The laughter in my voice going quiet with the serious words as I drop my gaze down to his chest.

“I know you care about me, Garrett.” He reassures me, which actually does good to hear.

“That’s… uh, good. And for the record, I know you do too, care about me - I mean you’d kinda have to with how all this has gone so far, you know.” I say with a knock of my head towards the past few months.
Cal’s features go a little flat. “And you know I’m okay with how this has gone right?” He asks a little more solidly. “The way things have played out - there’s nothing for either of us to hold onto there in regret.”

“But I -”

Cal literally puts a hand over my mouth to stop me from talking. “Garrett. I know that you’re sorry. And some of it did hurt, but you need to know that you also have made me really happy over these last few months. And today, well the only thing that sucks today is learning about your parents, but even that I’m glad that you choose to trust me with that information.” He takes a breath then that’s a little shaky, having wavered into a frown around the words about my parents, but continues, “I know none of this has been easy for you and in a situation like this, well hurt was always going to be part of it. But all the good things - that wasn’t promised. That’s what’s on you and me, okay?” Cal’s words are even and sure and while there’s a bite to them there’s no edge. He believes every word he’s saying which shouldn’t surprise me. Cal chooses his words carefully, slowly and like each one matters as much as the next.

Part of me wants to argue, unsure if I believe it, but I don’t really know how I would do that without actively trying to hurt both us right now which isn’t something I want. Besides, he does have a point. I’ve been focusing on making things up to Cal, not disappointing him that I’ve kinda let that feeling overshadow other parts of this thing between us. I mean, it doesn’t make all the other worry and guilt go away, but it helps to remember that it’s not the only thing there in the previous months.

Maybe if I focus on the good things, doing good things for the sake of the fact that we enjoy them rather than some sort of break-even system, I can make sure he’s never surprised I show up when I say I will. The thought makes me want to ask about that again, but I don’t think this is the right moment and I keep any words on the topic from rolling off my tongue.

Cal hasn’t removed his hand from my face, watching me as I roll around his words in my head. I think he might be reading my face for some sort of understanding, or he’s outright reading my mind which he tends to do. Honestly, though, I’m getting a little dizzy and I’m not sure it’s because of what’s all happened, what’s all in my head, or if it’s due to his hand, but either way, I kinda want to breathe.

It’s only when I actually nod, a little dumbly because I forgot I could do that - the communicate without words thing - does he lower his hand. “I’ll try to think of things like that,” I promise the best I can, my voice a little raw but with tension leaving my shoulders.

“Good.” Cal leans in and kisses me on my cheek, lingering long enough so that I feel the heat of his body along the full length of mine. Without moving back for any cold to settle in, his lips brushing the skin of my cheek. “Now do you remember what question you had or can I go back to kissing you?”

“Oh… what’s okay in public?” I ask a little teasing and a little serious, fumbling because I can’t completely remember what I actually wanted to say when he sounds like that, but I know that at least had been on my mind earlier. I want to lean in to kiss him regardless of what I said. I think he can tell because he rolls his eyes at me.

“Definitely not this.” I don’t have time to think about what that means when he kisses me, pressing his body against mine which feels really damn good. My hands find his hips as he swipes his tongue across my lips. I part them, allowing him to tangle our tongues before holding down on his hips as I roll mine up. The action causes Cal to retract his tongue, lips brushing against mine as he moans.

“Not that either, right?” I ask smirking a little which he apparently takes as a challenge, because he
then moves one of the hands he has bent over my shoulder, finding a hold in my hair, to in between
us. Cal trails his hand down as he kisses me hard and all tongue.

I lose track of his hand for a heartbeat then, caught up in the taste and feel of him, which is
apparently long enough for him to slide his fingers down the side of my thigh, light in motion but
heavy in pressure, and then back up on the inside until he’s tracing along the lines of my hardening
cock beneath my clothes.

I gasp losing any hold on the kiss that I had as the shot of arousal shoots up my spine, my hips
jerking upwards. “Fuck me.” I curse causing Cal to chuckle all hot air.

“That’s certainly not a public activity.” He laughs and it takes me a minute to figure out what he’s
talking about. A full minute. When I do come to an understanding, I just shake my head at him,
amused and wanting by his teasing. I do realize though, that Cal probably didn’t see that look as he’s
gone back to leaving a mark on my neck with teeth. The hand that’s not below my belt has circled
back around my front, under my shirt, and up to press along the scratches on my back that he gave
me yesterday. They had been nothing but raised skin yesterday and by this morning I could only feel
them when I consciously thought about them, but when his fingers grasping at the skin there it’s like
they’re brand new. I keep exploring his body with my hands, just wanting his skin to be against my
palms, every now and then dropping to trace the edge of his jeans, but not quite brave enough to
drop lower.

Cal presses his palm along my dick that has me bucking upwards against his hand and moaning
probably louder than I want to be in the middle of the school day only for it to dissolve into a whine
when he removes his hand completely. Cal stops kissing my neck to look back up at me. He moves
like he’s going to kiss me, but ends with open lips breathing against mine as he grinds our clothed
cocks past each other apparently forgetting to actually complete the kiss in favor of the pleasure and
need pulsing through both of us. It’s good to know he’s as hard as I am, I think for all of a second
before the pleasure overwhelms my senses and I return the favor, rocking up as he comes down, as
one of my hands takes hold high on his neck to pull him hard into the kiss he forgot about.

Okay so this is something new for us - we’ve never gotten each other off before, actual hand jobs
and blow jobs might have happened yesterday for the first time if Abby hadn’t shown up when she
did, but that was yesterday, and this is right now in the middle of our school day, so despite wanting
to make this into another try at something more I stop myself. Or try to. Or maybe I don’t.

It’s a little hard to think of anything other than Cal and how hard I am, though.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

In gym, Garrett talks to Nick, Bram, and unfortunately Spencer.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Considering I did not make it to my previous class at all, I actually manage to get to the gym for my sixth period early - like before fifth period ended, early. Which was nice on my part as I got a chance to clean up and calm down after spending the last forty minutes with Cal in a janitor's closet.

I didn’t even know the room had been a janitor’s closet until we went to leave and then I made some stupid joke about closets and coming out and Cal shoved me, telling me not to make him regret what just happened between us because of some dumb joke. So I, of course, told him another dumb joke and he shoved me again, smiling, telling me to get to class and leaving without kissing me again which was rude, thank you. Though in hindsight the way his hair was mused and his lips bruised was a pretty enough view, plus I got to stare at his ass when he actually walked away, so maybe the lack of a kiss wasn’t the worst. I would have preferred to kiss him. Press him back up against the locker, forget-me-not kind of kiss.

I haven’t bothered to get the grin off my face yet. Though as I hide out in one of the stalls when the fifth period gym class comes into change, I catch a reflection of myself in a mirror and I sort of grimace for a half second at how very visible the marks Cal left on my neck are blossoming purple and red. Someone is certainly going to notice those, and they’re certainly going to notice I didn’t have them earlier in the day.

And that… can’t be bad enough to regret getting them, I think as sixth period actually begins and I come out of my hiding spot to grab my gym clothes, soccer cleats and shin guards from my locker. Technically this is just a gym class, but our soccer coach had everyone on her potential team sign up for it or the last period so that we could get extra workouts in.

I’m putting my shin guards on while sitting on one of the benches in the room when Bram sits down next to me. I look up and smile at him in greeting, still on a good high from my time with Cal to really even think about anything else from the day.

“So,” Bram starts catching my attention. I look up at him again despite not stopping in my actions in an attempt to prompt him into continuing. “I should probably apologize for lunch.”

“What?” Oh right. Lunch. That was also today.

“At lunch, I think I scared you when I - with how I reacted to the news that…” And he trails off before actually saying the news that I’m dating Cal, which has me sobering up as the situation and lunch and all of that other stuff starts to seep back into my bones. I try to wave him and those feelings off, but he doesn’t accept that apparently as he continues. “I didn’t mean to scare you or anything. I’m actually really happy for you. You know that right?”

I nod because I do know that. I know that and yet for a fucking heartbeat, I thought I was wrong. “I
do know that. Really, I do. I was just really worked up you know?” I try to continue with the light tone I had earlier, the one that was lingering from being with Cal, but even I hear the bit of weight my words are gaining as I continue.

“And I should have known that - I mean I personally should have to know how hard it is coming out to friends and then on top of that revealing you’re dating someone as well - I’m just saying I should have been more aware and more vocally on your side.” Bram counters, not taking my flippant acceptance as an end to the conversation.

I gotta admit it’s nice to hear that. I don’t like him feeling bad, but I’m glad to feel validated in how I felt earlier in that heartbeat of fear. I’m glad that it doesn’t sound like I was overreacting. It’s a relief honestly. The lazy feeling of sinking in a pool, that slow submerging type of relief overcomes me as I continue to sit beside Bram.

“I’m… thanks, dude. Really, thanks. I think I needed to hear that.” I finally respond quietly without actually looking up to catch his gaze, but that’s more out of embarrassment about all the sentimental talk in the locker room than any sort of distaste towards him.

I drop my hand to start tying up my cleats and Bram turns his focus to do the same as an easy silence settles between us until Bram says with a smile, “For the record, I can totally see you two being together. It should have been obvious, really, that’s why I was surprised I hadn’t guessed him. He should have been my first guest.”

“Really?” I roll my eyes, letting that feeling of good friendship settle into my tone. I laugh a little when he tells me, yes. And for a second I think he’s going to continue, tell me why it’s so obvious when Nick interrupts by showing up.

He’s rushing to change shirts and pull on his cleats at the same time as the bell for class rings. Bram and I stand to head out to the pitch but stall long enough for Nick to get his shit together and join us on our walk out.

“Running just a little late there, Eisner?” I tease, wondering what had him running so late but not curious enough to actually ask.

Nick looks at me sideways a little out of breath from rushing for a moment to make sure I understand that he doesn’t think I’m funny when he suddenly does a double take and starts to grin.

“I might be running late, but at least I didn’t skip the fifth period to make out with my new boyfriend.”

Bram concerned-about-my-grades-Greenfeld immediately asks if I did, in fact, skip fifth period which until that moment I totally forgot I shared with Nick and Leah. My nonanswer is answer enough for Bram to know I did just that and he goes on to ask Nick how he knows I was with Cal and Nich so kindly points out the hickey on the other side of my neck from Bram. I wave off Nick’s hand and we sort of get into a little shoving match that’s more teasing than anything else until Bram breaks us up calling us children.

I try to say something in retort to it all, but between the blush that I’m definitely sporting right now and the hickeys that all of us are now aware of, I fall flat. Nick chuckles a little, swinging an arm over my shoulder as our shoes hit the grass outside, “It’s cool, Laughlin. You totally just earned me ten bucks.”

“How did I do that?” I asked suspiciously.
“I made a bet with Leah. She said was convinced you wouldn’t be able to convince Cal into making out on campus, especially after being caught by Abby only yesterday. She figured you were just ditching, needing space after lunch or something like that, but I knew better.” I fucking groan, dragging a hand over my face.

“Oh, yeah, Abby totally told us about that,” Bram says like he’s trying to be apologetic but totally isn’t.

I shove Nick’s arm off of me as my friends laugh, and I try not to smile. “Okay, first off - Abby probably exaggerated, don’t believe any of that. Second, I wasn’t the one doing the convincing, though to be honest, it didn’t take a lot for me to agree.”

“What? Seriously?” Nick asks astonished as I break this idea of Cal he apparently has. I’m struck by how easy Nick has adjusted to the fact that I’m dating a guy, how he’s making this like any other person I’ve dated before with a bunch of teasing aimed at me and fond laughter. And honestly, I’m glad. Really, but I also feel a need to make him understand that this is different.

Not because Cal is a guy, but because this is Cal.

I’m trying to figure out how to do just that when we make it to the pitch with the rest of the class and the coach starts us off by having us do stretches before laps around the practice field for class with the intention of pulling her potential players off to do drills on the actual field.

I end up losing the other two as I rummage my thoughts to the pounding of my feet against the ground, only for a few minutes to pass where I still haven’t figured out how to explain to my friends that I really don’t want this thing with Cal to be like my previous, fleeting relationships. All I accomplish is working up a sweat.

There’s nothing wrong with my past relationships. They were all good in the moment, with people I cared about, and about half ended on good notes. I don’t think any of my exes have a particularly negative attitude towards me now. But they were also relatively short with the longest being when I was a freshman and was dating a junior named Jennifer who went by Jenny which lasted six months. That had been… an awakening relationship. But even that one, doesn’t live up to the feelings I’m dealing with that are swirling about my chest due to Cal.

Cal’s worth my parents being upset with me. Cal is worth being scared and being brave for and I can’t really tell that to my friends without explaining about my parents and that’s not about to happen. For one, my parents don’t actually know about me yet, second, it would only make Bram feel guilty for something he has no business feeling bad for, and the rest of them worry. There’s no reason for anyone to be worried.

Nick breaks my thoughts when he catches up to me and starts keeping pace with me. “Hey, I have a question about this you and Cal thing.” He says the moment he sees he has my attention, not bothering to work up to this line of conversation. His tone is a lot more serious than it has been so far while discussing this, and it’s making me pay him more thought than I originally planned, completely putting my previous thoughts aside for now.

Really, I should have known that the rest of the day my conversations with my friends would be about Cal, that I wasn’t going to get away without answering that many questions about the whole thing. “Go on.”

He catches his breath then says, “how long have you and Cal been dating?”

“Dating - well, since this morning actually.” I clarify.
“But Abby caught you two yesterday…” Nick prompts trailing off trying to be tactful, a little red in
the face from being embarrassed by the subject matter when it’s brought up in a serious way.

I let us make it another half a lap before answering. “I’ve been talking to him since last April. And it
definitely started off physical.” I admit slowly, my breath catching between some of the words. I
never really liked talking while running at the same time even if I can do it fairly well.

“Since April?”

“Yeah - that, uh, cast party.”

“Oh - the one you got so drunk that we had to come back for you?” Nick asks.

It takes me a few seconds to understand what he’s talking about, to remember how our versions of
that night are different. I ended up laughing on my exhale when it comes together in my head, “I
wasn’t that drunk actually.”

“Wait. Are you tell me you stayed to make out with Cal?”

“No - but that did happen.” I’m still laughing and I’m glad soccer has made me keep my cardio up.
“No. I was actually freaking out when Spier found me. Cal told Spier I was just really drunk to cover
for me.”

Nick lets that sink for a few minutes, processing it all, before asking, “about the pansexual thing?”

“Yeah. I didn't know what to call it at the time though. I had been thinking I might not be straight for
a bit by then and then I was drunk and Cal had been drinking and then he kissed me and… and I
really liked that.” I explain, getting a sense of being winded but not from running. I'm most certainly
not looking at Nick and I am most certainly not thinking about Cal kissing me - that night, last
period, or anytime in between. What I end up thinking about is how long I've been freaking out
about all this for, how long I've let my parents dictate how I treat Cal and my friends.

I fully believe that we make our own choices at the end of the day. I don't get to use my parents or
anyone else as an excuse for how I acted. But that's not what I'm thinking about at the moment. At
the moment, what I'm thinking about is that I've been scared of my parents - their reaction, losing
them, their anger - for a long time now. Before Cal, since Bram came out actually.

I slow my run, collapsing down into a short walk that has Eisner flat out stopping in order not to lose
me.

“You okay?” He asks and I don't really know what to say. I just feel a little dizzy and really sick.

“I need to sit down.” I somehow manage and then do just that. I get maybe five feet off the field, out
of the direct line of traffic, before sitting down on the grass with my head hung low between my
knees to help the sick feeling go away. Eisner comes with me, kneeling instead of sitting with a hand
on my back.

“Are you freaking out about the fact that you like kissing Cal because the hickeys on your neck
suggest that ship has sailed.” He’s trying to be teasing, to be light, keep me from spiraling I think. I
appreciate it, but I'm not going to spiral, I’m not really freaking out. I'm okay. Really. I'm okay.

I'm just… tired. And so ready for this day to be over.

Except for that to happen, I have to go home.
I drag a hand over my face sitting up straighter as I hear a different tandem of feet from the ones of passing students on the track. Looking up, I see Bram and Coach Morales coming up towards us.

“'I'm not freaking out about Cal.’” I get across to Nick before the other two arrive because I think it's important he knows that. It's probably important he knows the real reason too, but I don't even try for that across my lips. Eisner gives me a sideways look that says he doesn't quite believe me, and I'm about to tell him again when the coach gets into speaking distance.

“Laughlin, what's the problem?” She barks in a way that's somehow no-nonsense and comforting. Coach Morales isn't a woman to talk back to. She's honestly kind of a hardass, but she's a good coach, she cares about her players, and I get along fairly well with her. So, while I know she means well despite the tone, I'm not about to tell her anything about what's really going on.

“Nothing, Coach.” I do not miss the look Bram and Nick exchange, but I also promptly ignore it.

“Then on your feet, walk it off.” She instructs and out of habit I follow getting to my feet with the intention to at least walk until she calls people for drills. She looks me over once more and then adds as a warning, “get it sorted, Laughlin. Soccer tryouts are in a week, with the first game the second week in November. I'll put someone else on the field if you aren't fit. Goes for the both of you two as well.”

All three of us answer with a reflex-made, “yes, Coach” before she leaves us. A second or two later, I start walking and my friends join me.

“What was that about?” Bram asks.

I shake my head, “it's just been a long day. Between telling you guys at lunch, Cal in general, hanging out with his friends - I can't tell if Taylor likes me or is plotting my death - the reminder of soccer tryouts, the fact that this has been months of secrets and work and suddenly its all out, but it's not really and then with my general lack of sleep… I'm just tired.” I rush out a little surprised at the honesty of my own words. They aren't completely truthful, however, my voice dipping down with the exhaustion that's been slinking in the shadows since this morning that I'm just now starting to fully feel.

Neither of them say anything for a few heartbeats and for that time I almost wonder if I actually said anything aloud or not.

“That's understandable, Garrett,” Bram says sympathetically and I don’t even try to stop my sigh of relief when Nick picks up the conversation to the soccer tryouts.

How we shouldn’t have to try out again after being on the team since ninth grade. Bram tries to come up with reasons on why it’s a good thing we have to and mostly they’re good reasons, but it doesn’t stop it from being annoying. I end up joining in on the conversation, finding it helpful in ignoring the things in my head and my chest.

We talk until the coach has the soccer players group up in the middle of the field while the rest of the class - the ones that aren’t on the team and are actually taking it for a gym credit - continue to walk the circle. A couple of football players, second line up or something I think, ask if they can practice throws once Coach Morales has us start up on sprints. As usual, she allows them, going back to the gym to grab a ball telling one of the assistant coaches to maintain watch on the class.

The whole exchange takes less than a few minutes, but it’s long enough to feel unsupervised apparently as another soccer player, Jay, settles by my side and gossip made to look like conversation springs up among the players. Not so subtly, Jay asks about the hickeys on my neck which
unfortunately gets Spener’s attention.

I hope he doesn’t make the team. At least Aaron doesn’t do soccer.

Spencer hooks an arm around my shoulder as Bram lines up next to start his sprints. I stand up straight out of reflex, feeling good when he has to remove his arm due to the height difference between us. Spencer isn’t a short guy, but he’s shorter than me and that’s what’s important. Jay grimaces apologetically at me but also steps away from the two of us without an answer. I think Nick might be watching, but I can’t be sure without looking over in his direction.

“What’s this, Laughlin? Hickies? Got yourself a new girl? That Leah chick finally give in to your charms or is she still playing hard to get by fucking Eisner and his girl - oh, but didn’t they break up?” He asks and while he’s smiling, there’s nothing friendly in his words. I have to stop myself from turning and punching him in the face right then. Coach Moreles is already closing back into the group of players and I don’t want to get kicked from a team I’m not on yet or suspended from class. It’s a close call though because I really want to punch his face. But, I’ve wanted to punch his face since the end of sixth grade so that’s not really a new feeling. “Or did your bro break up with that fag Simon and you two finally hook up - you know I think you’d make the cutest couple of freaks,” Spencer asks with a grin that makes it clear that he thinks he’s funny. And of course, he’s not being quiet so guys that aren’t up for sprints yet certainly hear, gossip murmuring over their lips.

I grit my teeth and bite the inside of my cheek, but it’s not enough to stop me from responding. “You still on that homophobic and misogynist kick of yours, Spence? And here I thought you might have improved over the summer. Should have known, really, I mean no matter what you do to trash at the end of the day it’s still just trash.” His face sours, but before he says anything back Bram starts towards us done with his set and Spencer steps out of my space. If Aaron was around Spencer might have stuck around to cause problems, but he’d never pick a fight he didn’t stand a chance winning.

I’ll give Spencer the fact that he’s not an idiot. But that’s about the only nice thing I have to say about him.

I really hate the fact that I was ever friends with him.

“You okay?” Bram asks, his eyes and frown still on Spencer’s back.

“Of course. Even tired, I can handle Spencer.” I assure him. Wondering how much worse Spencer, Aaron and assholes like them are going to be this year for me now that I’m dating Cal. I mean, of course, I knew things would be said and that I’d hear some of it. And I think if I can deal with my parents, then I can deal with some high school bullies, but I’m suddenly aware that I have a different sort of worry with people at school.

At home, I’m worried about losing my parents. At school, I’m going to need to be worried about not getting expelled which has nothing to do with the person I would be fighting. I got into two different fights last year in the last few months of school because some jerk had to go and say something about my best friend and Spier where I could hear it. Is it going to be different hearing them say the same shit but with Cal’s name in the mix?

Fuck. This is just more shit to think about. Or to ignore.

“Just don’t get expelled, Garrett.” Bram might be joking but there’s a line under his words that says he’s also being serious and the way he’s looking at me has me thinking his train of thought was similar to mine just then.

It’s my turn to do sprints then and I just try to outrun all thoughts I have in my head right now, try to
just leave what I’m feeling in my chest that’s mostly good things about my friends and Cal and accomplishments for the day.

Chapter End Notes

I've been rather sick lately but with work starting back up tomorrow I wanted to get what I had written up for y'all to hopefully enjoy. I know this story has one more chapter for sure, Garrett and Leah doing some talking and such Get that cleared up, but idk if I can make that end the story like I want or not so there might be eight chapters. Either way expect at least one more chapter. It's mostly written too, so once I'm feeling better between work I'll get that up.

Thank you thank you thank you all for your comments and kudos and everything. I'll get to responding to comments personally once I'm feeling better, but know that I appreciate ever single one of them!!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

It's the end of the day, school is over, and really Garrett would like to go fall asleep somewhere, but that's not what his friends have planned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

September 19th Tuesday
Texting Group: Me, Cal $

5:13 PM G :: u wouldn't happen to need a ride after theater would you? because Im totally available for such a service.

5:19 PM C :: Do you want to give me a ride home Garrett?

5:21 PM G :: I would like to see u. Yes.

5:24 PM C :: Hah okay.

5:25 PM C :: Hey do you mind giving me a ride home today? Taylor and Brianna are going to the movies and my house is out of the way.

5:28 PM G :: yeah absolutely. np at all.

5:31 PM G :: I like that you added an excuse as if I didn’t just ask you to ask me that.

5:31 PM G :: are they really going to the movies?

5:39 PM C :: I thought youd appreciate that. They are going to the movies, but my house is not out of the way. Be out soon.

I text Cal, placing my phone flat next to me on the hood of my truck where I’ve been sitting since soccer ended, waiting for the theater practice be over. Bram and Nick had opted to go find Leah, who’s in one of the music rooms keeping up with her drumming, and to wait in the auditorium for Spier and Suso to finish up.

Normally, I head home after practice, done with classes and wanting to be off of school grounds as soon as I can. Bram and Nick usually catching a ride with Spier with only the occasional change of routine.

Normally, I’m home by now, but home isn’t exactly where I want to be.

I read Cal’s response putting my phone away as I keep hold of the pen in my hand, unable to falter
the smile that crawls onto my lips. With him agreeing to ride with me, all I have to do now is wait for theater to actually end. It’s supposed to end at 5:30, but Cal had mentioned today being the first real attempt at a complete read-through of the first act and that sounds like something that might take more time, so I’m not really surprised by the fact that it’s already ten after and Cal isn’t out yet.

A soft wind drops the temperature a few degrees more and I think it might finally start to feel like autumn soon. I curse the wind when it tries to turn the page of the spiral I have out in my lap. I have to readjust my hands so that I can hold the page down while also writing, except it’s awkward as fuck so I end up turning so I’m sitting with my back to the wind and the school in order to keep the page from moving with the wind without being all bent up in the arms.

I’m taking a note out of my mother’s book and making a list. A list of all the question like things today has left with me. Getting it all out of my head or at least that’s my intention. But no matter how fast my pen goes, the thoughts are all still there, weighing me down like an anchor. They are a little more organized, though. Instead of the whirlwind, bouncing, manic thought process of jumping from one to another midway through with at least three left turns and a full stop, they’re all lined up like bowling pins just waiting to knock another over, but not always doing so. Making it a little easier on me. So maybe it’s helping.

I keep circling different words, sentences. Underlining other ones and crossing out a few more. It’s a mess of a page. It’s a pretty good representation of my head, I think ruefully and exasperated.

I turn the page sideways to scrawl out a reminder about soccer tryouts and practicing in capital letters before righting the page and adding like three more question marks around What am I okay with in public? What is Cal? and an arrow from that question to further down the page where I’ve written school public different from not at school public affection?

I have a list going on down the right side of the page of date ideas for an actual date - dinner. Mini golf is a thing. Laser tag is better. Shakes. Bowling, Dave & Buster’s. Some type of show. I figure we should do something we haven’t done before since we’re more than a secret now. So the movies are out even if we both like the cinema. Maybe. I circle the idea about finding something like a drive-in movie or an outside showing since it’s something we like but would be new. I’ve got a crooked reminder near the list of Spier wanting a double date as I’m sure the guy will not forget about mentioning it.

Spencer and Aaron’s names are written near the scratched out the statement of my parent’s possible reactions where I wasn’t able to finish writing my thoughts regarding them. I’ve put a poorly drawn stop sign there and no punching on the other side of Spencer and Aaron’s names. Adding Nicole and David’s names further up the paper I put a reminder to call them. If I’m telling my parents - and I am - then I’ll need to tell them too. I just don’t know if I should tell my sister and her husband before or after I tell our parents.

Lastly, I’ve stream-of-thought added in the concept of not apologizing all the time for the summer like Cal wants:

Not apologizing to Cal.
about when I was a dick like he said and not never apologize if I mess something up.
I did mess up before tho. maybe a little apologizing??
apologizing and appreciating? Is that a thing?
I feel like that should be a thing.

Just do better. So Cal isn’t surprised ← Talk about that??

And scattered throughout the whole mess I’ve repeated Cal’s name and hot and sweet and boyfriend
several times over like some middle schooler with a crush. I don’t stop adding them though, finding it to be what I write when I’m trying to single out a thought.

I jump when Cal joins me up on the hood of my truck

He needs to stop doing that. I know he’s doing it on purpose. The almost smirk and smile in his eyes give him away when I glare at him.

“Sorry.” He says and I do think he means it even if my reaction was apparently enjoyable. I’m still worked up from my list - Is it a list though? It’s not really in any sort of order. What qualifies something as a list? - and the shot of adrenaline he just gave me, though so, I stumble over dropping my glare and finding my own smile back, but I do find it because I like that he’s suddenly there; it just takes a few more seconds than normal. I also become aware that there are other voices around us and a look over my shoulder confirms Bram and the rest are grouped up between my and Spier’s cars. More than a few of them are not so subtly watching Cal and I.

I roll my eyes turning my focus back to Cal. He’s not even trying to hide the fact that he’s currently reading the list I’ve scribbled out. I jerk the spiral close more out of reflex and habit of keeping secrets than not actually wanting to show Cal. But I also don’t open it back up for him.

Cal catches my eyes, “I was wondering why you looked upset.” He explains.

“I’m not upset.” I counter instantly, and he rolls his eyes obviously not buying it. “No, seriously, I’m not upset… just…” And I don’t actually have a word for it - frustrated, tired, stressed, relaxed, better, working on it - so I just kinda wave my hands around, keeping hold of my pen and spiral as I do so. I keep the motion up hoping to find the word, but failing to do so has the motion falling slow and broken, until Cal reaches up and takes one of my hands, the one with the pen, and folds into his hands in his lap. My other hand falls down into my own lap a little limply, grip on the spiral lost as I give a grimacing smile to Cal.

“That’s okay.” He tells me. How does he make it sound like that’s the truth? I exhale, sort of collapsing to the side in order to press my forehead to his shoulder forgetting about my friends and where we are. Our group is most certainly not the only people in the parking lot due to after-school activities, but I don’t really care about anything other than breathing him in at the moment, leaning on him because that’s what I need more than anything right now.

“Simon wants us to go to Waffle House with them all,” Cal informs me a few heartbeats later sounding like he doesn’t want to make me move. I groan softly because more weird and new interactions is not what I want to deal with right now. I just want to go home, or go to Cal’s and fall asleep on his bed using him as a pillow with my head on his chest while he uses his laptop to watch whatever show it is that he’s hooked on this week - last I heard it had been Black Mirror’s newest season, but that doesn’t have a lot of episodes so I’d bet money he’s already done with it.

“We don’t have to go.” Cal adds on when I don’t speak up, breaking my thoughts about sleep and TV shows. And I know it would be okay to skip out on the meal, but it also kinda feels like I can’t or shouldn’t.

Like I ate lunch (or well I spent lunch as I didn’t really eat anything then… or at breakfast either. Wow, okay, maybe waffles would be good right now) with his friends so now he needs to have a meal with mine? Which is weird, because most of my friends are actually already his friends as well. I don’t try to work that out.

“We should go,” I mumble, my breath sliding down the sleeve of his shirt as I don’t pick my head up. I don’t have to look up to know he’s about to ask if I’m sure or something along those concerned
lies, so I sit up straight and add, “I haven’t eaten much today. I could use the food.” Cal nods along to the words, acceptance falling over the concern in his eyes.

With one more heartbeat of getting to focus solely on Cal, I climb off the hood of my truck. I help Cal down as an excuse to put my hands on him, and we then skirt around my car to officially join the others who are trying and failing to hold a conversation like they hadn’t been spying.

“Food?” I ask after a few heartbeats of them trying to manage their awkward cover conversation.

“Yes! WaHo. We should go, all of us.” Spier exclaims like this hadn’t been his idea in the first place. I do not miss the fondness that descends on Bram’s face as his attention is taken up by his boyfriend. One of these days, I think, it will get annoying to see them so lovesick. But another part of me thinks seeing my friends happy should never be one of those things that gets old.

“That’s already the plan.” Nick grins and there’s a small spread of chuckles as we gather into the cars and head towards the restaurant, Abby opting to ride with Cal and I even though the five of them came to school together every morning so there’s certainly room for her in Spier’s car. I give her a very suspiciously playful look that she returns with a grin.

I don’t talk much on the way to Waffle House, with Abby and Cal keeping up the conversation about something with the play they’re doing for the fall semester which I follow relatively well considering I’ve heard more than a handful of people, Cal included, talk about it. As well as, what plays Cal thinks Ms. Albright is going to do in the spring as I drive. I don’t recognize any of the names of the plays he lists, not even heard in a passing kind of way. I think about asking Cal more about plays, try to catch some of the names to ask about specifically later.

Cal’s talked to me often about the theater stuff he likes - not just the school programs, but also about the productions the community theater puts on and higher production stuff like Broadway or just other show in general. At least, he tells me about them until he’s decided he’s talked too much and prompts me into speaking which isn’t hard since I always have something to say. Most of the time I don’t even realize he’s done it until I try to remember something he’s told me and I recall only half an answer.

Still, I think even if he didn’t do that, I’d still have a hard time to actually remember all the stuff he tells me about the theater stuff. I know he loves it, but I like how he sounds when he’s talking about it more than the actual topic. I don’t feel too bad for that since Cal only has a basic understanding of soccer and that’s a pretty big part of my life.

The thought makes me think of when I won a bet between us, and I got to put a game on instead of a movie when I was over at his place. I had been explaining the finer points of the sport to him until I realized he had fallen asleep with his head in my lap. He still swears I put him to sleep with my absent-minded strumming of fingers through his hair and not the game. I’m not really convinced, but he’s really pretty so I’m gonna let it slide.

I think it’s a good thing we both have our own things as long as we include the other in them when the other wants to. I think I read that’s good for relationships somewhere or maybe an ex told me it when she was justifying her actions. Maybe that’s what I’m trying to do now. Justify the fact that I don’t really plan on getting really involved in the theater stuff outside of supporting Cal in it. But that’s okay, right?

“Soccer season will be over by the spring play, Garrett, plan on trying out now that you’re dating the stage manager?” Abby asks picking up her voice to catch my attention.

I don’t have to be tuned back in full to think how fitting the question is considering my thoughts and
to know the answer. “Absolutely not.” It’s only after I say it that I realize how quick and opposed to the idea I just sounded and how it could very easily be insulting to the other two people in the car. So I tack on a little more sheepishly, “Being on stage isn’t really my thing.”

“But you do well being the center of attention.” Abby tries to reason teasingly, having not taken offense to my tone.

“I don’t have much of a desire to pretend to be someone I’m not.” And those words sound way too real for the light conversation. The words kinda echo around in my head and drains down into my chest where they settle in between my seventh and eighth rib. Oh.

“That’s good, since I kinda like you as is,” Cal says breaking the tension that tries to settle in the cab of my truck as we all took in how those words seem to spread out, touching more than just the current conversation. I spare a glance from the road to find him smiling real soft and one-sided at me. I return it feeling myself get a little flustered.

“Well, I think Si is going to try and convince Nick to try out. If it’s a musical - he’ll be a great addition.” Abby says bringing the conversation back and keeping it nice and level with a pleasant tone. “He can really sing.” I nod my head in agreement having heard Eisner singing whenever he can find a guitar and Cal continues the conversation with Abby without me having to add in any more input.

Waffle House really isn’t that far from the school, so it’s not much longer after that that we pull into the right parking lot. I shut off my truck, and get out as Spier parks in another open spot a few spaces down.

I follow the others into the restaurant with Cal by my side. The lot of us end up taking up two of the three booths that line the far wall. I pick one of the seats at random, Cal sliding into next of me. Outside of us and the employees, there really aren’t that many people present, so I throw my arm up along the back of the seat, Cal moves a little closer, and we exchange smiles.

I’m not really surprised when Spier sits across from me, though I am surprised when Leah takes the seat next to Spier. Bram is judging too by the look I exchange real quick with him before he, Abby, and Nick sit at the table behind Spier. If things go as normal, by the end of the night, we’ll have played musical chairs, but that doesn’t really happen until after the food so I just nod at Spier and Leah settling more into my seat, leaning against the wall about as much as I am the back of the seat.

After drinks are ordered, and small talk threatens to sizzles out, Spier finally breaks the elephant in room - namely Cal and I. “You guys are really cute together!” I don’t know if I’m laughing with content and nerves because of Spier and where we’re at or because of the red that colors Cal’s face at Spier’s outburst. I let my hand slide from the back of the booth down to Cal’s shoulder, squeezing it in comfort until he steals a glance that’s fond and embarrassed by the sweet comment at me from beneath his bangs.

Slowly, he looks back up, and I turn my focus back to the others at the table. Spier is all smiles and Leah is clean lines that don’t tell me anything. “Thank you?” I try, unsure on the right response to such a comment when Cal stays quiet and I get the hint that I’m gonna be the one to respond between us.

“Your welcome, but also I’m serious. Also, also, when did this happen? Nick said something about the cast party last year?”

“Have you two been together since April?” Leah tags onto Spier’s words sounding concerned maybe? Something like that at the very least. Something well meant, I think for a second, before
doubt swirls.

I take a deep breath and then offer up, “uh, no - I mean we’ve been talking since then,” as an answer which doesn’t seem to be what Leah wants to hear. I wonder if I’m just being paranoid. If I’m looking for something to be upset about that’s right here, right now because I can’t do anything about Spencer, Aaron, my parents, and others that make things difficult. Cal puts his hand on my thigh. It’s not teasing, just supportive and it has me letting go some of the tension I was building up in my spine. “The dating thing happened literally today.”

“You used literally right that time,” Cal interjects quietly curving the conversation, which has Bram - as he’s apparently listening - laughing as he sits up sideways, opening up to both tables. I need both of them to not be so judging of my English abilities.

“Don’t.” I warn looking at Cal with a smile and then point over Spier at my best friend, “You too. Don’t.” It just causing Bram to extend his laughter while Cal just smiles like he’s innocent.

The conversation diverges to classes then when the topic of English has Nick asking about the homework for English given out this morning which lasts longer than any of us thought it would due to Bram and Abby disagreeing on the interpretation of the homework, pausing only to order food when the waitress stops by. I chime in every now and then, but most of my time is spent in a bit of a heaviness that’s born from a long day that just sort of disconnects me - from the conversation, from the moment, from my head - interacting on muscle memory making me a little quieter than I normally am.

I slowly rise back up into the present with the ever increasing feeling of being watched settles along my skin. I think for a second it’s Leah or Abby, but quickly find it’s Cal. He keeps sparing me glances as he engages with the rest of them. When he catches my gaze, some of the concern building around his eyes falls away.

I sit up properly, shuffling so that the arm I had moved back across the back of the seat ends up tucking more around Cal making the gesture less causal and more of an intimate choice. Cal settles back into my side almost subconsciously as he continues to talk to the others, specifically Leah about Emoji, and it’s pretty much the best part of the evening so far.

I’m pretty content with how things are going right now. It’s easy to be with my friends, with Cal. Cal’s weight at my side is grounding and the day’s hectic nature leaves me tired enough to ignore the more worrisome matters at the moment. More than anything, I think, I feel like things are okay. That at least with my friends nothing’s going to change outside of the norm of me dating someone new brings to the group. It’s refreshing and needed and now the only thing I want is food because the longer I sit here able to smell the food cooking the more I realize how hungry I actually am.

Chapter End Notes

This got longer than I thought it would, so I cut it up into two sections to make me fell better.
Enjoys ~~~
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Time to go home.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my beta nymphstreet!!
And Thank you to all you people reading and enjoying this story!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As I thought, by the end of the meal we’ve played musical chairs, starting with Nick shoo’ing Spier out of his seat when Leah steps away to the rest room. Spier then has Abby move so that he can sit beside his boyfriend. Which leads to Abby trying to make Cal go sit with Spier and Bram, but I vetoed that action by putting my arm around Cal’s waist to his apparent delight in the form of color dusting his cheeks and a smile that’s rooted deep despite its simple look. Abby recognized my veto, but then squeezed herself on to our side anyway, which isn’t the end of the world I guess as it gives me a reason to be as near Cal as I am. Not that I need a reason. Really, I don’t. Except since we came in, Waffle House has gotten a flux of people and worry bites at my ankles despite me trying to kick it away. A few minutes more and Spier has moved to sit with Leah and Nick with Bram stealing one of the few actual chairs in the place to sit at the end of the table leaving the other booth vacant.

Most of the plates are empty and I’m on my third refill. The conversation has jumped around, looping back to topics only occasionally with Nick groaning about soccer tryouts, Cal being quieter than when it’s just the two of us, and Spier bringing up the possibility of Oreos crepes after Leah and Abby debated pancakes and crepes. Along with a few more inquiries about Cal and I - mostly springing from moments whenever one of us would bring up something the others were surprised we knew about.

I don’t really get their reactions and don’t keep my mouth shut about it. Abby tries to explain, but ultimately it’s Bram saying, “it’s just new for us. You two being together and it’s not for you two,” before I got it. Which he wouldn’t have had to say if I hadn’t been keeping secrets. I nod at the answer, falling quiet glad that no one brought up what was in my head and why. Other than a few road bumps, all and all, we’ve spent most of the evening enjoying each other’s company, but I was ready to get some sleep about an hour ago now.

But, I’m not one to call the end of a party, so I stick it out until Spier looks at the clock and says he needs to get home. “I told my parents I’d be home by nine.” So, we cash out and head out to our cars. This time, after goodbyes and see you tomorrows, Abby rides with Spier leaving me and Cal alone in my truck. Cal smiles at me as he takes the AUX cable for the radio. I return it a little slow with sleep, before kicking my car on and pulling out of the parking lot wishing Spier had looked at the time sooner.

“They seem to be okay with you and us,” Cal states breaking the silence. He still sounds quieter, as if
he’s speaking in a library with only footnotes available to get his thoughts across. “How was it telling
them?”

I shrug due to a lack of voice not lack of knowledge, pausing afterward to draw in a deep breath. I
don’t adjust my focus from driving, letting all the other stuff simmer on the back burner speaking off
memory and not heart as much as I can. “Bram almost gave me a panic attack, Spier demanded a
double date, Morgan and Anna explained what pansexual was for me when Nick asked, and I think
Leah doesn’t like it.” I get out in one breath and then quickly add. “The dating you part. She doesn’t
care about the pansexual thing, obviously.”

I don’t look at him with the whole driving thing I’m doing going on, but I can hear the puzzlement
that I’d bet money is showing on his face when he asks why I think Leah doesn’t like us dating.
“She seemed fine with it just now.”

“Yeah, she did.” I agree, wondering again if I’m projecting or redirecting or one of those other I
learned people in last year’s psych course. Despite the doubt, I still think she’s bothered by it, though
I have no idea why she would be.

Cal doesn’t say anything to that, hums a little, pushing on in the conversation thankfully, instead of
digging for more. “Why did Bram almost give you a heart attack?”

I smile a little more full, past the exhaustion, as I tell him what happens. Talking with Bram in the
locker room had really helped settle the lingering fear that was tangled with that interaction leaving
the moment colored as a funny. Halfway through the story, I have to interject about Bram’s game of
guessing who I was crushing on which leads me to explain about my conversation with Bram at the
beginning of the semester that leaves my cheeks hot, fumbling over those words and jumping at the
moment to go back to the original story.

I get Cal to laugh once and roll his eyes several times. He also smiles through the part I stumble
through like he can’t decide if it’s cute and amusing to see me stumble over the sentimental words
and a deeper fondness at hearing the sentimental words that are directed at him. Either way, it’s a
very nice smile, complimented by the color under his pretty sea blue eyes, and if I wasn’t driving I
would totally kiss him in order to taste that smile on my own lips.

“What about your friends? How did things go after lunch?”

“You mean after fifth period.” Cal corrects, my mouth going a little dry at the reminder. He chuckles
softly knowing exactly what sprang to my mind before continuing. “Ethan’s in my sixth period and
asked a lot of questions, but more of the too personal kind. Some of the tamer ones being things like
if I’ve seen you without a shirt, about the hickey on my neck, about when you decided you liked
guys and things like that.”

I swallow around the dryness that springs up in my throat because I legitimately hadn’t considered
the idea of Cal or anyone but me having to explain myself - about my pansexuality. I feel a little
stupid for that, but I figure it’s just one more thing on the list of things to think over that I hadn’t
considered or dealt with before.

“What did you say?”

“I didn’t answer most of his questions.” He answers casually as he pauses to check his phone,
already saying more than he did most of dinner.

“To the last question specifically.”
“Oh,” Cal says as I roll to idle at a stop sign. “Well, I said since I kissed you.” I blink twice and turn to look at him, grinning. He’s smiling like he’s clever and I break into a laugh. Just as steady he adds, “I try not to answer on other people’s behalf.”

“Well, I think that’s a pretty good answer even if it isn’t technically true. It’s pretty close.”

“Are you trying to tell me I didn’t lure you into homosexuality with my skills at kissing?” Cal feigns hurt stressing his southern drawl causing laughter to pull from my gut and to lean over the console.

I kiss him, short but something sure. “You and your ability to kiss me senseless only confirmed things.”

“Kiss you senseless?” He repeats quieter than before, with less confidence and a bit of questioning.

“Every time.” I kiss him again to prove my point, before finally settling back into my seat and moving from the stop sign.

We aren’t far from his house now, but with each street closer he draws quieter and more fidgety. Something harsh biting away at the giddy sureness of the sweet kisses until I can visibly see the tension in his shoulders. That didn’t take long to see, I think, wondering what stressor has worked its way into his muscles there. I wonder if it’s the same as mine.

I pull up along the curb, throw the car into park expecting more of a conversation, but with no intention of pushing it despite how much I want to be in bed right now. I just sort of watch him as he moves to shuffle his bag and looks from his house back to me.

I really like him, I think.

It’s such a simple thought. One that springs out of nowhere sometimes, comes without strings attached, and makes my heart skip a beat.

“Are you going to tell your parents tonight?” He finally asks, worry biting his tone and breaking my study of him.

I shake my head feeling warm and heavy at the same time, “No. I will. Just n- not today.”

Cal captures my hand. “I think that’s a good idea, Garrett. There’s no rush on telling them.” I can see there’s more on his mind, something at the tip of his tongue so I stay quiet giving him time to speak more as I try not to think past this moment right now, “…especially if they react like you think they will.”

Oh. I squeeze his hand. ‘I’ll be okay.’ Cal swings to look at me in the face. His eyes a little too wide allowing me to see the worry that’s blended into fear around the edges that is usually hidden away. I squeeze his hand again and offer a clumsy smile. “Going home, really. I mean that. I’ll be okay doing that.”

“Are you sure?” Surprisingly, before I can answer, Cal continues. “I’ve been thinking about it. About what you told me about your parents. And I… I feel like… are you sure you’re okay?” He cuts off and continues with sharp breaths.

“Yes,” I answer as strongly as I can, shifting a little closer to him in my seat. It’s not a lie. I’m positive that today my parents don’t know anything, won’t find out anything. Today is fine. I don’t know about later, I don’t want to think about later. I won’t let my thoughts go down that road to later.
My conviction causes Cal to swallow the rest of his words, trying to catch a deep breath instead. I copy the action needing it as much as him.

“Would you tell me if it wasn’t?” I almost don’t hear the question. And I have to blink a few times to really process it and that Cal said it.

The answer should be yes. Of course. But, it’s been months since my parents started hating Bram, of me getting slack for being his friend and I haven’t made any moves to tell him. I told Cal about my parents, but it took just as long. I think I would tell Cal, eventually, if things with my parents deteriorated that much, but I don’t know how quickly I would do so.

Cal stays quiet as he watches my face carefully. I doubt he likes what he sees.

“I want to say yes, but I don’t know.” I grimace at my answer, but any spiraling I’m about to do gets cut off the moment I recognize something like guilt and blame settle onto Cal’s shoulders and lips. “Hey.” He looks back to me. “What happens with my parents. It’s not on you.” I’m surprised my words aren’t harder, aren’t louder. They’re just there - leveled and easy to speak. This isn’t an opinion to me, something that I can emphasize with my feelings. It’s not. It’s a fact.

It should be a fact.

Cal looks like he’s having a hard time swallowing that truth.

I reach out with my free hand, fingers drifting along the side of his face. “Nothing’s happening tonight at the very least. In fact, I think I’m going to go home and crash without even talking to them. I’m really tired. Who know coming out to your friends and making out with your boyfriend in a closet could wear one out so much.”

My attempt to lighten the air works despite Cal seeing through my attempt. The smile he gives me is cute and happy despite the concern dug into the line around his mouth. “I would never have guessed.” Cal responds sounding that way one does when they’re trying to taste the sugar around the medicine. He leans over the console, kisses my cheek. “Everything you did today… that was amazing. You’re amazing.” And I get another kiss on my cheek as blood colors it faint.

We stay leaned into each other for a moment, breathing each other in before giving in and kissing each other on the lips with as much appreciation as we can give to the other apparently. It leaves me a little overwhelmed and giddy and feeling in a good place despite any warranted worry either one of us has. I’m smiling when he pulls away.

“I think I should head inside now.”

I can’t exactly say he’s wrong, even if I think he’s wrong. It is getting late. “Probably?”

“I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yeah. I mean, I probably won’t get up as early as I did today.” I confess because sleeping in sounds like the right decision to make.

Cal laughs a bit at that. “That’s okay. If you want, you can find me in the music rooms when you do show up or I’ll see you in math.”

“I’ll see you before math,” I promise. “Math sounds too far from now.” He’s about to roll his eyes at me when I kiss him to seal my promise. His hands come up to cup my face, breaking the kiss momentarily as he chuckles wobbly at me and pulls me back in.
I’m so very utterly happy to see that he’s climbing out of my truck looking pleased and kissed, given the worry and the tension and the hardship of the day. I’m pleased to feel like he looks right now given how many things I’ve left cooking on the back burners of my mind.

“Later,” I say when he’s turning back, feet on the ground, to close my truck’s door.

“Tomorrow.” Cal responds and then quickly with a smile that’s threatening to be a smirk adds, “ sometime this week we should go over your list. We can do mine at the same time.”

I’m agreeing before I register the words. And the door is shutting when I get out, “List? You have a list? Cal!” I groan when the door clicks shut, left watching as Cal pulls his house keys out on his way to the front porch. I think his list can’t be any worse than my own or he wouldn’t have left me hanging like this. That doesn’t stop me from debating on following him into his house for an answer now.

The only reason I don’t is because there are cars that most certainly belong to Cal’s parents in the driveway. The first time I meet them probably shouldn’t be when I march into their home to steal Cal’s bag.

Cal gives me one last wave, before disappearing into his house. I don’t move my car from park until the front door closes tight.

Chapter End Notes

I can’t remember the last time I completed a chapter story and really that’s all to yall and your very kind words. I haven’t gotten to reply to everyone’s replies as I normally do and I’m hoping to get to that this weekend, but I’ve been really low lately so I might end up sleeping away my weekend. If I do that, I really want all of you to know how much I utterly appreciate everything you guys share with me.

It really helps me keep sharing my ideas regarding these two lovely boys. And I do have a lot of ideas and plan to write as much of them as I can to share. I’m not sure what idea I’ll work on next, prolly something shorter so maybe not the whole Garrett's parents thing just yet. Yall will have to wait a bit more on that. Give yall some more feel good stuff before I go to that, so if yall have any headcannons or ideas that you want me to maybe work with, just leave them in the comments and I’ll try to work ones in that fit along the series.

Also, also, I might try a few pieces in Cal's POV would, yall be up for that?

<3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Some questions regarding things now that Garrett's out and they're official. It sort of goes off course, but they do try to stay on topic.

This story is a chapter reposted from the 'Texting To and From' that I've moved here.

Chapter Notes

ISS is In School Suspension which is exactly as it sounds. Instead of just suspending students when they've broken rules or such, schools can discipline students without having them miss school in which they go into a special room with cubicles and low interaction from other students. It's often used here in the states.

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**September 19th Tuesday**

**Texting Group: Me, Cal $**

9:46 PM G :: so u have a list?

9:47 PM G :: what is on ur list? u saw mine

9:59 PM C :: I thought you were going to crash?

10:03 PM G :: that was before you decided to be mean.

10:04 PM G :: don’t be mean.

10:18 PM C :: Ive been told Im a rather nice person and I choose to accept the majority’s opinion.

10:20 PM G :: my opinion is definitely more important than the masses.

10:21 PM C :: For me that might be true.

10:26 PM C :: My list is like yours. just things I think we should discuss.

10:29 PM G :: like what?

10:31 PM G :: is ur list in that notebook u quickly took from me in chem?

10:36 PM C :: No its not in that spiral and we can talk tomorrow, Garrett. sleep is important and today was very long.

10:38 PM G :: one question?

10:39 PM C :: Sleep.
10:40 PM G :: of course.

10:40 PM G :: question first tho?

10:42 PM C :: You think your cute dont you?

10:43 PM G :: are u trying to tell me u dont think Im cute?!

10:44 PM C :: Of course I do. Now G’night, Garrett.

10:48 PM G :: night Cal.

September 20th  Wednesday
Texting Group: Me, Cal $

7:49 AM G :: question time!! confetti emoji

7:49 AM G :: what r u okay with affectionwise in public?

8:04 AM C :: Quick kisses, hand holding, hugs. simple things I suppose.

8:04 AM C :: Really I think it comes down to what are you okay with?

8:07 AM G :: oh yeah that makes sense

8:08 AM G :: I like holding ur hand and its hard not to kiss u sometimes… but idk like it depends on whos around. tho it shouldnt

8:11 AM C :: I think changing your behavior based on whos around is pretty common for everyone. on your own and especially in a relationship.

8:14 AM C :: How about I follow your lead on this until your more comfortable?

8:15 AM G :: okay

8:15 AM G :: thx

8:27 AM C :: My question - do you want to sit at lunch together again. my friends or yours table?

8:49 AM G :: yes. mine?

8:53 AM C :: That works for me.

9:27 AM G :: math is boring.

9:28 AM G :: I like that shirt on u.

9:36 AM C :: And here I thought youd prefer it off of me.

9:44 AM G :: fuck why do to this to me in class?
September 21th Thursday
Texting Group: Me, JockJokeBF

6:12 AM C :: Does Bram know about your parents? Does anyone other than me?

7:09 AM G :: no. pls dont tell anyone.
7:13 AM G :: especically Bram. hell just feel guilty or something.
7:24 AM C :: I wont say anything.
7:27 AM G :: thx.
7:28 AM G :: I just parked btw. see u in a min

12:28 PM G :: have u told ur parents about us?
12:34 PM C :: No. not yet. figured Id wait til tonight since we do the weekly family dinner.
12:37 PM C :: Are you okay with that?
12:51 PM G :: absolutely. just curious.
12:59 PM G :: am I going to have to start coming over when theyre home or can I still come by when theyre out of the house still?
1:12 PM C :: yes and yes.
1:46 PM G :: will it be harder to come over without them knowing if they know ur dating?
2:07 PM C :: My parents work schedule will not change just b/c I have a boyfriend, Garrett.
2:14 PM G :: shush you. I dont need your logic.
2:18 PM C :: I feel like thats not true.
2:19 PM G :: I dont need your logic. I need your attention.
2:32 PM C :: I think I can live with that.

9:31 PM G :: howd dinner with the folks go?
9:55 PM C :: Fine really. they asked questions about you but thats expected.
10:04 PM G :: thats good. really good.
10:05 PM G :: Im glad and oddly relieved and idk what else
10:21 PM C :: Im sorry telling your parents wont be as easy.
10:24 PM G :: yeah...me too.
10:26 PM G :: Ill see u tomorrow. Night.

10:37 PM C :: Gnight. sleep well.

**September 22th Friday**  
**Texting Group: Me, Cal $**

12:11 PM G :: if I get ISS will u still date me?

12:18 PM C :: Id prefer it if you didnt get ISS, but yes Id still date you.  
I waited too long to let something like that make me give you up.

12:19 PM C :: Why might you be getting ISS?

12:21 PM G :: some guys are talking shit and I kinda want to punch them.

12:22 PM C :: Please dont get hurt.  
You cant fight everyone that says something.

**September 22th Friday**  
**Texting Group: Me, Garrett**

12:20 PM B :: Stop texting Cal and pay attention to your teacher.

12:23 PM G :: how do u know Im texting Cal at the moment and not paying attention to class??

12:28 PM B :: Educated guess.  
Youve been texting him all week during class, and I have class with Cal now and he  
keeps checking his phone.

**September 22th Friday**  
**Texting Group: Me, Cal $**

12:31 PM G :: I know but I hate not doing anything.  
also Ive been informed by Bram that I need to stop texting you.

12:33 PM C :: Uh, okay?

2:13 PM G :: I should have gotten my shit together sooner. asked u out sooner. but I was being a  
coward.

2:18 PM C :: No you werent and ‘should have’s dont do anyone any good. focus on the right now.  
The right now is pretty good.

2:19 PM C :: at least I think so.

2:22 PM G :: I think so too.
3:01 PM G :: do you have a question for today?

3:29 PM C :: Will you give me a ride home today?

5:16 PM G :: absolutely. soccer just let out. Ill wait at my car.

5:23 PM C :: Im out now and heading that way. maybe you can actually tell me about maybe getting ISS on the way home.

5:25 PM G :: maybe winking face emoji

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