Listen to my heart, can you hear it sing?

by dragon_rider

Summary

Blake is a country star. Adam is a prostitute. With a broken heart and broken dreams, they meet in the middle and put each other back together.

Notes

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HANNAH!!!
Blake drives through this part of town far more often than he likes admitting but it’s one of those nights and he needs a distraction, needs a warm body to help hiding the fact his bed is constantly and hopelessly cold these days.

He usually sticks to one side of the red district, the side with the pretty girls that will lend their bodies if he pays them enough. His only requirement is for them not to be blondes and then he’s game, doesn’t care about how much or how little make-up they’re wearing or how many pounds they have extra or how many they’re missing.

He’s never cared about perfection. He’s a simple, down-to-earth sort of guy. His fame hasn’t changed that.

When he falls for someone; he falls for the pretty and the ugly, falls for the whole picture, for the real person. The only mistake he’s ever made in his love life is assuming everyone falls in the same way because they don’t—she sure as Hell didn’t—and now he’s alone with his misery and with only money but no real will to fix that.

He peruses the women for a long while, having trouble deciding which one to take home tonight.

Maybe he’s not drunk enough, he thinks, maybe he needs to down another quarter of that vodka he found in his mini bar.

He’s on his third round around the block when he spots him; tall, lean and striking in the tightest pair of skinny jeans he’s ever seen on a man along with a white tee with holes that has probably seen better days. His arms are covered in tattoos—the guitar on his forearm catches Blake’s eye the most—that make all the more obvious to him the man he’s ogling is a work of art, plain and simple.

He’s wearing boots and they’re not cowboy boots and he’s definitely—oh, most definitely—not his usual type but he’s a brunette and Blake is hooked.

He’s so hooked his dick has already taken an interest in the guy outside the car window, an interest that only goes up when he bends and picks a girl’s purse after she drops it, the swell curve of his ass highlighted by the way his jeans hug it like a second skin.

The girl smiles at him and kisses him on the cheek, giggling about whatever the guy—that ought to be a male model instead of a hooker in Blake’s humble opinion—tells her.

His waist is trim, almost like the kind of waist Blake’s used to holding between his hands, and he decides in a whim that yeah, he can’t wait to get his hands on him.

So what if he’s never been with a dude? There’s a first time for everything, ain’t it?

Blake’s life is falling to pieces and if he’s having a sexuality crisis on top of the clusterfuck of his failed marriage and his mounting depression, well—he’d do better not denying his own desires.

He rolls his window down and beckons the guy to him.

“Me?” he says, so stunned you’d think he’s not used to draw attention at all despite of his looks and
his line of work.

Even in the dim light of the street, Blake can see he’s got hazel eyes and long, curled eyelashes that most women would probably kill to have.

He wonders if he’s a musician, if he sings.

Blake is good at figuring people out—alright, he’s good most of the time and obviously not when it really matters—and this guy surely looks like sex on legs but also like he belongs on stage with a mike in front of him and a guitar in his hands.

“You're in the wrong side of the sidewalk if you’re looking for this kind of hook-up, man.”

“I know what I want,” Blake says, voice deep and husky betraying just how much he means what he’s saying, “Get in, rock star. Don’t play hard to get.”

The guy leans on the window, his smile turning cocky once he realizes just how badly the big dude in the truck wants him. “Not even going to ask me how much or anything, huh? I guess I’ll have to trust you and your dimply face then. I’m in.”

He hops in and winks at him as Blake starts the car.

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The trip to his place is quiet. Blake is used to whoever he picks talking his ear off during it. He supposes that’s a women thing and doesn’t push, has half a mind to turn the radio on when his hired lover for the night breaks the silence.

“Hey, my name is Ad—“ the guy winces, ducks his head a little, “Adam, yeah, that’s actually my name.”

Blake raises an eyebrow at him. This is his first time with a man and if the guy is a newbie it could be fitting. He wouldn’t mind at all if that was the case.

Of course, Adam doesn’t know this and tries to fix his slip.

“I’m not a rookie, I swear. I’ll rock your world, you just wait,” he assures, an edge of desperation in his voice that makes Blake’s heartstrings pull in sympathy, “It’s just—it’s been a long night.”

“Tell me about it,” Blake agrees, smiling to let Adam know he’s lost no points in his book so far, “I’m Blake, by the way.”

He doesn’t tell Adam it’s his real name too but judging by the way he smiles brightly and goes back to being playful and chipper, he got it anyway.

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He owns a house in town but keeps his affairs in his apartment. The whole fifth floor is his and there’s no danger of Miranda walking in on something she’d rather not see.

Just because she broke his heart doesn’t mean Blake wants to do the same to her. He tells himself even that is wishful thinking because she’s clearly over him, if she was ever into him at all, but can’t help wanting to spare her from what he went through.

A little part of him still loves her, the same part that longs for company and pushes him to search the only kind that can make him feel worse, that can make him forget he’s a good guy and could get
anyone he wanted if he went out for a while and did some mingling and even some courting too.

The same part of him that just wants to be miserable and wallow in it.

Adam takes one look around, eyebrows shooting to his hairline, and turns to stare at him.

Blake knows this reaction. It’s the one he gets every time he brings someone here. It means he has things in his life that should allow him to get anyone he wanted and that he’s probably into very weird shit if he needs dollars to buy what he can’t otherwise get.

“Any kinky stuff will cost you extra, cowboy,” Adam says, shrugging, “Just saying.”

“Is good ol’ love making a kink, now?” he asks, “Because that’s what I have in store for you, sweetheart.”

“Woah, you’re a sweet talker, aren’t you?” Adam laughs and it’s such a pleased, appealing sound Blake can’t find it in him to get upset about it, “No, it’s not.”

He slides his hands all over Adam’s back—finally getting his hands on him like he’s wanted for the past half an hour—from his shoulders to his hips and then back up to his waist, keeping them there to flush him to his body.

“You’re so big,” Adam mumbles against his neck, hands clinging to his shoulder blades and voice a little awed. He’s amazed when Adam instantly notices how the one word makes him tense and amends it quickly, “I meant tall, baby. God, I could literally climb you like a tree.”

Blake surprises himself kissing his temple and freezes for a second. He chuckles, nervous, because all of this is always easy—paying for sex isn’t exactly complicated, it’s meant to be the exact opposite—but having Adam in his arms feels more than easy.

It feels natural and that’s unexpected and scary.

“Good,” he rumbles, pulling the smaller man to the master bedroom by the belt loops, “Because that’s what I’m paying you to do.”

The reminder of their roles seems to sober Adam. He lets go of him and starts undressing; first tentatively, probably checking if he wants a striptease or to undress him himself, and then quickly and assuredly, like he’s done this a thousand times and it’s nothing but a chore once he notices that’s not the case.

Blake is still regretting what he said by the time he has every bit of Adam available to leer and touch.

It’s more than breathtaking, how almost sculpted every dip and slant and line of his body seem, like a spur of a moment decision a God made to create something downright perfect, and Blake might be a song writer but he’s never been much of a poet and he can’t find better words to describe what he’s seeing and itching to kiss and grope.

There are more tattoos on his shoulders, which isn’t surprising, and more on his chest. He traces each one with wandering fingertips, stopping by Adam’s hipbones to turn him around and admire the ink on his back.

He’s always been a fan of tattoos, especially old school. He has just the one on his forearm and it’s an ugly attempt of a tattoo, at that.

He doesn’t remember what he was thinking the day he drew it and demanded to get it on his skin.
Chances are he was just piss poor drunk.

“How do you want me?” Adam asks, casual, head tilted to the side and back towards him letting Blake appreciate the delicate features of his face.

He wonders absently if there have always been men this beautiful and he just hasn’t been paying attention or if Adam is one of a kind and meant to open his eyes to him and him alone because there will be no other man like him, no other man that can awaken what Blake feels burning inside of him like a firecracker that sets a hearth on fire and gives it power to crackle and warm over for all the crisp months of winter to come and more.

Blake has done this dance before. He knows what to say not to spook Adam even more than he’s spooking himself.

“On your back.”

Adam complies, eyes roaming Blake’s figure as he takes his own clothes off slowly. His eyes travel from his bulky shoulders to his chest hair and lower, not stopping in his mid-section despite the flaws there from too much drinking and too little exercise and that’s a first for Blake.

Even with hookers, he’s always been able to pinpoint that brief and small moment of disappointment, even though he’s so far from sporting a pot belly that in his best moments—and no, he doesn’t’ have many of those—he thinks they’re all just being mean bitches, his ex-wife included.

Adam’s gaze seems to zero in on his hips and his thighs—even his calves get some attention before those hazel eyes lock with his, bright and frisky. He raises an eyebrow and stretches on the bed like a cat that’s just waking up from a nice nap, all graceful motions and slim lines.

“You gonna join me sometime soon or should I start by myself?” Adam quips, hand reaching for his dick that’s already half-hard and resting like a treat on his thigh. That’s the best compliment he could ask for since they haven’t even touched each other yet.

Blake shakes his head, knees bumping on the mattress at each side of Adam’s legs, and takes on the job the younger man was about to do.

Jerking off a cock is familiar enough. He’s not shy with it, fingers immediately stroking the vein and locking around it for a couple of firm pumps. He’s kind of impressed, to be honest, since Adam is well-endowed for such a little, lean guy.

And he swears he’s usually a polite client. If he wants a kiss, he checks with his bed companion first since in this kind of business transaction not all parties are interested in being loving and enjoying what’s going on as much as in getting certain parts into the necessary places and being done with it as soon as possible.

He doesn’t this time. He steals a kiss, just like that, covering Adam’s lips hotly with his own and sucking the little pants that are leaving Adam’s parted mouth. He uses one elbow for leverage and tilts Adam’s head for a better angle using his hand to grip his chin, thumb caressing Adam’s already wet bottom lip for an instant before taking it back between his lips.

Adam stutters a moan so loud it still echoes around them despite they muffle half of it in their mouths and surges in the kiss, teeth nibbling until Blake opens his mouth and lets him in, the control of the contact going back and forth between them like it’s a game they both want to excel at and loving every bit of it.

It’s so intense Blake finds himself blinking, lightheaded and so hard he’s sure he’s going to die if
they don’t get on with it soon—harder than he’s ever been since the first flick of Adam’s tongue against his own—but Adam honest to God *whimpers* at his first try of leaving his mouth, a breathy ‘*please*’ all he needs to kiss him again and relinquish his hold on his cock in favor to rut against him and find some release in the friction against his thigh and groin, depending on how well he aims his hips, hand sneaking around him to grasp Adam’s rounded and perfect ass to push him up to meet him.

He’d be content coming just like this and Gosh, he could bet everything he owns that it’d be the best orgasm he’s ever had but somehow he collects himself enough to slow down and add some sweetness into the kiss, hand stroking Adam’s inner thigh to rouse a shiver in him.

“Where have you been all my life?” Blake breathes against his neck, nipping his way down until he gets to a spot that makes Adam moan and lingers there, sucking the skin to his mouth hard enough to bruise but not caring either for the extra that’s gonna cost him or how he’s doing it for the wrong reasons entirely, “You taste better than the finest rum I’ve ever had.”

Adam giggles breathily, tilting his head back to give him more skin to mark. “You’re so dumb. No one ever told you you don’t need to sweet-talk a whore to take them to bed? Especially if they’re already in your bed.”

“Maybe I don’t care,” Blake says, teasing, breaking apart enough to snatch lube from the nightstand drawer and thank all the heavens he’s bought the stuff ages ago to smooth things with the ladies instead of taking for granted they’d all be wet and ready for him. Why would they, if Miranda hadn’t even wanted him and he was her *husband*? “Maybe I’m just dumb. You’re gonna have to find out yourself, rock star.”

Adam makes room for him, legs spreading invitingly, cock fully hard against his belly now, and Blake bites his lip as he tries to relieve some of the ache in his own with his hand, having Adam’s pink pucker waiting for him to use as he pleases.

He’s noticed how they’re both pointedly not using their names even though they know them, and it makes him angry because deep down he wants something real, he’s *dying* for something genuine and sweet and soothing, he’s just too much of a chicken to go and look for it.

He’s almost flying blind by now, inexperienced as he is with a man. He’s not even tried anal with a girl and for some reason he wants Adam to think highly of him so he regrets that now.

He wants Adam to have him in his mind for days after this, wants Adam to think of no one but him as he writhes beneath another man from now on.

The thought makes him bitter and he coats his middle finger in plenty of lube, done with waiting and thinking, barely circling Adam’s entrance before pushing in all the way.

“C’mon,” he all but grunts, hand pressing Adam’s abdomen to the mattress so he can’t move, can’t do anything except taking what he’s giving him, “Show me how pretty you’re gonna look around my cock, Adam. Show me how well you’re gonna take it for me, darlin’.”

He’s not even done with the dirty talk when Adam is already keening and arching off the bed, upper body coilin in pleasure and heels digging into the mattress as he spreads his legs wider and pushes back against Blake’s hand.

“Shit—“ Adam curses and oh, Blake is a quick learner—he’s already figured out he discovered something great in his first try and gently circles it with the tip of his finger, kissing Adam’s knee when he shudders and cries out again, “Your fingers are so fucking long, Blake.”
“Oh?” Blake smirks, squeezing more lube into his hand to push his index finger in this time since it looks like he’s doing good so far, “I got something else that’s long that you’re gonna like.”

He brushes teasingly the leaking head of his cock between Adam’s cheeks. This is a bit of himself at least no one can look down on and he takes pride in it, in how thick and long he is, in how his length and girth are just this shy of being overwhelming and just enough to fill everything nicely and completely.

If he had the time and the self-control, he’d lick Adam all over—he’d mouth and map every inch of his smooth and inked skin until Adam forgot everything, even the need to come, and then he’d push right inside of him and delight in the screams he’d heard but he’s a weak man and he wants things fast and dirty for now.

Later, he thinks, later he’ll buy as much time as he possibly can to have this exquisite man trapped between his sheets with no desire or intention to leave his bed again.

He peppers Adam’s thigh with wet kisses as he adds a third finger. He watches his own hand at work in and out of Adam and inhales the musk there. It’s heady and different but definitely not unpleasant. He enjoys going down on girls a lot and he wasn’t kidding when he said he wants to lick Adam everywhere and he gives into it for a moment, tongue rolling Adam’s sack as his fingers make room for his cock.

Adam whines, high-pitched and unashamed, and Blake loves it, so he does it again. “Oh God,” he pants, “God, please tell me you’ve got condoms somewhere close.”

“Want me that bad, huh?” Blake teases, withdrawing his hand and attaching his mouth to Adam’s left hipbone, “This is my rodeo, what if I’m just starting?”

Adam hisses, breath ending in a moan as Blake mouths his way up to a nipple and sucks, and straightens up shakingly on his elbows to level him with a measuring look.

“No, I think you want to be inside me like, yesterday, and you’re just being a fucking tease,” he grins once Blake looks up, cocky and pleased, and adds, “Do you want me to beg? Do you want me to be so loud your whole building finds out how good you’re giving it to me?”

Yes, Blake would say any other day, yes, I want fake and loud and as filthy as it can get. I want to feel like the king of your world, like someone who ain’t real because he’s too damn good to be true.

“No,” he hears himself saying, heartbeat steady and anchoring as it rushes in his ears, lips brushing Adam’s almost tenderly as they look at each other from too close to see nothing but the need they have to be together, “No. I want you to be you. If you like begging, let me make it as hard as I can for you. If you’re a screamer, let me make you voiceless,” he pauses, shuts his eyes tight against the frightening truth that’s about to come out of his mouth and presses his forehead to Adam’s softly, almost apologetically so, “I want you, Adam, I want nothing and no one but you.”

He feels more than hears the breath catching in Adam’s throat, chest constricting and stuttering with it. He feigns he doesn’t notice that or how much wetter his eyes are now.

He grabs a condom from the nightstand, rolls it on, slicks himself up and lets his length align with Adam’s entrance on its own as he grips Adam’s thighs and leans down, putting a bit of weight on each one, muscles taut with the need to thrust right in.

“Blake,” Adam breathes just as he’s squeezed the tip in, eyes and mouth wide open, and it’s not as much about the sex as it’s supposed to be. It feels too real, too special, too right to be something he
bought because they’re both desperate in different ways, “Blake, please.”

“I’ve got you,” he assures him, bottoms out with a groan and laps the bit of saliva that’s leaking out of the corner of Adam’s mouth before kissing him, “I’ve got you, Adam.”

It’s a frenzy race after that; hips meeting ass back and forth, limbs tangling in each other’s bodies to try and be a little closer. Adam moans and whimpers for him, thrashing and cursing like there’s no place he’d rather be than clamping around his dick and driving him crazy in ways he never knew were possible.

“You’re beautiful,” Blake murmurs, so gone he messes up the rhythm but he snaps his hips faster and makes up for it, relishing the almost-shout he gets out of Adam, “You’re so beautiful, Adam.”

His lover comes with a shout that’s half a sob and at least a quarter of disbelief.

Blake keeps going for five more thrusts before he’s groaning, hips gyrating in place as he empties himself in the condom and making Adam gasp quicker.

He holds the edge of it firmly and pulls out after catching his breath for a moment. He ties it and dumps it on the floor, hand looking for something to clean them both just enough to lie there for a while.

Adam is still panting and trembling when he’s done.

Blake kisses the tears on his cheeks away, shushing him gently as his arms guide him closer to him.

“Did I hurt you?” he asks quietly, an apology ready in the tip of his tongue in case he did.

“Are you kidding me?” Adam looks up at him, sleepy eyes squinting at him, “No one bothers to be this gentle, dude, where are you even from? Mars?”

Blake chuckles, happy and sated like he hasn’t felt in months. “Oklahoma,” he says, “But close enough. It’s like another planet compared to LA, yeah.”

“Good things grow in the South besides wheat, I see,” Adam hums, kissing his chest before pressing his cheek against it, “What else do you want? You still have like 25 minutes.”

“Sleep with me,” Blake replies, lips brushing his hairline sweetly, “I’m not kidnapping you or anything, I promise.”

“Okay, I’ll have to trust you.”

Adam laughs a little and Blake feels a pang of sympathy when it doesn’t even take him a minute to be out like a light.

He sings for a while under his breath until sleep finally claims him.

If I could take you in feeling you deep beneath my skin then I could slip away with you as a poison in my veins...
Soft, almost shy notes strummed in a guitar wake him.

He puts on some clothes and pads to the living room to find a half-naked Adam with one of his acoustic guitars. He always has a couple laying around for when the mood strikes and he can write a new song and the habit hasn’t died down despite of how long it’s been since the last time he felt like doing that.

He’s vaguely familiar with the melody Adam is playing and the name might be escaping him but not the beauty of it—the precise and impeccable movements of Adam’s fingers and how he loses himself in the music, eyes closed and body hugging the guitar like it could disappear any second if he lets go of it.

It’s been five minutes, maybe, when Adam realizes he’s got an audience now and stops, putting the instrument on the couch beside him hastily.

“Sorry,” he whispers, cringing in a way that makes Blake’s heart ache, “I wasn’t going to steal it or anything, I just—I wanted to know if I still knew how to do that. It’s been a while since I played.”

Blake shakes his head and crouches in front of him. “Yeah, you suck as a thief, I gotta say, but you’re a damn good guitarist.”

He smiles, encouraging, and hands the guitar back to Adam.

“C’mon, play me something else, something that I can actually pronounce.”

Adam laughs but it’s short-lived. He looks down and takes a deep breath like he’s gathering strength and lets go of the guitar almost finger by finger.

“It’s late. I should get going,” he mutters, standing up and walking to the bedroom without looking back.

He’s so quick in putting his boots and his t-shirt on Blake hasn’t even moved from where he is and has yet to decide what to do.

Adam hangs back near the hall, so awkward and sad Blake wants nothing but to take him back to bed but knows better than to offer even if he’d be paying again.

He drags his feet to his bedroom, fishing his pants to get his wallet. He bites his lips, stalling for almost a minute, and settles on doing something crazy because being nice and proper hasn’t worked out well for him and he, quite frankly, doesn’t give a damn anymore.

Adam can rob everything he owns next time if he wants to. Blake won’t stop him.

He strides to a separate room for the guitar case and goes back to the living room to put the instrument away and give Adam his money with a little plus, grabbing his hand to close it around the handle of the case.

“Take it,” he says firmly, pushing the guitar back to Adam when it looks like he’s about to refuse what’s probably the best thing that’s happened to him in a long while, “It’s a loan so you can play something for me next time.”

“How drunk are you, man?” Adam asks, gaping, “I could sell this for a lot of money and never see you again. It’s a big city. You wouldn’t find me.”
“I guess I’ll have to trust you,” he quotes, grinning, “What do you say? Do we have a deal?”

Adam grips the guitar more firmly, looking briefly at it before meeting his gaze and nodding. “Yeah, okay. I’m in.”

Adam beams for the first time, dimples shy but clear, and Blake tells himself is okay to steal one more kiss.

It doesn’t look like Adam wants to complain or charge him for it, standing on his tiptoes to kiss him right back.

“Thank you,” Adam breathes against his lips, “Ask for Jack if you can’t find me.”

“I will,” Blake says and watches him go.

He spends a long while afterward taking comfort in the way Adam turned around one last time to see him before going away.

Chapter End Notes

The song Blake was singing is Over.

Adam was playing the Adagio of the Concert of Aranjuez.
Adam doesn’t relinquish his hold of the guitar until he’s locked the front door of his ratty apartment and slid down to the floor, back against it, feeling simultaneously like bursting into tears and laughter.

He does a little of both because really—what the fuck did just happen? He can’t wrap his head around it, can’t even begin to try to do so and he’s got to admit he’s scared shitless of being in a dream and about to wake up in his bed, alone and cold and with a day filled with ugly—when he’s lucky—and sick—when he’s not—johns to please if he doesn’t want to end up in the street in a different way that he is now.

He curls around the case, sobs winning the battle against the smile that had been making his cheeks hurt all the way from the country singer’s place, and tells himself whatever happened and whatever is going to happen next is going to be worth it because he can play again.

It’s four in the morning and if he lived in a good neighborhood he’d be worried about bothering his neighbors, but he doesn’t. He can hear the noises from both the apartment across the hall and the one beside his own; a heated argument in one and heated fucking in the other.

He pulls the guitar out delicately, almost reverently, and lets his fingers memorize every inch of it again, get reacquainted with something he’s never truly forgotten.

All he sees in the back of his eyelids are blue eyes, so amazingly honest and sweet Adam is already missing them along with those strong arms around him, those warm and slightly calloused fingers touching him like he’s something dear and meant to be cherished and loved, like every bit of him deserves kisses and praise and kindness and oh, wouldn’t he like that to be true?

The way Blake treated his tattoos—his tattoos that are the only thing Adam still loves about himself, the only thing that no one can take away from him no matter how many times they rape him and beat him to convince him he isn’t worth shit and never will—is something that’s carved in his mind, something that made him stupid enough to go and fall from the moment he took his clothes off for a celebrity that every tabloid in Los Angeles would pay a shitload of money to find out he’s fucked a hustler and acted like it was the best thing that ever happened to him.

He starts improvising an angry melody, fast and unrelenting and hard enough his fingers will be sore for days, the callouses years of practice as a musician gave him long gone from his fingertips.

He knows who Blake Shelton is. He doubts there are people who haven’t heard his songs or his name said in passing at the very least. Why he can’t just go and make some money that would allow him to spend at least a couple of months without turning tricks for a living is beyond him.

No, actually, that’s bullshit. He knows why he can’t do that and it’s not really because the guy rocked both his metaphorical and his real world, making Adam gag for the same things he’s always getting in his job but that he’s never actually wanted before being in Blake’s bed and between his arms; it’s because he knows what destroying his music career would do to him.

Even the rumor Adam could start would be Blake’s undoing, he’s sure of it.

Granted, Adam was never famous, but he tried to be. He tried to share his vision of music with the
world and failed spectacularly, first with the fiasco of his first album and then being enough of an idiot to get in a car with the first motherfucker who swore up and down he’d make Adam a star.

_I made you a star_, his pimp is always eager to remind him while mounting Adam like he’s the best piece of meat he’s managed to cut in all his years as a butcher, _every man who comes here to fuck another man knows who you are and wants you, Adam. You’re famous, just like you wanted!_

Adam’s fingers come to a sudden halt, his tears too thick to keep playing through them.

No. He won’t rat Blake out. God, the man has enough problems that require copious amount of booze to make them bearable as it is. He could see the ragged, torn edges that make up Blake’s heart scattered between empty and half-empty bottles and he won’t make it worse, not when everything Blake did to him was showing him how to be loved felt like.

He’ll just try to make it through the day, as he always does, while a minute, coy voice in his head wails and implores Blake to come back and make him forget what he is, to come back and make him feel like he’s worth being loved, to come back and show him Adam didn’t dream all of it.

The guitar is a good reminder of that but it hurts too much to hold and touch, so much he can barely stand it.

It’s the corpse of everything Adam wanted in his life but was never good enough to get.

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He’s dreaming of a warm, big body beneath him and big hands holding his waist when there’s a knock on the door and he jerks awake, hurrying to hide the guitar in its case and shove it under his bed.

The warmth of the dream is almost palpable, almost tickling his skin with the ghost of memory but it’s not enough to hold on to reality and shield Adam from the cold he got snoozing on the floor.

He wipes his cheeks absently and mumbles, “Just a sec!” deciding to throw the only hoodie he owns on to try and get warm again.

“Hey, buddy,” Jesse says, smiling outside the door, “Are you busy right now? The guys came for an early brunch and I promised I’d check if you were home.”

_You wouldn’t want to share the table with a whore_, he thinks, and yet he can’t confess it.

He’s hungry. And he loves these guys. They’re one of the few good things Adam has to fight misery with in his life.

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Adam picks at his food but jokes and smiles a little every time Jesse, James, Matt or Mickey look at him.

It’s a bit of a stretch but it’s not so hard to find the person he once was being around people who feel the same kind of love he does for music.

They have these impromptu meetings every now and then—sometimes with months in between and it kills Adam, but he never pushes them for more—and he doesn’t know how he’s managed to earn their friendship being pathetic and elusive but he has.
Every time he gets home wrecked because a client got off hitting him or worse, he’s terrified to the bone Jesse is going to see him and know what Adam is with just a look, is going to know the best thing he can do is toss him out of his life and pretend they were never buddies or even acquaintances.

They play a new song for him, something they’ve been working on for the past month. Adam puts his two cents in it, as he always does, but doesn’t actively play a part in composing and he shakes his head every time they ask him if he knows anyone who can sing and wants to join a band.

Me, a tiny, agonic part of him whispers, Please, I can be good. I will be, with them.

He shakes his head and pushes the pieces of his broken dream away.

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“That one over there has blue eyes and is looking right at you, Jack,” Shakira elbows him impishly, “Wink at him and he’ll be yours.”

Adam makes a face, ducking his head in embarrassment at his only friend in the business noticing his thing with blue-eyed Johns lately, “Cállate,” he tells her in her native Spanish and then rushes to kiss her cheek in apology, “Sorry, I’m just—you’re right, I’ll go with him. He looks safe enough.”

“It’s okay, cielo,” she says, “I’m sorry Blue Eyes hasn’t come around to pick you yet.”

“Yeah,” Adam smiles sadly. It’s been two weeks and there’s no sign of Blake and also no sign of Adam ever getting over him and the hours they spent together, “Me too.”

He should’ve known Blake wouldn’t even remember him in the morning. He hates himself for thinking it’d be any different.

Why would he? He was just another whore he fucked like he meant it and maybe—maybe that’s his thing.

Maybe he’s so fucking gentle he can’t turn it off.

***

It’s been another whole week of awful and god-awful and Adam is so sore and tired he isn’t sure why exactly he decided to decline his—very rare, very generous and slightly creepy—pimp’s offering of a night off.

Then he spots Blake’s truck and knows why he did.

He’s torn between sprinting to the car and hiding to see if Blake will really look for him and for no one else.

He does neither, stays right where he is in plain sight but doesn’t give the thugs in the van parked nearby a reason to believe this john means shit to Adam.

Soon enough, and to his immense relief, the window rolls down and Blake gestures for him to get in, blue eyes ablaze with the same hunger he saw the first night they were together.

There’s something else in them, a message that could get Adam’s heart light with joy as the weight of doubt leaves him for real and he lets himself revel in this one gift he’s allowed to have for as long or as briefly as he can have it, but he turns his head to the side and refuses to see it.

How could Blake love him, after all?
With Adam’s luck, the stupid charming country man only loves fucking him and Adam has it all backwards because he’s just lame like that, lame and dumb and desperate for love in ways that scare him too much to face.

***

Blake reeks of alcohol even more than the first time Adam met him.

Still, it isn’t fear of dying in an accident what makes Adam ask him to park in the first dark, deserted alley they find.

It’s desperation. He wants to make sure Blake is going to come back faster next time, wants to make sure he won’t go on forever craving Blake’s touch and presence beside him, he wants to make sure Blake knows what exactly he’s been missing since the first time was more about him fucking the living daylights out of Adam instead of him actually doing his job and blowing Blake’s mind with no strings attached, cheap, dirty sex.

He unbuckles his seatbelt and makes the most of the fact the front seats of Blake’s truck are actually just one—a bench.

The country singer is already half hard and doesn’t resist one bit when Adam unzips him and takes him out of his jeans, blowing warm breath on the tip of his shaft and enjoying how Blake practically jerks with it, hips going off the seat in a silent beg for him to go on.

“Looks like someone missed me,” he teases, looking up as he makes himself comfortable and stretches on the bench, one hand gripping Blake’s thigh and the other holding his dick in front of his face, tongue flicking the slit and making Blake groan, “You up for this, cowboy, or do you have something else in mind?”

“I have it all in mind with you, Adam,” Blake says vehemently, fingers carding Adam’s hair and tugging for him to look up and see the blatant want photographed in every feature of his face, “All of it. I want your mouth, your ass, all of you, doesn’t matter what part you’re giving me now. I want you, Adam, simple as that.”

_Simple_, the dickhead says, as if there were anything simple in the way he makes Adam’s heart flutter in a kind of pain that is too intense and too frightening for him to accept but too irresistible and wonderful to fight.

He goes to town, disguising the moan that Blake sucked from his mouth with the filth that was pouring out from his as humming around the head of his cock.

Blake swears, hips out of control as they push over half of his length down Adam’s throat and he’s so fucking big even Adam with his vast experience of taking cock gags a little, eyes watering and breath hitching, but he’s a pro in this and recovers quickly, deep throating the rest of it and swallowing around it, getting a groan from Blake so deep and long he feels it vibrating through him too and has to close his eyes against the intensity of what should be just another dirty blowjob but feels like anything but.

The angle is awkward, that’s for sure, but Adam makes it work.

He buries his nose in Blake’s pubic hair and breathes in the heady smell of him, the weight of him on his tongue almost overwhelming. He bobs his head up and down, licking and slurping and moaning around Blake’s dick like he can’t have enough of him and—fuck, he definitely wants to; he’s so aroused and so into it he can’t help but rutting on empty air as he keeps blowing Blake.
Adam looks up at him every time he can keep his eyes open enough, looks at him to watch him completely wild and only focused in the pleasure Adam is making him feel, the grief circling his eyes and his mouth that Adam tried desperately not to see nothing but a distant memory.

Every time he does, Blake’s blue-blue eyes are riveted to him and nowhere else, chin glued to his chest and hips giving little trembling thrusts up, and Adam is just this close to coming in his pants realizing again and again that it’s not what he’s doing as much as the fact he is the one doing it what is making Blake lose it.

When his thumb outlines his own cock on Adam’s neck, Blake comes hissing his name and holding his head in place, hips rocking until Adam has swallowed every drop of come he spurted. He’s not sure who’s quicker then—him, climbing Blake’s lap or Blake pulling him to it, but suddenly they’re kissing and there’s an edge of tastes that should dominate the kiss—and booze and come aren’t exactly a winning combo—but it doesn’t, everything Adam is able to relish are Blake’s plush, plush lips and his adamant, skillful tongue pressing into his mouth only to retreat and make Adam’s chase it.

He’s moaning and rutting against Blake’s groin like the cheapest whore when the country star finally sneak’s a hand in his jeans and Adam just flat-out cracks, words spilling out of his mouth as the country singer fondles him with the ease of years of familiarity they don’t have with each other but that seem to be there anyway.

“I missed you, I missed you so much,” Adam babbles, kissing Blake’s neck and not caring whether he’s sobbing or begging or both. He just wants him to come back for him again, he wants him to come back and not let him go but that’s too much to ask, “I’ll be good, I swear, I’ll be the best you ever had, but please—“ please don’t leave me again.

His orgasm hits him then, hard and unexpected, and he sags against Blake’s chest, face flushed and clothes sticking with sweat even tighter than they usually do.

There are two wet patches on Blake’s blue button-down—the same one that almost took Adam’s breath away when he first saw him wearing it, so gorgeous he was tempted to pinch himself to make sure he wasn’t dreaming he’d come back for him again—and they’re both his fault and one has probably ruined it for real.

The most embarrassing is the one his tears keep making.

“A gig came up, I couldn’t say no,” Blake is whispering to his hair, arms as steady and tender around him as Adam remembered, “I missed you too, Adam, so damn much. There wasn’t a second I wasn’t thinking about you and how much I wanted to hold you in my arms again.”

He’s not sure what makes it but something convinces him Blake is telling the truth, for now.

It’s probably how Blake kisses the top of his head over and over like there’s nothing he wants more than to soothe all the weeks of loneliness and desperation he made him feel or how much his drawl coats every word in so much honey Adam falls again for it, falls for him again.

He’s screwed. He’s so screwed he can’t even run because there’s no place in the world where he’d stop missing Blake.

Blake cleans them as much as it’s possible given the circumstances and drives the remaining distance to his place.

***
Blake asks him to wrap his legs around his middle and Adam does it without a thought, letting out a little yelp and clinging to his neck when the taller man picks him up by the back of his thighs and walks into the building like that’s fucking normal, making a bee line for the elevator.

The doorman turns a blind eye at them after barely raising his eyes from his phone.

Maybe it’s normal for Blake, how the fuck is Adam supposed to know?

And wow, isn’t that a depressing thought?

***

“Gosh, I’m starving,” Blake says, patting his stomach comically before disappearing into what Adam assumes is the kitchen, “I’m gonna cook us dinner! You’re not like vegetarian or something else I should know about, are you?”

Adam laughs at Blake’s shouting, the taller man turning to look at him sharply when he realizes Adam followed him soundlessly.

He shakes his head, amused, and perches on a stool trying not to smile like an idiot because Blake literally ran from the airport to look for him as soon as he was back in LA.

***

Neither of them is big on the self-control department, Adam muses, because as soon as they’re done eating Blake bends him over the kitchen counter and he can’t hand him the packets of lube and condoms with Blake’s name on it he’s been carrying since day number two fast enough.

“So damn gorgeous,” Blake breathes, enthralled, as Adam holds his cheeks open and he moves two fingers in and out of him. He mewls, pressing back, knees almost giving in when the damp tip of Blake’s dick brushes against him, “How can people quit you? You’re perfect, just look at you, opening up for me sweeter than any cunt could ever do.”

Blake reads every minute reaction of his body like it’s a score he has no problems following at the first try, hand gripping Adam’s hip firmly to stop him from slipping off the counter, and Adam blushes, panting and whining, and opens his mouth ready to beg even though he fucking hates begging because he’s so desperate he doesn’t care about anything that isn’t the fact Blake’s dick is still out of him for reasons that he doesn’t get.

The sound that makes it out is a loud moan, Blake impaling him with his cock like he’s trying to break Adam in two, folding around him until he’s able to nip at his earlobe while they fuck, and it shouldn’t be doable but he hits his prostate every fucking time and Adam isn’t going to last three minutes like this if Blake keeps it up.

He tilts his ass higher, hands reaching to the edge of the island, and yeah, that’s more like it, gets more of Blake inside of him and turns the unrelenting hitting to brushing that’s still almost too much but Adam wants it so bad he holds on using only one hand and kneads the short hairs of Blake’s nape with the other, tugging in time with his thrusts and relishing how Blake keeps groaning and panting like he’s as lost in it as Adam is.

“Fuck, you should—” Adam pauses, can’t help it when his eyes roll to the back of his head and he feels every slap of Blake’s skin against his to the tip of his toes, pleasure traveling through his spine in a relentless current with overwhelming spikes every now and then, “You should be a porn star, your dick and your mouth, I swear—” he keens this time and gives up trying to wisecrack while he’s getting so thoroughly fucked is impossible to focus on anything else.
“Huh?” Blake chuckles, kissing his way down to his shoulder and nibbling at it, teeth almost tracing every line of his tattoo there like he knows every single one by heart, voice so gruff and sexy and breathless it makes him shiver, “Can’t hear you, darlin’, you’re moaning too loud but that’s alright—fucking Hell, I love hearing you, can’t stand the idea of someone else getting to hear you like this.”

Adam downright shouts then, Blake’s teeth biting into his shoulder as Adam arches his back and presses against him from shoulder to thigh.

“I fake it,” he admits, eyes shut tight, the friction on his dick against the counter and inside him as Blake pushes into him faster and faster almost too much, “With everyone else, I—I—Blake—”

Blake comes with a shout, pulling too quickly out of him and making Adam gasp in discomfort, but he makes it up with eager and long fingers and Adams trips over the edge just a minute later.

Blake spends at least twenty kissing him and muttering something that sounds suspiciously like a love confession but that ends up being the lyrics of one of his new songs.

Adam tells himself he’s not disappointed about that, the same way he convinces himself some of the things the country star says don’t cut right through him like a red-hot knife.

At least he hasn’t called him ‘rock star’ this time.

***

“Dude,” Adam winces, pushing Blake away from him when he wakes up only to find him watching him intently, “That’s creepy as fuck, stop.”

They’re lying on their sides on Blake’s bed and he doesn’t manage to move the singer one inch, of course he doesn’t, and Blake just leans in and kisses his cheekbones softly, nuzzling his nose like he can’t help himself.

Then Adam remembers—Jesus fucking Christ, did he actually forget? How pathetic is that?—he’s on a job and the guy paying has every right to do pretty much everything he wants if it doesn’t involve physically hurting him too much.

His throat closes up and he’s sure he’s about to have a panic attack, but Blake’s hands smoothly going up and down his back somehow prevent it.

***

“I should get going,” Adam mumbles, voice funny as it struggles with the lump he still has in his throat, “It’s been—huh—five hours, but I spent one sleeping, so—“

“I’m paying for that too,” Blake cuts in, resolute, “And you still haven’t played a song for me, Adam, so we ain’t done here.”

For a moment, Adam thinks about telling him to go to Hell; him and his stupid blue eyes and his stupid obnoxious but endearing chuckle, him and his addictive love making, him and his pity but the fight is long since gone from him so the anger is squashed to ashes quickly and Adam blinks, dog-tired and meek again.

“Okay,” he shrugs, “Suit yourself.”

He dresses and goes to the living room, picking up one of the many guitars that lay invitingly in a corner in different colors and kinds.
He picks up an acoustic again and sits down, strumming the same notes he’s been plucking absent-mindedly sometimes when he’s playing the guitar in his apartment and trying not to think about anything.

It’s nothing but the same notes over and over. He blushes a little in embarrassment, expecting Blake to laugh at him.

Blake doesn’t.

“Wow,” he gapes instead, “That’s really good, Adam. Really, really good. Do you have lyrics for it?”

Adam freezes. How does Blake know? “Why would I?”

“C’mon,” Blake prods, “I know a singer when I see him. You sing, don’t you?”

“I used to,” Adam admits, looking down as his fingers adopt a mind of their own and touch his throat gingerly, like wondering if his voice is still in there, “You don’t want to hear me. I sound like a girl with a cold.”

Blake sat in front of him on the coffee table all the time he was playing. He moves to the couch now, gently taking the guitar from Adam’s hand, and cups his face in both of his once there’s nothing between them.

“I’m sure you sound like an angel,” he says, so confident and heartfelt it wakes something in Adam’s chest that he thought was forever dead, “I’m sure your voice is clear and graceful, just like you, honey. I hope you let me hear you one of these days.”

Adam stares at him until Blake gives him one long, close-mouthed, soft kiss on the lips.

He closes his eyes and counts to three hundred, hands gripping Blake’s thighs until his knuckles are white, knowing that’s still too fucking long for him to enjoy Blake’s attention but not caring one bit. He needs it—needs him too much to do anything else.

He turns back to look at Blake one last time before leaving.

Chapter End Notes

The first song Adam plays in the guitar is the acoustic version of Harder to breathe.

The song he plays for Blake is She will be loved.
Chapter 3

It takes Blake a long moment to move again after Adam leaves.

His stillness has a horde of reasons—from the acute way he starts missing Adam ever since he catches that particular twitch in his jaw that somehow means he’s decided it’s time to go, time to stop stalling in a job that has never felt like such, from the hundred questions racing through his mind; how can someone as talented and beautiful as Adam end up in the streets with nothing more than his body to bargain with?

He blinks, feeling like his heart is breaking.

He laughs, the sound watery and strange to his ears.

He’s so far down the rabbit hole there’s no point in denying it now, especially being so irrevocably alone whenever Adam’s thin but soft and skilled lips aren’t on his or anywhere on his body.

He’s in love.

He’s in love with a prostitute—a male prostitute, at that, and he should be afraid, he should be terrified because these feelings could very easily obliterate every big and little thing he’s worked for in his life.

He wonders if Adam will be worth it, if he loses everything for him.

He wonders if he’s going to take his heart, squeeze it and drop it to the ground when he doesn’t want it anymore just like Miranda did.

***

He’s fairly productive in the days that follow.

He has a talk on a radio show and spends the vast part of an hour laughing his ass off with the host. They exchange numbers afterward, that’s how good they get along, and Blake feels like he wants to make a friend for the first time in years.

Carson replies to his inane texting almost instantly every time and laughs at his jokes even when Blake knows he’s pushing it and it’s not funny anymore.

He feels at once selfish and pleased about it.

He has friends, of course he does. He even managed to keep most of them after the divorce and that’s saying something considering his ex has the ability to be both the sweetest and the scariest woman in the world.

But all his friends are from places like Nashville or Oklahoma.

All his friends would condemn what he’s been seeing in his dreams every night for the past month, the nicest of them would probably tell him the booze is messing with his head if he’s fantasizing about a future that can’t be with Adam’s hand in his and his little body pressed intimately to his side.

Carson seems like an open-minded, easy-going sort of guy. He seems safe enough even if Blake never has the guts to confide in him and tell him about how much he wants to make Adam smile a real and wide smile more than winning ten Grammys in a row.
He wants to make Adam happy more than anything else in the world, his career—dangerously, terrifyingly—included.

***

The street lights have never looked less welcoming than when he drives by on Friday.

The foreshadowing atmosphere has him frowning in his truck, tightening his grip on the steering wheel, and it’s not as much what he sees but what he doesn’t what makes him taste something bitter and rancid in his mouth.

Adam isn’t there.

He’s been taken for the night, most likely, he’s been taken because Blake was late and because no matter how much Blake tries to ignore the fact they’re not a couple, they’re not and Adam is God only knows where doing things to get money that he’d do better not to think about because just the thought makes his blood boil and he doesn’t want to be furious if Adam comes back, he wants to be gentle and caring and warm and hold him with just enough strength to keep Adam in his arms and keep him coming back to him at the same time.

It’s a delicate balance and he could mess up so bad if he isn’t paying attention it scares him.

He’s always been a jealous lover. He’s insecure and stupid when it comes down to the most important things in life, so he needs constant reassurance he’s wanted and needed and that he’s the one who means more than everyone else.

He doesn’t know how he’s going to control himself now.

Remembering Adam isn’t his—not really, not yet—does nothing but fuel his anger.

***

He’s been driving around for an hour and parking in the same spot for ten minutes when a hand with fat fingers and dark gloves taps on his window.

He rolls it down and does his best impression of a whimsical, single-minded and slightly creepy hillbilly.

“Howdy. I’ve been looking up and down for Jack but can’t find him. I’d like to book him when he comes back. I can pay double.”

The brute outside his car harrumphs, watching him coldly for all of three seconds before bursting into the most hideous, cavernous laughter Blake’s ever heard.

“Jack, huh? You like ‘em feisty, don’t you? Well, you’re not the only one, buddy, but double will definitely give you priority. You’ll get the bitch as soon as he gets here.”

Blake nods and twists his lips in a facsimile of a smile that at least allows him to grit his teeth while the douchebag goes away.

That Adam is apparently very popular has occurred to him but it doesn’t mean he likes it one bit.

***

He’s been sipping a lukewarm, shitty beer feeling more asleep than awake when a black car parks next to his and Adam stumbles out of it, drooping heavily on the sidewalk the instant his feet are on
the pavement, his jaw badly bruised and his cheeks not much better.

It happens too fast for him to do anything. He can only stare as the same big man with a criminal record probably three times thicker than his biceps drags a squirming, resisting Adam by the armpits and shoves him onto the backseat of his truck.

“Son of a bitch!” Adam curses, kicking and swinging for all he’s worth, “You promised I could go home afterward!”

“Here you go,” the repulsive man says, patting the side of Blake’s truck condescendingly, “All yours.”

It’s not a gentlemen's agreement what makes Blake mutter his thanks. It’s just the fastest way he can talk without it being suspicious and the effect is instantaneous.

Adam stops struggling.

Blake steps on the gas and gets the both of them away from that hellhole.

***

“Adam,” he calls softly at the first red light they come across, “C’mere.”

Adam tosses a leg over the back of the bench, sliding to the front seats. His movements are less graceful and poised than Blake remembers and he hates himself for a moment, realizes Adam is more hurt than he thought and that he just made it worse with his poorly thought request.

It’s just for a moment, though.

The next Adam is trailing feather-like kisses all over his shoulder and the crook of his neck and he’s too busy breathing forcefully through his nose and fixing his eyes on the traffic lights.

He’s never thought someone could say so much saying absolutely nothing at all but every brush of Adam’s lips on his skin and through his shirt pleads the same thing to him.

Stay.

And he plans to. Oh, he plans to.

***

He carries Adam to his apartment like it’s their wedding night, an arm secure beneath his knees and the other cradling his side to his chest, tucking his chin on his damp hair and relishing how every bit of their bodies fits like a puzzle that’s taken them long years to find.

Adam is shivering but he doesn’t bother covering him with his jacket. He knows the tremors have nothing to do with the chill of the night and everything with the disgusting tastes of the client he was with tonight.

“Can you turn off the lights?” Adam asks first thing after the door closes behind them, doing some lovely things with his tongue in Blake’s mouth to convince him.

It distracts him, that’s for sure, but he grasps Adam’s arms with just enough force to stop him from reaching for the switch when it’s obvious he’s not going to do it himself.

“No, Adam,” he pulls him back to his body, taking his jacket off and letting it fall to the floor as he
noses as much of Adam’s elaborated shoulder tattoo as he possibly can through the dark tank top he’s wearing, “Don’t get shy now. You know that I want you.”

“You won’t want me anymore,” Adam assures him with stony certainty, “Not if you see me like this. And if you do, you’ll either fuck me until I pass out or hit me until I do and I don’t—“ his voice cracks and he turns around, looking up at him with not as much fear as sadness in his eyes, “I don’t want that to happen, not with you.”

Blake sighs, bites all the words that want to pour out of his mouth because they wouldn’t do a thing to help them.

He hauls Adam slowly towards the bedroom and guides him to lie down on his bed. He leaves him for a minute, retrieving an icepack and a small, thin towel to wrap it in so it doesn’t burn Adam’s smooth skin.

He holds it to Adam’s jawbone carefully, watching every wince and stutter in Adam’s breath.

His heart clenches when those sweet hazel eyes look at him like he’s an apparition, like he’s either a hallucination or a figment of Adam’s imagination or worse—someone that exists and is real alright but will leave him to bite the dust once he moves on to the next pretty thing.

Blake lets the minutes pile up, alternating between putting the ice on Adam’s visible bruises and kissing them better softly, lips going numb and chapped with cold after a while.

It’s not until Adam’s damp eyelids flutter close and his body finally loses most of the tension in his muscles that he dares to peek under Adam’s tank top and check there’s hardly a expand of skin that isn’t bruise over bruise there.

He wonders how it came to it with only a few days since the last time Blake saw him, wonders if his back is in any better shape, wonders if every little discoloration that he blamed on the light casting different hues on Adam’s frame were healing welts that looked as dark and angry and painful as these at some point in the past.

He worries.

“Do you need a doctor?” Blake asks, tone as gently as he can make it, “I can call someone who won’t ask no questions, someone I trust.”

He’s not lying, not really. He can call his own doctor, tell him Adam is a friend and has been assaulted but doesn’t want to go to the hospital.

It’s not really that far from the truth.

Above all, he feels his heart breaking a little more because he doesn’t need to ask to know no one takes care of Adam when this happens and this isn’t a rare occurrence—this is usual, this is something Adam is used to ignore and endure at the same time, all on his own.

Adam snorts at his offer, more weariness than bite in his voice, forearms conveniently shielding his expression from Blake’s eyes. “Someone you trust enough to tell them your rent boy got the shit beaten out of him? Wow, you must have awesome friends. But no, thanks, I’m fine.”

Blake nods, not surprised in the least by that answer, and stands up from the bed to prepare a hot bath for Adam.

If he has to order him in, so be it. He’ll be damned if he lets him leave his house sorer than he came
He doesn’t have bath salts or sweet-smelling shampoo or soap that leaves the skin soft.

He doesn’t have painkillers unless you count booze or aspirin.

Still, his bathroom is big and he gets Adam in the tub and sits comfortably on the tiles beside it, stretching his legs and trying to give Adam a smidgen of privacy while selfishly enjoying his presence.

He doesn’t offer to leave him alone. Adam—obviously—doesn’t ask for it, either, and Blake closes his eyes and hears him scrubbing himself clean.

“You could get in, you know,” Adam says after a few minutes of silence, “It’s a big tub. We could have fun.”

Blake shakes his head. He’s no saint, knows he won’t be able to keep his hands off of Adam if he does that and he refuses to be another one of the men who take, take and take what they want from him even when Adam has nothing else to give.

“I can take you, cowboy,” Adam presses, a wet hand ghosting over his back and settling on the back of his neck as Adam stretches, half-way out of the water, “You can stop your gentlemanly crap. I won’t break.”

Blake purses his lips, electricity traveling down his spine and heat coiling in his groin despite his best efforts to focus on the horrible aspects of the situation.

It seems his dick only cares about Adam looking breathtaking, wet and flushed and there and about nothing else.

“What do you want?” Adam keeps pushing, crawling to him, skin steaming and dripping water and completely bare for him, “What do you need, baby? Tell me.”

“I need you to stay in the goddamn tub and stop tempting me, Jesus Christ,” Blake groans, fingers twitching to either shove Adam on the floor and have him right then and there or pull him into his lap and at the very least let him control the pace, control how much he can actually take without aggravating his injuries that have to be more than what he’s showing Blake, “I won’t hurt you.”

“You won’t,” Adam promises, straddling his lap and getting him thoroughly wet in a matter of seconds, “I feel better, please,” he vows, rutting against him and sucking his bottom lip to his mouth, going almost cross-eyed as if he’d wanted to do that all night and finally being able to do it was almost too much, “I want you, Blake. Don’t make me beg.”

He tells himself it’s okay to give in since Adam is asking so prettily even though he feels like an ass because he can’t help himself, because he strips in record time, wet clothes and all, and kisses Adam like they’re both dying of a horrible disease which only cure can be found in each other. Adam kisses him back just as passionately, responding to his every touch like he’s been born to fulfill needs Blake didn’t even know he had until now.

He takes his time, at least, makes Adam writhe on his fingers first, back plastered to his chest and head lolling on his shoulder, his panting echoing in the tiles along with the splashes of the water, and makes sure he’s ready for him before being balls deep in him and allowing himself to lose it.
He whispers sweet nothings in Adam’s ear, nuzzling the back of his neck and shoulder.

Adam tilts his head to the side and kisses his temple almost gratefully, as tenderly as he can with his mouth slack in pleasure, and Blake forgets about the bruises that are rapidly turning a sickening shade of purple for a while and surprises himself liking the scratches Adam leaves on his arms.

***

Adam sleeps like the death for hours that seem like minutes to Blake.

He’s overwhelmed by a lot of things but it’s the way Adam curls into him in his sleep, legs entwining with his and nose buried in the dip above his collarbone, what makes him blink at the ceiling feeling like he must be drunk out of his mind and imagining all of this because there’s no mistaking the way Adam clings to him.

A little part of him insists that he must be wrong, that there’s no way Adam—or anyone—could love him but he sets his jaw and refuses to listen to it.

He hasn’t felt this light and content in so long he’s not even sure he ever did.

He caresses Adam’s back with careful—there are bruises there too—and reverent fingertips and a smile on his lips.

Maybe his heart will survive this.

***

They kiss for minutes that seem seconds when Adam is about to leave, lips greedy and avid, and it takes them so long to pull away that they start chuckling and Adam blushes to the tip of his ears, ducking his head as he hugs the sorry excuse of a leather jacket he’s wearing snugly to his body.

It’s so endearing Blake wants to kiss him all over again.

“Right, so,” he mumbles, pocketing his money after Blake hands it to him, “I’ll see you around.”

He hopes the tiny piece of paper with his cellphone number scrawled on it that he hid in Adam’s back pocket gets discovered in the near future because he’s terrified of Adam needing him and him not being there for him.

***

He surprises himself again composing a new song in record time, notes and lyrics coming to him with an ease he’s never felt before, not even around the time he got married.

For the first time, he wonders if Adam knows who he is. He wonders if he even likes country music, if he’d enjoy Blake playing songs for him that have him as muse.

Maybe if he sings first, Adam will do it too later, when he’s comfortable enough, when he’s ready.

***

He manages a nap of scant two hours before his doorbell rings.

He swears out loud and rubs his face tiredly, swinging his legs to the side of the bed to open to whoever has decided to come by and check he hasn’t drowned in his own vomit or some other gross shit like that.
It’s Luke. The bastard grins and comes in like it’s his own house and he forgot the keys.

“What do you want?” he groans.

He waves Blake off and goes to the bathroom, reappearing quickly after the telltale sound of the toilet flush.

“I’m good at multitasking,” Luke says, “I get to see your dumb face and pee all in one trip.”

Blake smirks. “Couldn’t hold it ‘til you got home, pal? You’re an old man already.”

Luke chuckles. “Say that to your grey hairs, buddy. But I guess you have every right to feel young, huh?”

He wiggles his eyebrows cheekily and Blake suddenly remembers and starts sweating.

Fuck, he left the condom on the floor, didn’t he?

“So who was she?” Luke prods, “Do I know her? I feel like I should thank her for getting you out of your funk. It’s been almost six months since Miranda, I was getting worried, brother. You weren’t yourself anymore.”

“Right, and you think a quick fuck is gonna fix me?” Blake barks, hiding his terror behind a thick wall of annoyance.

“Of course not,” Luke blinks at him like he’s an idiot, which he is, “But you gotta start somewhere, moron. Actually meeting somebody sounds like good news to me so excuse me if I’m happy for you.”

Blake deflates at that, shrinking in his couch while Luke does a swift sweep of the room and gets rid of the lone empty bottle of rum that’s been there for the last two weeks and eyeing the contents of a half-empty one like it could reveal the secrets of the universe to him.

It looks like it reveals Blake’s secrets to him, at least, since he turns around to gape at him.

“Trying to catch a fly?” Blake teases halfheartedly.

“It wasn’t a quick fuck, was it?” Luke asks, ignoring him entirely, “You’re… better, man. You’re not downing three of these a week.”

Blake makes a noncommittal sound, nervous perspiration sticking to the hairs of his nape.

“So what’s her name? What does she do for a living?” Luke keeps asking and asking, “When are we meeting her?”


It isn’t a lie.

Luke rolls his eyes. “Fine, be that way. You’re worse than a fifteen year-old debutante sometimes, I swear to God, but I’m telling Kelly anyway. She’s been worried sick and she deserves to know.”

“Fine,” Blake grouses, “Tell her I’m in love with a hooker, then.”

“You’re hilarious,” Luke deadpans, patting his shoulder and showing himself out.
Blake stares at his hands, feeling the absent weight of the wedding ring on his finger like a stab wound, and doesn’t even hear Luke saying goodbye.

He only hears the clunk of the door closing and the pounding of his heart, accusing and loud and screeching he can’t keep Adam as his dirty little secret, not without hurting him too.
Adam stretches lazily, looking out the picture window in his apartment.

He has no curtains and the constant exposure would probably freak most people out but Adam isn’t most people.

He relaxes on the floor tiles, half-naked and unapologetic as he lights his fifth cigarette of the day.

Winter is around the corner and it’s drizzling, the sky a light shade of grey in the mid-afternoon. The window is open a crack, enough for the smoke to clear out and for the cold breeze to hit his cheeks and rouse the skin on his arms and legs with goose bumps.

It’s going to be a long night, he can already tell. It’s always worse the first night without Blake, without his kisses and his touch fooling Adam into thinking that he matters, that he’s special despite of what he does.

He knows his body needs—and will need—the rest but can’t bring himself to go back to sleep.

His sixth cigarette tastes like sadness and fear, leaves ashes and bitterness on his tongue and sticking in his throat, deep-seated and festering in his lungs. He coughs a touch and takes another drag, rubbing his face absently as the smoke simultaneously smothers him but helps him feel a little bit lighter, a little bit more in control, the cigarette firmly clasped between his fingers.

He hates his life so much.

Blake is a breath of fresh air, a nice reason to get out of bed and to parade on the street, but he’s only a temporary relief to his misery and Adam won’t forget that.

He won’t forget, not even with the crumpled piece of paper he’s still clutching in his left hand, that he’s been holding on to as if for dear life ever since he found it in his jeans.

Here if you need me, it reads beneath Blake’s number, so giving and so misleading that it’s driving him crazy. He doesn’t have the faintest idea of what to do with it, with this new tidbit of something that is just too good to be true and bound to blow up in his fucking face when he’s least expecting it.

He wants to tattoo it on his skin, to burn it to oblivion, to frame it to always remember and cherish what they had and to pretend it never happened all at the same time.

And it’s not his call, not really, because it’s done already. It’d be impossible for him not to remember Blake at this point, no matter what he does.

Adam wants to call him, wants to tell him every time they part it gets a little harder to go back to the everyday shit in his life and that he doesn’t want to, not again.

He presses the bruises on his ribs with a brutal hand each time he’s about to, cutting both his breath and his hope off for things to get better.

He hates his life but he won’t make Blake hate his too. He won’t ruin him. He’ll just take a little bit of his love and let him have his career, his success, his life.
A little bit, enough to remember and draw strength from it but not so much that he can’t keep going without him.

They’ve seen each other three times and Adam already feels like he’s stepped on that thin line, about two inches from toppling over the edge.

He smokes until he can’t hear his thoughts over the mad beating of his heart, dizzy with heartbreak and too much nicotine in his body.

He lies on his couch bed, breaking into a sweat, and blinks at the peeling white paint on the ceiling until the queasiness and churning in his stomach ebb away.

***

The sex is thankfully bland with his first john of the night but then he’s not so lucky—he never is for long—and before he can realize what he’s doing he’s stumbling into a telephone booth and dialing the number that he’s already committed to memory.

*Just this once*, he thinks, heart flapping with anticipation of hearing Blake’s voice, thudding its promise to keep going after Adam listens to the unexpectedly gentle and caring hick one more time, *just today*.

A woman’s voice answers, music blaring in the background, and it’s definitely not what he wanted to hear, jealousy flaring hot in his gut without permission, but he’s so desperate he doesn’t hang up, not yet.

He just wants to hear Blake for a little bit.

“Is—Is Blake there?” he asks, smacking his forehead against the glass.

He sounds so nervous, so pathetic.

“Sure he is, sweetheart,” she says kindly, Southern accent slightly draping her words, “He’s busy with the barbecue but I’ll put him through right away for you. Who’s calling?”

“Adam.”

And maybe his voice is too quiet, his name too short and inconsequential to be heard, but the instant she asks ‘*Who*?’ over the ruckus in the other end of the line Adam puts the phone down like it burned him and doesn’t try to reach Blake again.

He exhales and it stings so much he almost expects to taste blood in his mouth, stale air refusing to leave his lungs and clawing at him not to forget what the real answer to that simple question is.

“No one,” he whispers.

***

The week is a blur after that.

He works at night, plays the guitar if he gets back with few new bruises and enough energy.

He cooks mediocre meals for one that last two and sometimes three days.

He sleeps.
He exists, missing Blake with every breath he takes.

He’s just so fucking weak.

***

He stops dead in his tracks, staring at the flat screen of a window shop on Sunday.

Blake is in it, all long legs and Southern charm, gorgeous as ever in a blue plaid shirt that brings out his eyes.

Adam comes into the store to watch, biting back a laugh when Blake cracks a joke.

He’s charming, of course he is, but he’s goofy too and that’s something Adam hasn’t experienced much first-hand and he’s curious and delighted to find that out.

The clerk gives him the evil eye right when he spots him. Adam absent-mindedly counts the minutes until he’s kicked out but keeps watching.

Blake’s reaction to a blonde woman sitting beside him, his whole body stiffening and his expression closing off, is enough to make Adam cringe.

He belatedly recognizes Blake’s ex-wife—the famous Miranda Lambert and what a feast the press had with them when their marriage crashed and burned—when they’re asked a few questions about their careers and their professional relationship.

Blake looks like a man in the middle of a shipwreck. Miranda is the salt and the sun on his heated skin and his wounds, doing nothing but worsen his thirst and his pain.

It takes her about two minutes to extinguish the light in his eyes.

Adam almost falls on his face in his rush to leave the store.

***

When he calls Blake this time, it goes to voicemail.

He only has a couple of hours before he has to be working unless he wants to get in trouble but he needs to know Blake is okay.

He needs to.

***

He’s ready to turn tricks—he always is—to sneak in Blake’s fancy building if he has to.

The doorman gives him an unimpressed stare when Adam asks. He lets him in without demanding retribution, acts like Adam isn’t even there once he’s inside.

Adam takes the stairs three at a time and hopes Blake is the kind of person who keeps a spare set of keys hidden underneath a potted plant.

***

There’s a small hallway where the elevator and the stairs lead.
There are no plants but there is a single key under the doormat.

Adam uses it to unlock the door and almost whoops in triumph when it works.

***

“Blake?” he calls into the dark, every curtain and shutter in the room closed, not even a tiny ray of light making it in.

He hears glass breaking underneath his boots but still no answer so he reaches blindly for the switch and squints in the sudden bright.

Blake is a lump on the floor, shards of glass disturbingly encircling his back. Adam forgets how to move, forgets how to *breathe* for a second and gets so fast to his side next that he blinks and he’s *there*, placing Blake’s head on his lap and dotting his sweaty face with frantic, tiny kisses, ignoring the prickle on his shins and knees as he holds the country singer close.

“Blake, please,” he begs, prying fragments of an empty bottle from Blake’s loose fingers, “You gotta wake up, man. Come on, come *on*, open your eyes for me, you idiot.”

He keeps pleading and starts—fruitlessly, stupidly—crying when Blake doesn’t come around, no matter how loud and insistent he is, no matter how many of Adam’s tears drop on his face, but he stops eventually and eyes the phone only to shake his head and press his ear to Blake’s chest.

He wipes his cheeks roughly with the back of his hand and blinks.

He’s been around enough drunks and junkies to know when it’s serious, when they need help if they’re ever going to make it out, or so he assures desperately to himself because he can’t call 911 without this making it to the news and spectacularly screwing Blake’s career up and he won’t let that happen, not if he can help it.

Blake’s breathing is strong and even, his heartbeat slower than what Adam’s used to hearing but that’s probably because there’s no passionate sex this time to raise it, only Blake attempting to drown himself—quiet literally—in alcohol and gloom.

He inspects the cuts in Blake’s left hand, brings the same fingers that have always been warm and loving on him closer to his eyes. They’re scabbing already even if they still look raw and dirty, the biggest and deepest wound crossing his palm in an almost even line that is definitely going to scar but that at least won’t make Blake bleed to death.

Adam nods to himself then, takes one last shuddering breath and delicately puts Blake back where he was.

He goes to the kitchen for a broom, finds it and cleans, careful to throw every broken bottle and frame out. He doesn’t know what to do with the pictures—with how beautiful Miranda looks in every single one and how happy Blake seemed—that were in said frames so he just leaves them on one of the shelves upside-down.

There’s a first-aid kit in the bathroom sink and he’s very thorough in dressing Blake’s hand after taking every miniscule piece of glass out of his skin. He squeezes and picks and winces in sympathy each time he has to but Blake barely grunts through it all.

It takes so much effort he’s surprised he doesn’t pull a muscle but he gets the bigger man on the couch afterward.
He’s pretty much dead weight by the time he fetches a pillow and a blanket from the bedroom. He makes sure Blake is as comfortable as he can be before closing his eyes, nosing Blake’s chest through his shirt, knees complaining of the lack of consideration when he stays on the ground next to him, hands cradling Blake’s injured hand delicately and heart reminding him that yeah, he still wants to cry, he’s still scared out of his mind.

He can’t stop thinking he’s not the right person to be doing this.

He smooths the lines on Blake’s forehead with the tip of his fingers and he doesn’t know who benefits more from it—if him, finally able to breathe normally and stop thinking, or Blake, his brow relaxing until it looks like he’s sleeping peacefully instead of practically comatose.

***

He comes to a hand kneading his scalp, blunt nails scratching here and there just in the way that Adam likes it.

“You’re awake,” Adam whispers, turning his head to look into Blake’s eyes, “Welcome to the land of the living, dipshit.”

“Adam,” Blake breathes in awe, palming his whole face as if he couldn’t believe Adam was real and beside him, “You’re here. You came for me.”

He frowns, doing a double take at noticing the gauze around his hand, and Adam wants to kiss a bruise onto his lips and ride him right then and there so he can convince himself Blake is okay but he does neither.

He’s not on the clock this time. Hell if he knows how this thing between them works but maybe sex is only allowed when Blake specifically searches him for it.

He hobbles to the kitchen, his legs hurting like a bitch and his back stiff from the awkward position he was sleeping in, and comes back with a glass of water filled to the brim.

He shoves it under Blake’s nose and the older man turns to lie on his side slowly and drinks down, unprompted.

He looks around, disoriented and confused and goes back to stare at Adam, a baffled expression on his face.

“You did all this?” Blake asks, disbelief and something else that escapes Adam warring in his tone, “For me?”

“What was I supposed to do, jackass? Let you roll in the mess you made?” Adam retorts, defensive and sharply self-conscious.

He blanches instead of blushing, scared shitless of Blake kicking him out because he trespassed, because he didn’t mix business and pleasure this time but both of those things with romance and this—what they have, if they have anything at all—isn’t it, will never be and he should know better.

Blake merely winces, pinches the bridge of his nose and presses fingers to his eyes, mumbling pitifully, “Aspirin?”

Adam practically sags with relief.

It’s okay, he did okay, there’s nothing wrong with them—yet, a treacherous voice in his head
reminds him—and Blake still wants him, still looks at him like Adam has hung the moon and the stars in the sky instead of simply swept the living room and treated his cuts.

He hides it behind a snort. “Assholes have to suffer through their hangovers alone so no aspirin for you.”

“You’re mean,” Blake moans, grimacing again when he moves his head, “Can you turn off the lights at least, you bastard?”

“Oh, quit your bitching, I’m sure it’s not that bad. I’ll bring you more water, hang on.”

He kisses Blake on the forehead, grinning when Blake just gapes at him, and stands up.

He gets water along with two aspirins and flicks the switch on his way back.

Blake thanks him and makes him lie on the couch with him. Adam doesn’t resist, not even when Blake kisses his face with a mouth that smells like something died in it and stayed there to rot, and curls on top of him, trying his best not to think about just how much Blake loved his ex and how heartbroken he has to be to resort to drinking and whoring to get over her.

It’s not like he can condemn those methods. It’d be fucking rich if he tried to. He’s the whore in the equation.

It’s the only reason he met Blake at all.

Selfishly, he kisses Blake’s neck, lightly biting it here and there, enjoying how his pulse skyrockets beneath his lips, until they’re both dead to the world again.

***

He wakes up with a gasp and almost falls off the couch, uncoordinated and vainly trying to see shit in the still pitch black room.

He staggers to the kitchen, the sun barely rising in the sky outside.

He shivers, the contrast between the cold early morning and Blake’s inviting body heat too much for him to do anything else, and lets his mind go numb again for a little bit as he brews coffee and makes scrambled eggs which are an acceptable hangover medicine in his book; the blacker the coffee and the greasier the eggs, the better. It’s also one of the few things he knows how to cook, so there’s that too.

As dawn becomes more apparent, so is the fact Adam just lost a whole night doing… he’s not sure exactly what. Sleeping, for most of it, yeah, and how is he supposed to explain that to his pimp? The douche already acts like he owns Adam even though everything he actually ‘owns’—and just figuratively—is the street Adam works on.

He has some savings. He ponders whether demolishing them is worth avoiding the fallout of skipping.

Usually, he wouldn’t even think about it. The beatings he can take, he’s self-destructive enough not to fear them and he knows that he deserves them, one way or another, so he just takes them, only sometimes being dumb enough to open his mouth and complain.

But Blake wouldn’t like it—God, he seemed so upset the last time they were together, didn’t he?—Adam is sure of it even if he doesn’t understand why. And if he can prevent Blake from wasting his
time indulging him with kindness and affection he doesn’t even remember experiencing while growing up—his mom was never that tender, not even if he was sick—then he’s going to do it.

***

He leaves a cup and a plate on the coffee table and unceremoniously opens the shutters all in one go.

Unsurprisingly, Blake wakes up with a pained groan, trying to shield his eyes from the light with both arms.

Adam shakes his head, mildly exasperated but worried in spite of himself, and pushes the breakfast he prepared on Blake’s hands when he sits up.

“Adam, it’s the freaking crack of dawn,” Blake protests, “Why can’t we go back to sleep?”

“You, because no matter how much you sleep, you’re still gonna feel like shit when you wake up,” Adam says, crossing his arms and raising an expectant eyebrow at him, “And me, because I’m not sleepy, okay? Now man up and eat.”

Blake eyes the contents of the mug like they’re personally trying to murder him but he does chew a bit of eggs and swallows, a pleased rumbling sound rushing out of him when he’s done.

Adam smiles and kneels at his feet, propping his forearms on Blake’s thighs and leaning his head on them.

His legs are still throbbing but it’s dull now, a muted discomfort he’s more than capable of ignoring, especially with Blake’s relaxed and blissful expression as he eats right up there for his eyes to drink in.

“Open up,” Blake says after a few bites, fork already prodding Adam’s mouth so he obeys, turning every mouthful into innuendo using just his eyes and his tongue.

Blake ends up feeding him half the eggs and a few sips of coffee too.

He scoops Adam up once they’re done and kisses him, deep and hungry and messy, palms keeping Adam’s neck in just the right angle for it to be thrilling and dirty, fingers spreading on his face, every kiss as strongly sweet as the sugary black coffee he still tastes like.

It doesn’t take long for Adam to be overwhelmed with Blake caressing his skin with lips and thank yous after that, doesn’t take him long to feel barer than being naked has ever made him feel.

He’s sprawled under Blake, losing a piece of his mind with every article of clothing Blake takes off of him.

Blake takes his time, brushing his lips reverently over every inch of his body; from Adam’s prayer beads tattoo on his chest to the tiger on his arm to the dip of his belly button and then lower.

By the time Blake presses a hickey to the point where thigh meets groin, there’s not even a litany of curses left in his vocabulary, the only word Adam remembers how to utter between loud pants isn’t a word; it’s a name, it’s the one thing that makes it a little less painful to be himself, it’s both the first and last thing in his mind every day, it’s everything.

His breath hitches when Blake finally, finally mouths him through the damp fabric of his briefs. He makes a noise he’s never heard in his life, high-pitched and crazy with want, when all Blake does is inhaling deeply right where he is, outlining Adam’s dick with his nose like there’s a treat waiting for
him under it and he’s fucking starving for it.

He lets Blake take off the last garment on his body with a mewl and a roll of his hips that goes all the way up to his shoulders, bending his back until only the back of his head is touching the cushion, thighs enveloping Blake’s head and squeezing as he begins sucking and lapping like he’s been wanting to do just that for years.

He tries to release Blake when he distantly realizes what he’s doing but the man puts big hands on his legs, fingers digging in with a clear message for him to stay put, so Adam just fucking does—hips rutting crudely up towards the wet and eager heat of Blake’s mouth, head falling back and eyes fluttering shut.

Blake does gag and choke and graze his teeth a little too hard on Adam’s circumcised length but he groans deep, throat vibrating tantalizingly around him, and sucks like his life is depending on it so it’s still perfect and Adam comes with a shout, already twitching for another round when he feels Blake swallowing half of it down, the rest dripping down his chin.

He doesn’t get a chance to reciprocate—or to rest, for that matter. Blake keeps his legs firmly on his shoulders and licks his way behind his balls, making Adam’s eyes cross and roll back in his head.

He swears he feels Blake’s tongue tracing every crease of his hole. He moans, loud and lewd, and twitches with almost every flick on his rim.

The growl Blake lets out when he starts fucking him with his tongue it’s something he will never forget; Adam feels it like an electroshock, cursing through him quick and intense and mind-blowing, toe-curling and painfully but deliciously teasing because it’s not what he needs but it feels so good he can’t help but want more of it.

“J-Jacket,” Adam stammers, Blake’s leaking cock skimming between his cheeks. He’s not even hard again yet but he’s gagging for it all the same and he doesn’t even care, he just wants Black to fuck him so hard he can feel it for days on end, “Fuck, hurry up.”

Blake works him open the rest of the way with slick and deft fingers so attuned with Adam’s anatomy and pace there’s not even a hint of discomfort despite of how rushed it is.

He rolls the condom up with a grunt, bottoms out with one fluid roll of his hips only to pull out abruptly and turn Adam over so he’s on his hands and knees on the couch.

He thrusts right back in, starts rocking his hips deliberately in a deep but maddening motion that fills Adam’s dick a bit more each time he slots right into him.

Adam is already unconsciously pushing back to fuck himself onto Blake’s thick cock when a sweaty but assured arm weaves around his middle, a hand gripping his left hip tight, Blake’s teeth nibbling a promise onto his nape.

“None of that,” he chides, cock sliding into him just so and making him cry out, everything turning unbearably white at the edges, “You wanna come again? You come when I tell you or not at all.”

Adam babbles something incoherent, the sentiment behind it blatant enough for Blake to take it as an affirmative and murmur hot and damp filth in his ear, folding around him like a bow that is about to make the bowstring pull and release in the most beautiful, dead-on way possible.

“Next time,” Blake grumbles and the assurance of a next time is the final step, it’s what turns Adam into a sobbing wanton wreck, “Next time I’m gonna prep you nice and proper and let you gape prettily while you fuck yourself on my cock, what do you say, Adam? You want that?”
Adam nods, head lolling between his shoulders, panting and taking everything Blake is giving him and still wanting more, still longing for that next time and the time after that.

He’s only ever come untouched in Blake’s arms and he finds himself craving it, balancing his weight—and more than half of Blake’s—on one hand as the other snakes back to grasp Blake’s buttock and push him harder and deeper into him instead of easing the agonizing pressure on his cock.

Blake’s response is almost worthy of a poem, a long groan that ends with Adam’s name voiced like both curse and blessing, rhythm picking up as his hand shoves Adam back onto him, the sofa’s legs skidding forward an inch with the force of his thrusts.

“You know what I want?” Blake asks, hoarse and winded, accent as thick as molasses, “What I really want and I’m gonna do next time?,” next time, Adam relishes, letting the words and cadence wash over him, “I’m gonna fuck you while you hold the condom between those pretty lips of yours, sweetheart, and then I’m gonna lick all the jizz that oozes out of you until you’re dying for me to fill you up again.”

Adam climaxes with nothing but a loud gasp, too far gone to scream or move at all. He’s drooling and still tearing up while he absently watches the stain he left on the cushion beneath him.

He almost collapses on the wet spot but Blake’s trembling but still strong arms put him gently on his side, bypassing it, lips pecking his slimy skin from hipbone to temple as he mumbles things that Adam can only register after a couple of minutes, doing a cursory cleanup of both of them with his shirt.

“Will you let me?” Blake is asking over and over, pleading, voice barely above a whisper.

“Yes,” Adam swears, again and again until Blake settles over him and kisses him, sweet and lingering, Adam’s fingers clasping his stubbly cheek to keep him close, “Anything, everything you want.”

He tries not to doze but Blake kisses his eyelids, whispers reassurances to him and there’s not a thing he can do.

***

He blinks, feeling for once pleasantly sore and beat, and stiffens when he realizes what woke him up.

The doorbell rings again and they’re still naked and entwined in each other, Blake’s nose crinkling and his brow furrowing as he nuzzles Adam’s shoulder in his sleep.

“Blake,” Adam shakes him, head still fuzzy, meets the hazy blue of Blake’s sleepy eyes that wide in dread as soon as he’s conscious enough and a long ring echoes in the living room, “Blake, who—”

“I’m coming!” Blake shouts, hushing Adam with a hand on his mouth, and urging him with a low, frantic tone, “Fuck. Adam, get dressed, now.”

He doesn’t say they can’t see you or anything remotely rude but Adam hears it all the same, hears it and sees it in the way Blake shoves his clothes to him and pleads him with a look to hurry the fuck up and leave.

Adam dresses, dazed and miffed and furious at himself for getting offended by something that’s really fucking understandable when you think about it because who the hell would want their friends—or anyone they know—to see them with a prostitute?
He’s ready to leave when Blake finishes straightening his rumpled clothes and turning the cushions of the couch to hide the evidence of their encounter—to erase from view any trace of Adam ever being there with him—and they both realize at the same time there’s nowhere to go, nowhere safe for Adam to leave without being seen which is exactly what can’t happen.

He doesn’t make Blake ask him. He just picks his jacket and the used condom lying forgotten on the hardwood up and feels slightly vindictive as he hides in Blake’s closet because the smell of them is still heavy and unmistakable and that’s not something that can be wiped away easily, not so fast.

Blake takes a clean shirt from the hook right beside Adam’s head, leaving the dirty one in a heap at Adam’s feet, and goes to open the door.

He’s too far away to understand what they’re saying but he listens to Blake talking with his friends for minutes that stretch out like days.

Adam has never felt more out of place or discarded in his whole life.

***

He’s pinching his shins through his jeans distractedly—that sting is more bearable than the ache of remembering what exactly his place in Blake’s life is, that’s for sure—when Blake comes for him and lifts him from the floor, frantic but gentle as he deposits him on the bed and very visibly tries to kiss the last couple of hours away, out of Adam’s bruising heart, but not even him can manage such a feat and Adam doesn’t exactly turn his head and rejects him but he doesn’t respond either.

He’s too numb. He wants to leave even knowing it won’t help one fucking bit.

He wishes he could chop Blake off his skin, off his head, off his soul.

“Adam, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” Blake says, holding Adam to his chest, kissing his apology to his hair now, “I didn’t know they were gonna stay so long and I couldn’t kick them out.”

*Of course you couldn’t*, Adam thinks, blankly staring at the spot where he huddled between Blake’s coats and shirts.

It looks so small from a distance. And he fit there because he’s small too, he’s insignificant.

“They were worried because they saw me on this stupid show,” Blake keeps yammering, oblivious, “My ex-wife was there. It was awful and I drank too much when I got home, that’s why you—why you found me like that. I’m sorry.”

Adam doesn’t tell him that’s the precise reason he came looking for him. He doesn’t tell him how worried he was, how awful it was to hover over him not knowing whether he was doing too much or too little, doesn’t bother trying to convince Blake he didn’t come here to be thoroughly fucked because what would be the point in that?

He wasn’t supposed to forget what he is. But he did, he can’t believe that he did.

He’s probably the dumbest man alive.

“You don’t have to apologize or explain yourself to me,” he says, standing up from the bed and away from Blake’s arms to put his jacket on, squaring his shoulders and keeping his chin down so Blake’s blue eyes can’t fool him again, “I’m your whore, not your lover. Pay up and I’ll be on my way.”
Blake flinches like he just punched him. He palms his jeans inelegantly and pulls his wallet out with shaky fingers.

He doesn’t even count the bills he extends to Adam.

“Right,” he says, voice tight, “That enough to cover it?”

Adam does count it because he’s supposed to.

It’s quite a lot, more than what he’d make in two good weeks.

“You’re forgetting I’m cheap,” he points out, throwing three quarters of the money to where Blake is sitting on the bed harsher than he should, “And that’s how you like me, don’t you, cowboy?”

“Adam—“

He surprises himself; he doesn’t cry, doesn’t wobble, doesn’t teeter to the door even though he’s barely aware of his body moving.

He’s only aware that he needs to leave before falling apart.

“Don’t,” he interrupts coarsely, giving Blake his back, “And next time, you better book a room somewhere. I’m not coming back here.”

He doesn’t turn around but it’s a near thing, an impulse he ignores with every bit of feeble willpower he still has.

Chapter End Notes

The one on Blake’s cellphone is Kelly Clarkson.
I hope you guys don't mind the title change. The song (Come what may from Moulin Rouge, yes) is perfect for them. I will probably make a fanmix when I get the time. If you have any song suggestions I'll be happy to listen to them.

This chapter kicked my ass and I hate it but you all seem so eager to read anything that I give up and humbly submit it to you. Here, have at it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The pain is a ringing in his ears, a thudding that goes on and on in the center of his chest, a gaping void in his mind after he hears Adam closing the front door with a soft but final clack.

It goes with him when he walks dully all around his apartment, shooting up a little more each time he stumbles on a hint of Adam’s presence and realizes he was out cold for most of it.

Here, the broom and the dustpan tucked neatly in one corner of the kitchen not at all in the way he keeps them wherever he last used them.

Here, the frying pan and spatula Adam used to make food for them. Here, the lone mug and plate they shared because apparently Adam didn’t even think about helping himself some and had to be coaxed into eating and that makes his heart ache now that his head isn’t trying to pound out of his eyes.

Here, how perfectly they fit in the couch despite Blake’s size alone can barely be contained in it but there’s something shockingly poetic in the way Adam just fills all the negative space around him.

The pain stays with him when he opens every cheap and expensive bottle of booze he owns that survived his last attempt of drinking his problems away and empties them in the sink, a grim quirk on his mouth, hearing his mistake drip relentlessly out of every bottle because he knows now—and he should have—he should’ve gone to Adam for comfort instead to the bottom of a bottle.

It digs its claws into him, forbidding and razor-sharp, when he finally runs out of things to tidy and stares at his injured but so very carefully treated hand.

It chokes him, unforgiving and cruel, when he remembers how dead Adam’s eyes looked, how very young and yet so barren of any trace of hope he seemed and how he did not only fail to make Adam feel better but was also the one who hurt him, the one who broke what little pieces he’d been able to put together in the few weeks they’ve known each other.

It doesn’t let go of him, and he doesn’t expect it to, when he finally goes back to his bedroom and collects every bill Adam threw back at him.

“I was supposed to take care of you,” he murmurs roughly to the silence, to the only one he seems to be capable of being honest with, his voice cracking something awful as he slips to the floor and weeps like a child, inconsolable and open and absolutely unable of seeing past it all.
Kelly comes back that same night and finishes the job for him, throwing all the empty bottles out for recycling.

She doesn’t comment on it but Blake catches the glint of happiness and pride in her eyes.

He wishes he could smile back a little but the pain is still with him and it won’t go away, not until he fixes things with Adam—if there’s any fixing still possible to do, if he didn’t ruin them for real for being a coward.

He’d been so sure of his feelings for Adam, so sure of his ability to risk everything for him at a moment’s notice but then when it came down to it he’d turned tail instead, hadn’t been able to do it and what did that say about him?

Kelly cleans some more, turns on the TV and makes dinner. Blake stays idly on the sofa and doesn’t even object when she settles on an episode of Sex and the City.

She sighs then, nibbling at her tuna sandwich absently while doing a very impressive job of scrutinizing him.

Blake swallows visibly but otherwise tries to keep eating like he’s completely oblivious to her assessment.

“I’m giving you a puppy,” she declares suddenly.

Blake almost chokes and makes a face. “If you want the poor thing to end up dead, okay, be my guest.”

“It won’t die, don’t be like that,” she swats his shoulder hard but her tone is patient and kind, “You have to remember you didn’t only divorce a woman, you also lost a part of your family—your pack of dogs—and I know you miss the mutts. You’re just making this extra hard on you by insisting on being alone. Adopt new dogs, go back to your house and leave this place for when you’re running late and can’t make it out of town. Being alone doesn’t suit you, Blake, it never has and you know that.”

Blake doesn’t try dissuading her, years of friendship have taught him better than that, but he hopes she forgets about it.

Sure, he misses the dogs but the last thing he needs is mimicking what he had with Miranda back in Tishomingo.

The only thing he needs in his life is Adam and that’s exactly what he’s just managed to push away.

He doesn’t sleep a wink that night.

(Or the one that follows or the one after that).

He thinks about what ifs and would haves for hours; what if he’d introduced Adam to his friends? What if he hadn’t all but asked him to pretend he wasn’t there, that he didn’t even exist?

*Hey, this is Adam, and I love him and it’s complicated*, he would’ve said, *but that part is easy. That*
part is easy.

But he didn’t, did he? And for every kindness Adam surprised him with that day—for every unconscious gesture of love, for every quiet admission of something bigger going on between them—he’d gone and paid him back by satisfying his own selfish desires and tossing him aside like dirty laundry once he was done.

And it’s too late now, even if he knows he’d rather have his friends walking out on him that Adam withdrawing into himself and shutting him out.

He wishes he was a better man, a man who could give Adam what he needs without hurting him first.

But he’s not and it’s only the almost factual knowledge of this unlucky but so very strong man—a diamond in the rough, full of scratches that may or may not run deep into his core but that won’t lose value to Blake no matter what the case is because to him he’s simply the most beautiful thing he’s ever laid eyes on—having absolutely no one else to get him out of the pit that stops Blake from giving up.

“I love you,” he whispers to the dark, a hand solemn on his heart, “I love you.”

It might not sound like a vow at all but it is to him.

It is.

***

He moved to LA to focus on the one thing he still has in his life—his career—and he has some commitments on that account to be true to, even with the axis of his world thrown askew by Adam, so he spends the next couple of days working and looking every bit like he’s been run over by a tractor and left to rot in the sun.

“You okay, buddy?” Carson calls him and he sounds so genuinely concerned it almost brings a smile to Blake’s face, “You know I’m just a ring away from anything you need, right?”

He brushes a wayward tear out of his left eye and blinks quickly. “Hey. Advice on groveling would come in handy so I’d appreciate it, if you have any.”

Carson muses for a moment but takes his question to heart despite his weak but joking tone. “I think the best advice for whenever you screw up is showing your partner how sorry you are instead of saying it. It makes all the difference sometimes.”

He’s so worried about Adam, so worried he can barely function, can’t even worry about Carson’s particularly convenient choice of words.

He wants to know where Adam is right now, what he’s doing and if he’s taking care of himself despite of how spectacularly Blake managed to fail him, of how he went from loving him with everything he had—and at the very least convincing him it could be real, what they had found in each other—to shove him to the back of his closet like he was ashamed of feeling that way for him.

He’s so worried every minute that ticks away without seeing or hearing anything from Adam sends a fresh jolt of pain through him.

“That’s really good,” Blake rasps at length, “Thanks, pal, I’ll give you a ring if it doesn’t work.”
“You do that.”

He hangs up, wishing it could be that simple.

He doesn’t even know if Adam is going to let him show him how much he regrets how he handled things, how he handled them.

He’ll be damned if he doesn’t try all the same.

He can’t lose Adam—and if he did, if he already lost him, then he’s getting him back and learning how to be better for him.

***

On the third day after their fight, Blake freezes, recognizing the teal guitar case sitting next to the doorman of his building the second he comes in.

“Mr. Shelton, your boy toy left this for you.”

Blake shuts his eyes tight for a moment, pain a living thing pulsing in his veins.

He doesn’t want me no more, he thinks, panic gripping him with almost unrelenting hooks, wants nothing of mine to keep and remember me by. He doesn’t love—

No. He grits his teeth, plants his feet firmly on the ground before he can go careening off the abyss of self-doubt that will doom him and Adam both if he falls in it and remembers how devoted, how unbelievably sweet and patient Adam was with him when he was nothing but a pitiful drunk and how open he was even before that, all the I miss yous he whispered to him and the way he uttered his name like he was the one thing that made sense in his world demanding Blake to trust in this; to trust in them, in what they had and will have again if he’s strong enough to fight for it.

He takes the guitar from his doorman with a blind hand and breathes through the ache in his chest.

Adam loves him, he felt it, he knows it, doesn’t need to have it spelled out to believe it—doesn’t even deserve it, after his screw-up—and this is just another way he’s finding out how deeply he hurt the striking, giving man he was lucky enough to meet when he needed him the most.

“How was he?” he asks, voice even by sheer miracle, slamming a fifty on the counter in case the man who gets paid an inordinate amount of money to see and hear nothing but sees and hears it all needs extra incentive to be cooperative, “Was he hurt?”

The guy eyes the bill coolly and takes it.

“In a hurry, I’d say. Black eye, busted arm maybe. Nothing more that I could see.”

Blake nods, stomach roiling at the news, and goes to his apartment.

He’s mighty glad he got rid of every drop of booze in it when he finds his favorite guitar—the one he lent to Adam the first time they met—good as new in its case, looking like it’s never been gone at all, like Adam’s long and clever fingers have never touched it, not even once.

He stares at it for a long while, decides he’d rather have it in bits and pieces if that meant Adam had somehow reacted to being pushed to a dark corner like he was only good enough for having his ass up in the air but he obviously didn’t and Blake isn’t surprised.

God only knows how long Adam has been doing what he does—going through things Blake most
likely can’t even imagine—and how many times he had to learn it was always about sex and never about him.

***

_The sky is blue_  
_But from where I stand in the middle of this heartache_  
_It sure looks gray_  
_All alone_  
_What I wouldn’t give if I could feel_  
_The familiar touch of his love holding me again_

Blake bites his lip, stares at all the accusing pronouns he dared to use in the song. Writing a song he probably won’t show to anyone in a long time is small progress, but progress nonetheless and Blake won’t be picky now, not now when so much depends on him.

He sighs, looks around the studio from his seat in front of the piano with sadness pulling at his heart and stinging his eyes.

He didn’t have a chance to show Adam this room—didn’t even think about it and that’s another thing to blame on him—and he regrets that deeply, but vows he’ll do it eventually, once he can convince the younger man of coming back and staying, of not leaving anymore because there’s no need to leave when he’s ever-present and indelible in Blake’s mind, in his heart, in every little thing Blake does whenever they’re not together.

***

The next time he takes his truck to those all too familiar streets is the coldest night of the year and Adam is wearing the sluttiest outfit he’s ever seen on him despite of the temperature—which is saying a lot, considering how his clothes have never really left what’s underneath to the imagination.

He’s not wearing a t-shirt this time, just an old leather jacket that hangs a little loose from his shoulders, the tattoos on his chest plain for everyone to see and admire. He’s cradling his right arm to his chest under it in a posture that’s too casual to be natural, perching against a street light like he has nothing better to do.

He’s not wearing jeans either, a pair of threadbare black shorts instead, coupled with thigh high boots that leave a lot of smooth and almost hairless skin making an alluring and irresistible invitation to anyone who passes by.

He looks like the best dark promise you could ever hope to find but something about it stops Blake from fully enjoying it, makes him miss the way Adam wears jeans and torn t-shirts like they’ve been made for him and him alone.

There’s no denying what Adam does, not this time, and when their eyes meet the smaller man raises his chin in challenge, like he’s completely aware of Blake’s thoughts on his clothes, and doesn’t bat an eyelid at seeing him.

He’s wearing black eyeliner and that’s new too, an aid his beauty doesn’t really need, not that Blake has any say on the matter. His eyes look lighter but colder somehow, the little freckles of gold in them tough and unyielding instead of warm and open.

And he’s apparently staring more than he’s allowed to because Adam sneers and turns dead ahead, a look of disinterest on his face.
“If you don’t like it, keep driving, cowboy,” Adam says, “There’s plenty here for you to pick.”

“Not for me, no. There’s only you for me, Adam,” Blake counters, swift and gallant but quiet in case someone is listening, “You’re the only man I’ve ever wanted and I plan to keep it that way. Get in.”

“It’s Jack here, asshole,” Adam hisses, climbing to the backseat and closing the car door with enough force to rattle the whole truck.

He crosses his arms and legs, unapologetic and insolent, and Blake ignores the bait and starts the engine.

He spends the drive looking at Adam through the rear view mirror, breath catching in his throat whenever Adam drops the act and has to cover his face with his hands for a moment until he can get the mask of nonchalance in place again.

He looks so lost and sad, so little and disheartened.

The make-up and all the leather he’s wearing are an armor, Blake can see that now, but he doesn’t kid himself.

There are more shields in place, shields that don’t meet the eye, and those are the ones he has to get past.

***

They’re almost at the hotel Blake decided to take Adam to when the younger man kicks his back through the car seat and orders him to stop.

Blake does, wincing and turning to look at him with an entreaty in the tip of his tongue.

“Adam, please—“

“Shut up,” Adam cuts him, “Shut the fuck up, Shelton. Oh my God, you really don’t have a fucking clue, do you? You can’t drive me to the fucking Hyatt and expect us to walk through the front door! This is LA, there are more paparazzi than local birds here! Do you want to commit social suicide, is that it?” Blake flinches and Adam laughs, sharp and mirthless, “Yeah, that’s what I thought. You don’t want to do that, you’re just fucking clueless. Here’s what you’re gonna do. You’re going to drive back three blocks, leave me there and meet me in the tenth floor. I’ll be waiting on the stairs.”

Blake gulps and does as he’s told, face burning in embarrassment and heart beating like a jackhammer at realizing Adam has known who he is all this time—probably since the first night they shared, since the moment he told him his name and he smiled that brilliant, genuine smile when he noticed Blake hadn’t lied to him, had chosen to tell him his real name in exchange of hearing Adam’s.

He grips the steering wheel, knuckles going white, and drives the rest of the way.

***

Blake walks into The Century Plaza like he owns the place. He smiles pleasantly and flirts with the girl at the front desk even though his skin is crawling and the hotel is so far from his tastes he’s spent the months he’s lived in town driving past it without even looking at it.

All he wants to do is taking Adam home with him but that’s not an option so he tells himself this is necessary—he sure as Hell isn’t going to take Adam to a shitty motel and make things even worse
between them—and extends one of his credit cards.

***

Adam is waiting for him right where he said he would but he’s not alone and Blake wants to twist the arm the employee has on his ass until he hears it snap but doesn’t.

It’s only fear of losing Adam for good what reins his jealousy in, what keeps him from lashing out and showing Adam who he belongs to.

He clears his throat and waits for them to retract their tongues to their own mouths.

Adam winks at the guy. Blake grits his teeth and drags him to the room he booked, glaring over his shoulder to make sure the member of the staff trips over his own feet in his hurry to leave Blake’s sight.

***

He’s furious but his hands on Adam’s shoulders are gentle when he pins him against the door.

Adam still winces but recovers quickly, holding his gaze with wariness in his eyes and tension around his lips.

“You’re hurt,” Blake states, thumb smearing the concealer over Adam’s left eye to reveal a bit of purple underneath. Adam hisses slightly but stays put, lets him touch wherever he pleases, “I wish you’d called me, Adam. I was so worried about you.”

It’s clearly the wrong thing to say.

Adam slaps his hand away and gives him a dirty look, sneaking out of his arms and walking further into the room.

“That’s rich,” he scoffs, taking his jacket off with a roll of his neck, giving him his back as he stares through the large window on the wall at the appealing lights of the city outside, “And what were you going to tell your friends if I called you and asked for help, Shelton? ‘Oh, guys, he’s a bitch I found in the street, you wouldn’t believe how good he is at taking cock so you can’t blame me for keeping him!’ Something like that?”

Blake has the decency to blush, chagrined, and looks down as he hears Adam unzipping his boots.

“It’s Blake,” he says, quiet, chin tucked down but eyes betraying him and outlining the enticing curve of Adam’s body as he bends down and shimmies out of his shoes and shorts, “And you’re more than that to me, Adam.”

“Sure I am,” Adam smirks, his lean and muscled legs closing the distance between them for him to slide Blake’s jacket off his shoulders and start unbuttoning his shirt, “I’m good at cleaning messes up, aren’t I? I bet your friends have no idea how fucking awful that night was for you,” Adam stands on his tiptoes and looks up, lips parting in offering and his own respond in kind even though Blake knows he shouldn’t kiss him, not yet, “Only I know,” Adam says, brushing his lips with every word, voice like a shot of whisky, hot and irresistible, “And I won’t tell. That’s not my job.”

Blake tips his head down and their mouths find each other, just as their eyes are closing, Adam’s cold but nimble fingers making quick work of his clothes.

The kiss is unhurried but heated, appreciative sounds rushing out of Adam’s throat every time they
part a little to search for a better angle and a bit of air only to come back to one another and start again.

Adam’s hands grip his arms tightly, trying to pull him in the direction of the king size bed to their right and Blake lets him, cradling his neck with gentle fingers.

Adam smells like he’s been smoking longer than he’s been breathing since they last saw each other but Blake breathes him in all the same, nuzzling one of his sideburns and kissing the spot just below Adam’s ear that he knows makes him shiver.

He sits Adam on the edge of the mattress and kneels in front of him, between his spread legs, cupping his face for a long moment until he sees Adam’s eyes darting to the sides, his Adam’s apple bobbling anxiously.

“Be right back,” he says, pecking the corner of Adam’s mouth one last time before standing up and putting his shirt on again.

He leaves his belt and jeans loose and asks for room service, leaving a confused Adam on the bed.

He knows they will end up having sex—he’s weak, alright, and their bodies are more honest and willing than either of them can be at the moment because Adam still kisses him and clings to him like there’s no other place he’d rather be—but he wants Adam to remember it was never only about that, not between them.

***

He watches Adam standing naked in front of the window before wrapping him in his suit jacket. It falls down to his thighs, drowns him a little in fabric since he’s so freaking thin, but Adam doesn’t object and gets his arms in the sleeves, sighing when Blake burrows into his now clad shoulder.

“You have the weirdest, lamest kinks,” Adam quips halfheartedly, arms going around his neck, breath hitching when Blake grazes his neck with his stubble and kisses the burn better.

Blake chuckles, kissing his way along Adam’s jawline up to his mouth and lingering there, hands keeping Adam flushed to him by the waist as he walks backwards towards the small table where the food awaits them.

He uncaps the steak, pours them some wine and sits down.

“Maybe it’s just you who I’m into, Adam,” he suggests, patting his thigh for Adam to sit on.

Adam complies but plays dirty, licking his ear like that’s all the dessert he’s going to be eating, deft hands undressing him again.

“We can play all the games you want,” he whispers, wet and promising in Blake’s ear, “But don’t forget what I’m here for, cowboy.”

“You’re here because I missed you,” Blake replies, tone firm even though his dick jerks under Adam’s fingers through the fabric of his pants, “Because I wanted to see you, to hold you, to make sure you’re okay,” he grips Adam’s wrists as gently as he can and feels his right forearm carefully through his jacket, watching how Adam cringes and tries to break free from him, “Because I know that I hurt you but I would never, ever lay a finger on you like this, Adam, and every minute you spend with me is another minute that you’re safe.”

“Let go—“
“No,” Blake waits until Adam has stopped struggling and is looking at him with those sweet hazel eyes of his just this shy of too wet to keep talking, “We’re gonna have dinner and then I’m going to take a good look at your arm and you’re going to stop pretending it doesn’t hurt.”

He’s expecting harsh words, more resistance, anything but Adam gazing at him for a silent, long instant before nodding and tilting his head down just enough to kiss him on the lips, chaste and grateful.

Adam drinks one of the glasses of wine down then. Blake accepts some sips from his, along with small kisses on his forehead, but focuses on cutting everything and feeding it to the man on his lap. Despite of the circumstances, it’s the first time food isn’t foreplay.

***

“You’re sober,” Adam remarks. He’s sitting on the toilet, still wearing Blake’s jacket, wincing every now and then but otherwise remaining quiet while he makes a makeshift splint for his forearm piling rolls of gauze from the first-aid kit and fastening it on Adam’s skin with tape, “Ran out of booze already?”

Blake shakes his head, keeps working, “I threw it away, all of it. I’ll drink a glass or two if I’m out from now on, but nothing more.”

“You’re sober,” Adam asks, going stiff enough for Blake to look up and frown at the anxious expression on his face, “I should’ve taken out the trash, shouldn’t I? They made you quit?”

“What? No,” Blake kisses his knuckles, the tip of his fingers, his knees and a bit of his thighs, just about everywhere he can reach, “Adam, you did more than enough for me. I quit because I wanted to. I don’t want to be an alcoholic, you know, and that’s where I was heading before I met you.”

Adam frowns, clearly not getting what he means at all.

Blake sighs, uses one last roll of tape around the injury and shoves the kit to the side with a leg. The bathroom, as luxurious as it is, isn’t the most romantic of places to say what he wants to say but it’s the right moment and that’s gotta count for something.

“I don’t want to drink anymore, Adam. I don’t want to sleep around no more either,” he confesses, breathing every word on Adam’s lips like a caress, thumbs soft and warm on his cheekbones, “I just want you by my side, darlin’, I just wanna be with you.”

It’s not an I love you but it’s close enough to it that Adam’s eyes widen and his lips tremble against his, his good arm lacing around his neck as they kiss like it’s the first kiss they’ve ever experienced, noses and chins bumping and laughter accompanying the first shy glide of lips on lips.

It’s so brief but so heartening. Adam wants to be with him too and the things that are holding him back aren’t enough to drive Blake away.

“I’m not—I can’t—“ Adam stutters, shaking his head and putting distance between them with his shins, “Blake, I can’t be what you need. I will get you in trouble. We can’t be together. Fucking Hell, you can’t even introduce me to your friends!”

“Then I’ll get new friends,” Blake insists, “Adam, you—“

“What about your career? You’ll get a new one too?” Adam shouts, almost in hysterics, “Are you fucking insane? You’re going to lose everything and then you’re going to blame me for it. You’re
going to hate me because I killed your dreams, and I—“

Blake shushes him before Adam can start hyperventilating and making himself sick. He lifts him in his arms and collapses on the floor with Adam’s body contradicting every plea to leave him and pick someone else to be with that leaves his mouth, limbs entwining around him with enough force to cut his breath in half.

“Adam, I could never hate you,” he promises, time and time again, “Never.”

Adam kisses him then, needy and desperate, and if he’s been hard ever since he had him bare and ready for him to take then he’s out of his mind with it by now, so he kisses him back with relief and want in equal parts.

(And that’s when he screws up again, when he thinks Adam finally believes him and will stay with him because that’s what they both want more than anything).

***

Adam cries the whole time they make love, mute and plump tears streaming down his cheeks and making a mess of his face and he tries asking, tries soothing but nothing works and Adam simply kisses him, clutches a little tighter around him, and promises nothing’s wrong, says he’s just happy, and Blake just buys it.

He’s so happy himself, why wouldn’t he think Adam feels the same?

Blake wipes the soiled makeup and tear tracks patiently when they’re done, kisses Adam’s come-smeared thighs too sated to do anything else at the moment.

Adam smiles wearily at him, gestures for him to come to the pillows and rest with him.

So Blake does.

For the first night in almost five days, he sleeps.

***

He has the sweetest dreams, goes as far as to dream Adam sings to him and his voice is the most unique, enthralling thing he’s ever heard; high but distinctively masculine, the purity in it leaving no room for grit, every note he hits clean and perfect.

*Take what you want
I will be just fine
You will be better off alone at night
Waiting and falling
Constantly calling out your name
Will it ever change?*

***

He wakes up at noon the next day, the girl from the front desk calling to remind him he needs to pay for another night or leave in the next ten minutes.

He’s alone.

The sheets are cold but there’s a piece of paper, wrinkled and dirty and barely recognizable, where
he remembers scribbling his number to Adam.

He takes it with shaky fingers, a bad hunch turning his movements hesitant and slow.

There are a lot of scratched lines—and Adam’s handwriting is so tiny—but what he can read tears a scream out his throat.

*You have a great life. Don’t waste it on me.*

*Don’t come back for me.*

Oh God, that hurts.

What is he going to do now?

Chapter End Notes

The song (with a little twist that Hannah knows about ;D) that Blake sings is "All over me".

The one that Adam sings is "Not falling apart".
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

I made a fanmix. You can find it here. Let me know what you think?

I apologize for weird typos that you might see. My keyboard is misbehaving.

It’s not hard to determine the precise moment in which Blake falls asleep.

He holds Adam impossibly closer to him, shoulders burrowing deeper into the comfy and lavishly soft pillows, makes sure Adam is comfortable between his spread legs and on top of his chest, and then he’s dead to the world, goes so still it makes Adam ache and worry.

He doesn’t know how many hours of rest he’s stolen from Blake. He doesn’t need to, he feels guilty and undeserving as it is.

He spends the next couple of hours just listening to Blake’s heartbeat as if memorizing its rhythm along with the feel of his hot, moist skin against him and around him.

He doesn’t know what he’s going to miss more of everything Blake’s given him but feeling this safe, this loved and utterly adored ranks high in that list.

I wish things were different, he thinks, greedy fingers caressing Blake’s arm gently enough not to rouse him but firmly enough to halt the break down he feels coming down on him, I wish you could be mine and I could be yours, I wish we’d met five years ago when I was clean and you were just a regular guy, I wish—

But what he wishes doesn’t matter. The one thing he can do is what’s best for the one of them that isn’t ruined beyond mending.

His voice flows from deep within him, comes to say goodbye to the one man that believed in him knowing so very little about him and yet loving so very much, and Adam lets it.

He sings for Blake, just like he always wanted him to do, sings one of the many songs that swim in his mind but that have no place to be outside of it. It’s a wonder he still remembers any, it’s been so fucking long since the last time he forgot rent boys don’t sing.

It’s the first time he forgets rent boys don’t fall in love.

He kisses Blake’s brow and knows it’s going to be the last, the only one.

Opening the door takes him long minutes and he can’t make himself turn around, can’t stop watching Blake sleep so peacefully, with such a content smile on his face he can’t bite a sob back fast enough and starts crying again.

He stumbles out of the room and the door locks him out instantly. Adam pushes at it weakly, already feeling he’s not strong enough to do this after all, not strong enough to let Blake go, but it doesn’t budge.
It leaves him out—out of Blake’s life—just like he should be, so Adam swallows down all the pieces of his heart he wasn’t even sure he still had whole in him to break and scurries down the stairs.

***

Blake made an ugly mess of his arm but the stillness eases the pain so much Adam decides to keep it for a while and the guy he seduced earlier in the hotel doesn’t care about it, hardly notices it while he’s fucking Adam in the backseat of his car.

He’s young and unexperienced and any other night Adam would teach him better but tonight he simply pushes back, moans in the right places—he can fake orgasms in his sleep by this point and he knows he’s good at it—and offers husky praise once the man has taken his pleasure from him.

Dawn has snuck up on him and there’s no way he can get home without ending up in jail for—well, being what he is, which is a prostitute and it doesn’t take a genius to figure that out in broad daylight, so he hitches a ride with this john instead—manipulates him into giving him one, that is.

He hobbles the remaining two blocks to his building and thinks it’s only fitting he can’t keep the feel of Blake’s hands touching him for a little longer.

He’s a whore, after all. His body isn’t his, it’s for rent, and Adam doesn’t even get to keep it to himself for very long.

As much as he wanted to be Blake’s whore for the rest of his life—and how naïve was that? Jesus fucking Christ, but he really wanted to, he would’ve been almost happy with that arrangement—he can’t be because the country star wants and deserves more, deserves better, deserves things Adam would never be able to give him, deserves to keep all the things he’s worked hard for instead of Adam taking everything away from him to have a better life for himself.

He’s a master at fucking but wouldn’t know how to love no matter how long someone tried to teach him how.

(And that’s a lie because for Blake he would learn, he knows he would, but the price would be too high and Adam isn’t even worth a tenth of it).

***

It’s late enough that it’s early and it takes him twice longer than normal to climb the six flights of stairs to his apartment.

Adam is fumbling for his keys when he hears footsteps. He tenses out of habit because they’re on his back and nothing good has ever come of letting his guard down.

“Adam?”

He finally finds the keys and drops them like a hot potato because fuck, fuck, fuck, why now?

He already lost Blake.

Does he really have to lose Jesse too?

“Morning,” he greets lamely, looks over his shoulder in time to catch his friend gaping and staring up and down at him, “I—huh—I was just——”

“What happened to you?” Jesse asks, like that isn’t obvious enough, “There’s a free clinic we could
Adam unlocks his door on autopilot. He also assures Jesse he’s fine and his mind makes up bizarre reasons as to why Jesse hasn’t run away from him in disgust just yet—it’s not Halloween but maybe a costume party is still believable enough—and pushes it open, refusing help he needs but that he can’t even imagine getting, let alone accepting, not when he’s just standing there wearing little next to nothing with his thighs still sticky with Blake’s come.

“Man, if you were assaulted, we should go right now,” Jesse insists, “You could’ve caught something, it’s not safe to wait—“

Adam feels his knees buckling. He grips the doorframe, pressing a fist to his mouth to stop himself from crying out and closes his eyes, praying to all the Gods he doesn’t believe in to please, please, please don’t let Blake get sick because of him, because of a whim that Adam indulged despite knowing better when he was at his weakest.

Sure, he tries using condoms but that’s not always an option, not in his line of job, and there’s no telling what kind of STDs he could have by now.

He’s a high school dropout but he’s not stupid.

And yet he let Blake, the one man who’s ever meant a thing to him, fuck him without protection so maybe he is stupid.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers, ashamed and trembling, and he’s not sure whether it’s meant for Blake or Jesse but he has a lot of apologies to make to his friend so he might as well start with this, “I lied to you. I’m not a waiter, I’m a—“ hooker.

Jesse beats him to it, uses a term far more dignified than what Adam likes using to define himself. “You’re a sex worker?”

Still, he nods, too drained to discern whether his neighbor is too busy being shocked to get mad yet or too horrified to show it.

He murmurs another apology and closes the door behind him.

***

He rips apart the bandage Blake made for him and with every pull that leaves his arm freer he has to swallow a scream.

He’s had broken bones before, he doesn’t understand why this time it feels so much worse. Maybe his arm is worse than what he thought, maybe he’s getting weaker at dealing with this sort of thing. Either way, it’s not like he can go see a doctor and get a cast for it.

Who would want to fuck a whore with a fucking cast? That’s not attractive. It’s not permitted.

He takes a shower, the water blessedly burning hot for once, and rummages through his things looking for a roll of fabric bandage he knows he has somewhere. It’s been a long time since the last time he messed up enough to get a broken bone but he knows what to do, he’s just been too busy wallowing to care enough to do it.

He puts it on as tight as he’s able to using teeth and one hand and it might not be perfect but it’s enough to be able to breathe through the pain and enough for the sting to be a constant undercurrent in his brain that won’t let him get too maudlin, won’t let him forget for an instant he’s a collection of
bad choices and bad news and little else.

He stays there for a little while, sitting on the floor with his back against the couch bed and his head slouching back on it, until he finally stops sobbing like a fucking wimp and then he’s up and about, goes to wash some clothes in the sink and even cleans his place a bit.

He knows better than to stop. If he stops, he’s dead. If he stops, he will remember that what the future forebodes for him isn’t promising, it’s horrifying, and he won’t want to stick around for it.

Once he’s done, he takes most of the money he’s been saving and keeping under the mattress and shoves it in his shoe to pay his pimp with later.

This is on him, he thinks absently, because in his haste to leave Blake’s side he forgot to take his fee from him and that’s a mistake he learned not to do long ago but apparently love turns you stupid enough to forget even the basics.

***

“Cariño, I know what you’re thinking,” Shakira tells him as she’s fastening the fabric bandage tauter on his forearm and he hisses and wipes his eyes roughly with his other hand, “But you should really get this looked at. See here,” she pauses, gingerly presses down on a thin patch of angry red skin and feels the sharp edges of bone underneath and makes Adam’s vision spin and turn dark, “This doesn’t feel good, it won’t… like this, Jack. Jack?”

Adam blinks, shakes his head and ignores the fact he passed the fuck out for a second.

“I’m fine,” he says, stubborn and a little shaky. He cradles his right arm against his chest, feeling a tiny bit better despite of Shakira’s prodding, and stands up from the shop window they’ve been using as bench, “Thanks, I owe you one.”

Shakira sighs, giving him a sad but understanding look. She tucks a red lock behind her ear and her hand closes around Adam’s left wrist when he tries to go.

She’s warm or maybe they’re both cold but Adam is the one who’s freezing the most. Hell if he knows.

“Wait,” she says, standing up, and she sounds almost apologetic, “I’m glad you came to see me. It’s my last night here.”

“You got another job?” Adam asks and he’s surprised but happy, he really is, “That’s awesome!”

She shakes her head and smiles a little. “My boyfriend did. He’s got a contract, we have health insurance and everything now.”

“That’s still amazing. I’m so happy for you, Shakira,” and he hugs her because he means it but she still looks sheepish, like her own happiness could offend him somehow, “You can have that baby that you wanted now.”

That makes her perk up. “Yes!”

He smiles for her because she deserves to get out of this shithole and she beams, makes him promise he’ll go visit and he kisses her goodbye and tries to ignore the pang of longing he feels, the horrid envy lapping at his insides, and fails a little but it’s alright. She won’t be here to see Adam bitter about it, about how very alone he’s going to be and how very much he wishes he could have that with Blake.
“Jack!” he turns around and she runs back to him, whispers excitedly in his ear while the other female hookers give them a dirty look, “What about Blue Eyes? Have you seen him?”

“No,” he lies again. When it matters, he finds he can be a good liar.

Her face falls. “But you liked him so much. If he comes back for you, don’t let him go. He could get you out of here,” Adam shakes his head but she insists, “Hey, it worked for me!”

A honk saves Adam from answering and he waves at her as she climbs into a red car.

The last thing he hears from her is her sincere laughter.

It sounds hollow in the emptiness of his heart.

He realizes he’s always had a crappy, miserable life but he’s never been truly alone.

Until now.

***

There’s a copy of People’s magazine in the house of his next john with an article about Blake in it.

Adam steals the biggest picture of him he finds skimming through the pages and hides it in the inner pocket of his jacket.

When he gets home that morning, he tapes it on the wall next to his bed and touches it gingerly with his fingertips before lying down for the first time in two days.

He pulls the covers on top of him with a clumsy arm that sends shocks of agony every time he moves it the wrong way and stares at the photo until he dozes off, remembering this is the one thing he can have from Blake—which is the same thing that everyone else can have from him and absolutely nothing else.

Blake is holding a guitar and smiling.

That’s how it’s supposed to be, even if that means he has to stay away from Adam.

Even if it kills him.

(He misses Blake so much he’s amazed there’s any space left for air in him between all this yearning).

***

It comes in handy, the fact he can recognize Blake’s pickup from a block away.

During the first nights, he always manages to go off with someone else before the country singer can spot him.

But then he gets sloppy—screwing up is easy on a normal basis and it’s easier than breathing when he can’t remember the last time he had something that wasn’t a pack of cigarettes—and blinks to find Blake lowering his car window right beside to where he is on the sidewalk.

He looks—shit, why does he look so ragged? Adam is doing this for him, for his own good! Why does he look like he’s been living a nightmare he can’t wake up from?
Those lines of grief Adam has never liked on his face are back with a vengeance. His light blue eyes are dim and tired and Adam hates himself so much he gets dizzy with it.

“Come with me,” Blake says, begs, “Please, Adam, I—“

“Go away, I don’t want you,” he spits out although he has to close his eyes to do it and his voice cracks, “Get the fuck away from here or I’ll start screaming right this fucking second, I swear to God.”

Adam doesn’t know which part of the bunch of lies he’s just said works but Blake recoils from it, takes one last look at him, and drives away.

“Don’t come back,” he murmurs to no one, his breath turning white in the chill of the night.

***

When Blake’s truck keeps appearing in the corner of his eyes, he contemplates moving out.

Los Angeles is his hometown and it hasn’t been kind to him but it’s the only place that Adam knows.

He has a brother that he hasn’t seen in years that may or may not be living in New York but that’s the same as having nothing. He has no means to get there unless you count hitchhiking and blowing drivers as a form of payment and even if he could get all the way there, who is going to hire him when all the clothes he owns are two sizes too small and he’s twenty five but has experience in nothing that isn’t taking cock?

No. There’s no place to go, not for him.

But his strength is running out and he knows the next time Blake pleads him to go with him, he just—he will go, he will fucking do it, he will cave.

So he drags his sorry ass to a phone booth and calls him, hoping it’s easier to reason with him without having him in front of his face turning every coherent thought he has to rubble, without being able to hear anything above the shrill no please don’t leave me of his treacherous, selfish heart.

“Hey,” he croaks.

Something falls stridently in the background. Then he hears Blake inhaling hard and deep.

He closes his eyes and he can see his stupid, handsome face gasping, his long arms scrabbling to take a hold of something so he doesn’t fall flat on his ass.

“Adam.”

His name sounds like it’s been punched out of him and it hurts but he grips the phone tighter and tries to focus.

“You have to stop coming, Shelton. I don’t know how many more times I have to tell you.”

There’s a long pause, long enough that Adam thinks Blake must’ve hung up on him.

“So that’s it?” Blake says next and he sounds angry instead of sad, “You’re dead set in taking this decision for the both of us? Can’t you see how unfair that is? Does what I want not matter to you at all?”

“What you—“ Adam shakes almost violently, bitterness getting the best of him, “Fuck you! You
don’t know what you want, you dumb son of a bitch! You think it’s me but you’re wrong! You got it wrong and I’m trying to make things right for you but you’re not letting me!”

“It’s not me who has it wrong,” Blake replies, somehow managing to sound like he’s not supposed to every time he speaks, “You think my career will make me happy but it never has. I’m supposed to sign with my label again next week but I don’t think I wanna do it. If you really don’t want me, find another excuse because that one won’t do. I’ll keep pushing because that don’t matter, only you do and I know—damn it, Adam, I know that you need me and you have no idea how much I need you too. Please, stop doing this. Let me in, let me show you.”

He sounds weary this time, he’s not even pleading anymore.

And Adam doesn’t know what to do. He sobs and waits for Blake to end the call because he can’t even do that, he’s paralyzed with pain and confusion and longing.

He just wants Blake’s arms around him. All the reasons he’s been rejecting him suddenly don’t seem important.

When he asks where he is, Adam gives in.

He tells him.

***

Blake is dream-fast but reality-warm and solid against him when he kneels in front of where Adam is slumping on the ground and holds him.

He smells just like Adam remembers, like softener and aftershave and a tang of sweat, and it could very well be the smell of hope and dreams Adam thought he was never going to have again but he’s here and he’s picking him up like having Adam in his arms is everything he wants in the world and as ridiculous as that sounds, for once he doesn’t question it.

The kiss they share is tentative and brief but it loosens something in Adam’s chest and breathing is easier, the air sweeter, the night warmer and brighter.

“I’m so sorry,” he says, touching Blake’s face with the tip of his fingers when they break apart to look at each other, “I’m so, so, so sorry, I—“

Blake leans into his touch and smiles a hopeful, tiny, paper thin smile. “I know.”

The car starts as they cling to each other in the backseat. The sound is different, lower than the usual roar of Blake’s pickup, but Adam only has eyes for Blake and he couldn’t care any less about who’s driving and where they’re going.

***

Their driver introduces himself as Carson and extends his hand to him. He’s friendly and doesn’t laugh when Adam awkwardly offers his left hand to him even though Adam feels like he’s already screwing up for not being able to greet one of Blake’s friends like a normal person, simply swapping his own for his left and smiling at him before looking at Blake and telling him to call him if they need anything.

Blake thanks him and closes the door of the apartment behind him.

He’s back to Adam’s side on the couch the next second, cups his face and stares right into his eyes
until Adam has to look down because he can’t take it.

He hasn’t done enough to deserve Blake’s love, doubts he ever will.

“No more running?” Blake asks, like he’s making sure he can let go of Adam and he won’t disappear when he’s not looking.

Adam kisses one of his palms, looks up at Blake, feeling like his heart is bursting. “No more running.”

Blake cradles the back of his head with a big hand, gives him a kiss on the forehead and smiles a content, more confident smile now.

“I was so scared,” he confesses, breathing the words into his hair as Adam burrows into his chest, “So scared of losing you, Adam. Please, don’t do that to me again.”

“I’m sorry,” he mumbles again, feels Blake shaking his head and kisses the span of skin in the base of his neck that’s available to him, left hand digging into Blake’s back, “I’m stupid.”

“I’m sorry too,” Blake says softly, arms tightening around him. He starts rocking them back and forth but Adam tenses, his right arm throbbing with the smallest of movements now, “It was me who pushed you away first, Adam, you’re not—what is it?”

Blake pulls away in time to see him blanching and panting, his shoulder and upper arm spasming for all the days he’s been forcing them in the same position.

“It’s nothing, just—“ he tries taking a deep breath but ends up moaning and huddling into himself, “Fuck, just give me a minute.”

“Like Hell I will,” Blake lifts him from the couch slowly, careful not to touch his right arm, “You’re with me now and I’m taking you to a hospital.”

Adam huffs and gets ready to shout at him to stop but shuts his mouth when Blake only carries him to the bedroom, depositing him gently on the bed to open his closet and reveal a whole side of it filled with new clothes that look way too small for him.

Blake picks a pair of dark jeans, a pinstriped blue shirt and walks back to him to show him his pick.

“This okay?” he asks.

Adam stares, gaping, and thinks he’s clearly going crazy.

“Blake, what—what’s,” he stammers, pointing at the pile of strange clothes, “What’s all that?”

Blake’s ears go a little pink. He scratches the back of his head and gives a fleeting look in the direction of the closet.

“We can change them if you don’t like them or if they don’t fit,” he mutters, embarrassed, and hangs his head like Adam could seriously get mad because he went fucking shopping for him.

He bought a whole wardrobe for him, by the looks of it, and Adam doesn’t know what’s more endearing—if he way he’s reacting like a kid about to be scolded or the amount of faith he had to have in them, in that Adam was coming back to him, to do it.

“Leave the shirt,” he says, ducking his head but grinning, “It’s only going to get ruined with the cast and whatever else they have to do to me.”
Blake helps him out of his skintight, threadbare jeans and into a pair of jeans that are still skinny but heavier and classy. They probably cost more than the money Adam is able to make in a whole month. Blake also helps him slide an arm into a thick white winter jacket and steps back to take a good look.

Everything fits perfectly and Adam cocks an eyebrow at the taller man who is all but beaming at him.

“How do I look?”

“How gorgeous.”

Blake brings three shoe boxes from the closet. They’re the same kind of black boots in different sizes and Adam laughs, realizing he doesn’t know what shoe size he wears either.

He tries them on until the second fits and then tugs Blake down for a deep kiss.

“Thank you,” he breathes on his lips.

Blake nuzzles his nose, kisses him some more and puts the hoodie on his head, laughing when Adam puffs and takes it off.

“Maybe we could go tomorrow,” he suggests faintly, taking two steps back from the front door when they’re about to go out, “I’m—I’m feeling a bit better now.”

Blake takes his hands in his and squeezes, reassuring but tender. “Adam, nothing is gonna happen to you, I promise. I’ll be right there with you. And we could go tomorrow but you’re in pain and I’d like you to feel better as soon as possible.”

“I’m tired,” he slurs, hot and woozy all of a sudden. He paws at the zippers with his only working hand but can’t open them fast enough and breathes through his mouth, wheezing, “Please, don’t make me go.”

He hears Blake’s voice, urgent and near, but the words don’t make sense and the room tips almost comically to the side, making him trip and collide against Blake’s chest.

He closes his eyes and hopes that Blake doesn’t mind carrying him back to the bedroom.
I apologize for the delay. I had (have) quite a bit of a writer's block and no time to try to fight my way around it enough times to be remotely pleased with what I write but here you go. Hopefully it's not as bad as I think it is.

Blake calls Carson again, nothing in his voice betraying how worried he is as he apologizes for the inconvenience and waits for his friend to get there.

He spends every minute waiting and then on the ride to the clinic trying to gently coax Adam back to consciousness but the younger man is still in his arms and breaks into a cold sweat that makes panic bubble in his chest when they’re unlucky enough to catch a long red light.

“It’s just exhaustion, most likely,” Carson offers, pacifying, “He’s going to be okay, buddy. And we’re almost there, just hang on for a bit longer.”

Blake nods, mindful of Adam’s right arm as he holds him closer to his body and presses a lingering kiss to his clammy forehead.

He leaves the white jacket on because it’s cold and Adam has nothing but a thin, almost see-through t-shirt underneath. He steps out of the car, waves Carson off when he offers to stick around for a while, and walks into the E.R. with his lover in his arms and his heart in his throat.

“We were coming ‘cause his arm is broken, I think,” he tells one of the nurses that gently but quickly pry Adam out of his hands and onto a stretcher, his accent thick with unease, “But then he passed out and he doesn’t—I don’t know why—”

Another nurse nods, hands him a sheet of paper and a pen and all but nudges him to a chair. “Please sit here and fill this if you can, Mr…?”

Blake takes the form and answers in a whisper, refusing to look around and see if the people in the waiting room have already recognized him.

“Shelton,” he says, “Blake Shelton.”

***

They take Adam inside and Blake tries to be useful but fails spectacularly, forced to leave blank spaces in all the important places, every piece of necessary information—Adam’s age, his last name, his address—a mystery to him.

He does sign and pay for everything Adam might need. That makes him feel a little bit better.

***

“His blood sugar was low but he’s awake now,” the nurse, a young and tiny thing explains to him when she comes to collect the form, “He’s been taken to Radiology for some X-rays but I’ll let you in as soon as he’s back, Mr. Shelton.”
Blake sags on the chair, dizzy with relief. “Thank you,” he says, meaning it, “Thank you.”

***

They move Adam to a room and a doctor comes to talk with them, arranges the X-rays in a shiny board on the wall where he proceeds to point the nasty gaps that even Blake can realize shouldn’t be in the bones of Adam’s forearm.

His ulna is broken in three places, the doctor says, and it isn’t mending in the way it should because the pieces aren’t aligned in the proper way so they have to fix that using screws and plates. Adam is scheduled as the first emergency surgery of the day, he adds, and assures them the procedure is safe and relatively simple, that all they’re waiting for is for some basic tests to tell them Adam can undergo surgery without any risk for his health. He’s young, he remarks, so it’s really just a formality.

Adam cringes and stiffs as soon as the word ‘surgery’ is thrown into the mix. Blake does his best to soothe him, one hand carding through Adam’s short hair and lightly kneading his scalp, the other bringing Adam’s left hand to his lips and brushing his knuckles enough times for the breath caught in Adam’s throat to be released in a sound is not quite a sob but it’s too wrecked to be a sigh.

“And you have any questions?” the doctor asks.

Adam shakes his head, his gaze glued to the white sheets covering him. He looks so small and pale and scared Blake wishes he could take him home right away but he can’t.

“Are his tattoos going to be an issue? Are you gonna have to cut through them?” Blake questions.

Adam’s head snaps up, his eyes wide and amazed, and Blake squeezes his hand in his, a surge of something that could’ve been pride and glee in another situation at realizing he knows Adam well despite of the fact he’s just found out his whole name and his birthday today.

The doctor eyes Adam’s arm in the splint for a moment and looks rueful.

“It’s a possibility,” he admits, “That tiger is amazing but it goes around your arm in a way that will make it hard to avoid, but we’ll do our best to keep it. The other one—”

“I don’t care about the other one,” Adam cuts in, ice cold. Blake frowns, acutely aware there must be some good and horrible reason why his lover doesn’t want the heart with ‘mom’ tattooed in it anymore.

“Okay. We will keep that in mind. Please remember you can’t eat or drink anything before the surgery. We will come for you in a while.”

Adam nods and they’re left alone.

Blake settles on a plastic chair that isn’t nearly as uncomfortable as it looks, stretching his legs beneath the bed and squeezing Adam’s hand in quiet reassurance when the silence drags on.

He looks at Adam, sees him chewing his bottom lip and gulping repeatedly through a throat that must be closing in with things—thoughts, beliefs—that will take time to change in Adam’s mind, that Blake will need to fight not to let them turn their love slippery and fragile enough for it to slip between his fingers.

“I’m sorry,” Adam whispers, voice raspy and small and ah, there it is; the guilt, the self-doubt, “I didn’t know I’d need—so much, I—I’ll make it up to you, Blake, I promise, I’ll be good to you.”
Blake sneaks an arm around Adam’s back, mindful of his injured arm, and presses his nose against his temple, staying there with his eyes shut and his heart doing a series of painful, extreme little twists that have him doubling over and vowing quietly he’ll do everything he can and more to convince Adam he doesn’t have to do anything to keep his affection and that spending money on his health is the least he can do and certainly not something that will piss him off and make him drift apart.

He kisses Adam’s cheek softly, reverently, and smiles even though it hurts, even though it’ll fix nothing and Adam can’t even see it, leaning into him like Blake is the only reason he hasn’t bolted just yet, fingers going white in their blind grip of the sheets.

“You’ve always been good to me, Adam,” even when he was running, he was being selfless and devoted in ways Blake thought could only be real in movies, in books, in songs maybe, “Always. If you want to promise me something, promise me you won’t forget I’m here for the long run.”

For an instant, he’s afraid Adam is about to argue, about to force more words that will do nothing to prove his feelings for him because words are wind but they’re everything Blake’s capable of for now—that, and doing his best to ensure Adam is healthy and safe which isn’t really helping Adam understand how important he is to him—and he doesn’t have time for anything else, literally.

A nurse comes to fetch Adam for his surgery.

The younger man is already half-way to dead to the world as he’s being wheeled across the hall, Blake following close, still unable to let go of his hand.

“You’re gonna be okay, darlin’,” he says, resolute, although whether it’s meant to soothe him or Adam he will never know, “I’ll be waiting right here for you. You’re gonna be fine.”

Adam whimpers when another nurse forces Blake to let go and stay behind. He doesn’t cry out for him but he doesn’t need to; Blake hears it, feels it in his heartstrings and the pull knocks the breath out of him.

Blake drops his ass on the closest chair to the O.R. and waits.

***

“You’re an angel,” Blake sighs, accepting the coffee Carson hands him a couple of hours later, his body feeling like he hasn’t moved a single inch in all that time, “Sorry for imposing so much.”

“You’re not imposing, you dumbass,” Carson shakes his head, takes a sip from his own latte and gives him a sympathetic look, “You told me you only trusted me with this and I’m flattered as hell and not about to leave you alone when you need me. So how did your real angel take the news of his operation? Was he scared?”

“Out of his mind,” Blake admits, rubs his brow with his fingers again, a nervous gesture that’s been on a loop ever since Adam left his sight.

*I am, too,* he doesn’t say, and he’s not talking about the surgery—not only—but Carson seems to get it anyway.

He produces a bag with two big bagels out of thin air and talks about his show and the songs he’s been playing the most lately—Blake’s own baby *Over* being a public’s favorite, apparently—and distracts him enough that when the double doors of the O.R. swing open again Blake startles and looks up to see a smiling doctor who informs him everything went smoothly and that they will move Adam back to his room in a few minutes.
“If he’s feeling well enough, we’ll discharge him in the evening,” he adds, “You’ll be able to take him home to rest soon, Mr. Shelton, the worst has passed.”

Blake can’t help it. He stands up and hugs the guy, overjoyed and so relieved he could scoop him up in his arms and swirl him around but he has some self-control even if doesn’t look like it most of the time.

***

Adam’s discharge from the clinic isn’t as simple as his traumatologist suggested.

When Adam’s eyes finally flutter open, shaky and fleeting and disoriented, it’s mid-afternoon and Blake is ushered out of the room for solid twenty minutes that he spends grousing—he wanted to greet Adam first, was that really too much to ask?—and halfheartedly nibbling through a late lunch.

Back from his impromptu break, he’s grabbed by a petite, blonde woman in a white coat and red high heels that are a perfect match to her nails and lipstick. She almost looks like the perfect picture of a naughty nurse and Blake is a little in awe of himself and his utter disinterest in her but then he listens to her talking and any potential arousal turns into downright horror.

She explains to him in an unassuming but firm tone how Adam’s fracture was at least two weeks old and how that’s a classic telltale in an abusive relationship of any kind, when the part who holds all the means neglects the other’s need for medical attention and gives reasons that makes no sense when questioned about the obvious delay and carelessness.

“We can’t discharge a patient who shows signs of abuse, Mr. Shelton,” she explains, “Our first interest is with our patient’s well-being. You might be paying for Mr. Levine to be treated here but that doesn’t excuse your behavior—“

“Now you just wait a minute,” Blake manages to cut in, his voice an indignant croak, “I’m not—I haven’t—I would never lay a finger on him! I love him!”

She blinks, looks thoroughly unimpressed. “You think I haven’t heard that one before?”

He wonders what Adam told her for her to be this ruthless but dismisses the thought quickly and blames any possible misunderstanding on Adam’s head being fuzzy with whatever cocktail of drugs they’re pumping into him.

He has nothing to hide. He hasn’t hurt Adam—not in a physical way, at least, and he will stand his ground no matter how terrifying this woman is.

“Look, Miss—“

“Aguilera.”

“Miss Aguilera,” Blake breathes through his nose and the misplaced guilt he’s feeling for not getting Adam help sooner. He knows he’s innocent of the things this woman is adamant on inflicting on him so he keeps going, “I wish I could explain how Adam got hurt that bad, I really do, but I can’t. This is all I can do for him right now, he called me last night and it was only then I noticed how truly bad it was and I brought him here as soon as I could.”

She pauses to take some notes, doesn’t offer any reassurance that she believes him whatsoever but Blake has mastered the waiting game today and so waiting he does, not exactly patiently, but he doesn’t fidget either.
“It fits,” she announces, leaving the pen on the table, her gaze turning warm and open, “With what Mr. Levine said. I just had to make sure, Mr. Shelton. I hope you don’t resent me.”

“Just a little bit,” he answers, teasing, but heaving a sigh of relief.

“I’m still worried about your partner,” she confides, “I had a really short interview with him but the things I picked up from him—you have to know this has probably been going on for years, carried out in different ways, and that he will try to please you even against his own wishes. It’s up to you to read between the lines, to know when he really wants something and when he’s just humoring you. It’s up to you to break the vicious cycle or to add to it. And I strongly suggest counseling, for both of you, but especially for him.”

“I don’t suppose he said yes to that one.”

“He didn’t. But hopefully he’ll change his mind.”

Blake promises to do his damnedest to talk Adam into going to therapy. He wants to get him all the help he can get and he feels quite naked and useless dealing with this on his own so he takes the psychologist’s card and thanks her when she assures him he can ask her questions at any time.

When he goes back to Adam’s room, he’s asleep again and he doesn’t have the heart to wake him up.

He takes his hand in both of his, careful not to disturb his rest, and leans his forehead on them.

One step at a time, he mentally chants, and contents himself knowing Adam will heal from now on.

***

Adam is discharged before the day ends. Blake helps him get dressed, smiling softly when he does most of the work and Adam focuses on not falling asleep again just yet, and a nurse comes with a wheel chair that he uses to get Adam to the parking lot.

Carson eyes the both of them with a grin, giving him a knowing look when Blake pauses to check Adam’s sling is in the right place like the doctor adjusted it not even five minutes ago.

Adam’s head lolls to his chest after he groggily climbs to his lap.

Blake holds him, the weight on his chest giving way to something warm and hopeful once he’s reminded Adam loves him too.

They’re going to be okay.

***

Adam barely wakes up enough to stagger out of the car on his own and thank Carson personally for what he’s done for them. Blake almost gets jealous when he clings to Carson’s neck for a moment but his friend seems so honestly surprised and delighted he doesn’t have it in him to be that petty.

They take the elevator and Adam makes a low, pleased sound in the back of his throat when Blake lifts him in his arms, carrying him the rest of the way to their—*their*, and there isn’t a word half as sweet, half as meaningful now for him—bed, tucking him in with the smallest of pecks on the lips.

Adam is asleep before his head hits the pillows but his left hand is still clutching one of Blake’s lapels in a strong, white-knuckled grip.
The small gesture does funny, warm and touching things to his heart.

He takes a quick shower and is back to bed before Adam can even stir. He wraps his body around him and can’t help smiling with how perfectly Adam’s back fits against his chest.

He checks the alarms for Adam’s antibiotics and painkillers are on in his phone and with a sigh against Adam’s shoulder, he’s out like a light.

***

He wakes up to the smell of coffee and eggs. It’d be a nice déjà vu, if it weren’t for the fact Adam is supposed to be resting.

He strolls to the kitchen, for once forgetting about putting on a shirt and just wandering in the loose sweatpants he uses for bed.

Adam is freshly showered and humming something as he taps a bare foot on the tiles. That effectively extinguishes any thought of chastising him about being up already.

His sleep-adding brain realizes with approximately two minutes of delay that the song Adam is humming and slightly swinging to is Honey Bee.

“You like Country?” he asks, elated, his hands more than a little proprietary as they weave around Adam’s waist from behind.

Adam laughs, light and content and Blake feels drunk with sheer joy.

He looks so beautiful like this, with that new candid, relaxed edge to his smile, the only garment on his slim body one of Blake’s flannel shirts.

He feels a surge of possessiveness in him, his hands tightening around his lover, but Adam seems far from frightened of the strength of his touch. He leans back, into him, and keeps stirring the contents of the pan, one-handed and careful, the sling in his shoulder cradling his forearm in its cast to his chest the way it should.

“Not really, but that song is stuck in my head like a disease, man,” he teases, tilting his head just so to brush his lips over the stubble on Blake’s jaw, demolishing any bite his sarcasm could’ve had, “And your voice is nice, I have to give you that. Makes up for the cowboy vibe that’s not for everyone.”

Blake chuckles, hands caressing the clad planes of Adam’s flat abdomen as his mouth seals over the side of his neck. He doesn’t let it escalate for several reasons, even as Adam presses the sweet, firm curve of his ass right against his groin.

He will try to please you, the psychologist had said and something cold and horrified recoils in Blake’s gut just at the thought of inadvertently forcing Adam to do something he doesn’t want.

Considering his previous line of work and Blake’s own tendency to use sex as both release and punishment of sorts in the last few months he doesn’t think having sex will do neither of them good.

He also doesn’t think he’ll be able to resist for very long, but he vows to try.

He sings the song for Adam, purposefully letting his pitch go flat and awful in the most important places, and the romantic mood is utterly ruined as Adam squeaks in clear exasperation and menacingly jabs the hot spatula in his direction.
Blake cracks up so hard he has to sit down to breathe for a whole minute before helping Adam with the cups and plates.

“You sound like Santa,” Adam comments, reproving, “Like a 6 feet 9 version of Santa. It’s creepy as Hell.”

Blake stuffs his mouth and grins, unrepentant and open-mouthed, pointedly not thinking about what his mother would say of his manners.

“What’s wrong with Christmas?” he asks around a mouthful.

Adam scrunches his nose in mock-disgust but there’s a smile pulling at the corners of his lips.

He shakes his head, looking up at Blake through his lashes, pretty as ever.

Blake thinks he could get used to mornings like this.

***

He has to travel two towns over for a charity concert. It’s not something he can talk his way out of but after only three days of having Adam around and being finally together it leaves a sour taste in his mouth.

He promises Adam to be home as soon as he can, asks him to tune in the show, tells him he’ll sing his last hit for him because it’s been meant for him all along.

Adam jerks from the cushions of the couch so fast Blake winces, hands reaching to grip his shoulders before he can fall over.

“You wrote a song for me?” Adam asks, incredulous but quiet, as if the mere idea were too dangerous to consider.

Blake kisses whatever doubts he can off his lips, his forehead lingering against Adam’s.

He wants to announce his next album will be solely and entirely for Adam but he doesn’t even know if his label is going to sign him again after he’s honest with them about the parts of the contract that would need discussing and editing if they are.

So he just says, “I did,” simply, feelingly, and pulls Adam gently to the studio.

He knows Adam can hardly do a thing in there with just his left hand available but he takes the scores he’s been working on in his hands after Adam takes a seat in front of the piano bench and his fingers ghost over the keys in silent, reverential appreciation and hands them to him, feeling a little less awful about leaving him alone when Adam smiles brightly and kisses him goodbye keenly, wishing him a safe trip.

***

“There’s nothing like having someone waiting for you back home, isn’t it?” Usher muses, his smile weary but serene as they watch the staff setting everything for the show.

They’ve met just a few hours ago but the camaraderie between them is easy and filled with laughter and light jokes. Blake feels a pang of nostalgia at remembering this is something he has already, with Luke and Brad, and that he will most likely lose once they find out he’s gay now, even if he’s only gay for Adam and his love has been soothing and exactly what he needed to finally move on and be
himself again.

He crashes that line of thought. It’s ridiculous to miss people he hasn’t even lost yet.

He thinks about Adam and his new, easy smiles instead.

He smiles.

“You took the words right out of my mouth, buddy.”

***

Fifty hours—yes, he’s counting. He’s Country and he’s sappy and he doesn’t give a crap about it—later, he’s back at his apartment.

He calls for Adam but is greeted only by silence.

His stomach drops instantly.

Adam promised—he promised—no more running, no more running, he’d said, and there’s no reason for him to go out, he’s supposed to be resting, not outside straining his arm and his body doing only God knows what!

He checks all the bedrooms just in case but Adam isn’t sleeping in them, he’s not in the studio, he’s not anywhere and Blake takes a deep breath that feels made out of spikes rather than air when it pierces into him, making his heart ache and bleed.

He left, Blake thinks, hollow and forlorn, he left me.

He’s stumbling to support his back against the wall because everywhere—the bed, the couch, the kitchen, everywhere—is unsafe, reminds him too sharply of Adam and the glimpse of a life together they could’ve had if—if—

The shift of the lock in the front door pulls him out of his desolation.

Adam isn’t even done closing the door when Blake embraces him, tight and frantic and so relieved it’s a wonder his legs are still working.

“Gosh, Adam,” he murmurs against his disheveled hair, “We’re getting you a phone. Where were you? Out for groceries?”

“Sorry,” Adam winces slightly, his eyes darting between the floor and Blake’s face in a manner that sends his brain into overdrive and he realizes how utterly stupid his question was.

Adam doesn’t look right, from his split bottom lip to the way he’s holding his right arm to his chest without the aid of the sling. He even smells wrong and the salty, heady smell ought to make Blake see red and gag but it doesn’t, he’s too stunned for it.

He releases Adam slowly, his arms hanging heavily on his sides, and takes three steps back.

You cheated on me, it’s the first sentence his mind produces, but Blake discards it. They were never exclusive, they couldn’t be, and he’s not going to let his jealous side get the better of him at the worst possible moment.

He huffs, tries again.
“I know we haven’t talked about it,” he grits out, “But I don’t want you to—you don’t have to keep working in the streets, Adam, I thought you understood that. It’s not right, it just isn’t, and I don’t want you sleeping around to get anything ever again.”

Adam turns to close the door, his shoulders slumped and his knees trembling barely enough to be noticeable. He’s wearing his old jeans again, the ones that have more holes that worn-out fabric in them and hang low on his hips, and a tight net tank top that covers nothing from view.

“I had to pay my pimp off,” Adam says, his tone steadier than his knees but still wavering here and there, “Make sure he wouldn’t be looking for me and found you. I had some money from—you know—and it looked like it was going to be enough, but then he grabbed me and I—I couldn’t say no.”

“I could’ve gone with you,” Blake mumbles, stubborn and angry even though he knows he would’ve only made it worse.

Adam knows it too and he’s not in denial about it. “No, you couldn’t.”

He walks further into the room, going in the direction of the hallway, pausing to give Blake one last look that is so apologetic it hurts, that makes his anger crumble down to ashes and dust and leaves only the sharp stab of helplessness in its wake.

“It was the last time,” Adam swears in a small voice, “And he used a condom, he always does when he’s with any of us. It’ll be fine.”

*Us*, Adam says, like he’s still a whore, like he will always be a whore, no matter where he is and what Blake does to convince him he’s so much more than that.

They talked about wearing condoms until Adam’s test results were absolutely clean, neither of them wanting to celebrate their clean blood tests until there was no room for tragedy in them. They talked about menial things but never mentioned Adam’s work and what needed to be done for him to be truly out and Blake knows now Adam made sure they didn’t on purpose, that he knew it’d come to this.

He hears the door of the bathroom clicking close, replays his own heated, judgmental words in his head and the lack of reaction Adam had to them, like it was just was he was expecting, and holds his head in his hands.

How he can turn an already awful, delicate situation into something worse is beyond him.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Thanks for bearing with me, guys. I seem to have misplaced the meager confidence I had in my writing. I'll write faster if I manage to find it again, I promise.

Adam barely pauses enough in his frenzy to remove his clothing to remember he’s supposed to cover the cast on his arm with plastic because if it gets wet, it’s ruined, and he’s ruined enough things today as it is.

Everything during the shower he takes is perfunctory, including his crying.

It’s not fatigue what makes his left hand tremble as he washes away the filth on his body and tries to scrub away things that simply won’t fade no matter how much he scrubs, how much red the skin turns.

It’s fear.

If Blake kicks him out now—and Adam couldn’t blame him if he does because it’s the sensible thing to do, the right thing anyone in his place would do—he has literally nowhere to go.

His pimp was quite clear on that front while he was gentle in a way he never was before, in a way that made Adam want to gag, that felt like his skin was trying to turn itself inside out so the man who tore him apart couldn’t tarnish Blake’s caresses and kisses that his former boss was trying to mimic.

Please, he’d begged, fucking begged despite he knew better. He only wanted to be whole—as whole as he could be—to go back to Blake’s side and be everything he could be for him even if that was only a warm body next to him every night, Please, not like this.

His pimp had laughed louder than ever and Adam almost wept in relief, realizing he’d given him what he wanted.

The man bit his lip viciously a second later and was anything but gentle until he was satisfied. Then Adam got dressed and hurried back to the apartment that he’s been calling home after only a few days of living there.

He’s not surprised, not really, when he suddenly finds himself between Blake’s arms. Life has always been a bitch to him, why would it be any different this time?

He thought he was going to be able to hide this thing, this one little thing, from him so it wouldn’t come to this but his hope was vain, it blew to a thousand pieces the minute Blake let him go with something dangerously close to disgust in his face as he looked at Adam.

It’s only when he finishes putting the comfiest clothes he’s found in a wardrobe that’s his but that he still discovers little by little each day—always smiling softly at Blake’s thoughtfulness and that kindness he doesn’t think he’s done anything to earn—that it dawns on him.

He’s never been in a relationship, has never had anyone to be faithful to but he just did the very same thing Miranda did to Blake if all the rumors Adam heard about it had anything resembling truth in
them.

Good reasons or not, Adam did it.

He cheated on him.

***

He staggers back to the living room and finds Blake in the same spot he was before.

He walks to him, not sure if he can touch but wanting and daring to. He takes Blake’s hands away from his face, waiting with bated breath because he knows he couldn’t stand it if he’s made the one person who’s ever found something to love in him cry, and kisses every knuckle with grateful relief when he sees Blake’s face is pinched but dry, when he sees he’s fucked up but maybe not so bad, that maybe Blake doesn’t hate him yet.

He falls to his knees and looks up, still kissing Blake’s fingers, lips caressing the pads as Blake traces the outlines of his face like Adam is made of the finest porcelain on Earth instead of damaged goods. His blue eyes shine with pain and something else, something like regret, and Adam tells himself he has to hurry if he wants to keep this and to Hell with everything else.

Whether he deserves Blake or not, he’s selfish now in ways he hardly ever is, and he wants the chance to stay by his side and learn how to love him right, without screwing up, without hurting him.

Blake has fought so hard for this, for them. It’s not self-preservation what makes Adam want to fight just as hard; it’s the thought of ever being away from him again, it’s the thought of Blake ever needing him even half of what Adam needs him and Adam not being there for him.

If that isn’t love, Adam isn’t sure what else could be.

He kind of wishes that a blowjob could fix this but he knows it wouldn’t help at all, never mind he’s a master at giving head.

“I didn’t want to,” he admits, young and repentant and more than a little frantic, “I did it for you, I swear, I know it sounds awful and wrong but I—“

Blake doesn’t hush him with a sound or a look. His whole body does, collapsing in front of him.

Even on his knees, he’s tall and striking and Adam stifles a flinch when Blake’s palm opens beside his cheek. He expects some sort of retaliation for what he did, almost wants the slap to happen because it’d mean they’re even and they can start over without guilt clotting Adam’s chest, but it’s not a blow what Blake delivers with his hand, it’s a gentle grip on his neck; warm and familiar and so craved it makes Adam’s breath hitch.

“I missed you,” he whispers like it’s a secret he’s not allowed to say.

“I missed you too, darlin’,” Blake says in a low voice, every crack in it Adam’s fault and no one else’s, “Can you—can you try to trust me more? I wanna help you and I want us to work but if you don’t trust me, Adam, then we’ll go nowhere except down. And I’m not letting you go, even if that’s where we’re gonna end.”

Adam nods, dumbfounded but enthralled by the understanding and patience in Blake’s words, in his eyes and the tip of his fingers, in every inch of him, and Blake smiles like he’s just been given a gift instead of a bag of issues and a shortcut to trouble.
“Okay,” he agrees, quiet, between the second chaste kiss and the next and feels a smile of his own wanting to come out to keep Blake’s company despite of everything he’s done, Blake nuzzling his brow and looking down at him like he’s worth it.

Blake doesn’t say he’s forgiven him but he doesn’t need to. Adam feels it, sees it in every gesture and touch that’s as loving and gentle as ever and he’s absurdly, immeasurably glad Blake’s heart is more resilient than it seems.

He makes a silent promise to take better care of it and spends half the night cupping it in his hands, watching Blake sleep deeply, arms reaching out and holding him tight whenever Adam isn’t close enough.

He snuggles into his side and sleeps.

***

Adam slides out of bed early, ignoring the collection of aches in his body and the way Blake grumbles in protest without waking up, and prepares breakfast.

There’s a rerun of the benefit concert Blake contributed in and Adam curls on the couch with a hot cup of coffee, keeps the volume low to let his lover sleep but risks waking him up anyway because he wants to hear him perform again.

The first thing Blake does when he emerges from the bedroom is scowling at him when he notices Adam isn’t wearing the sling for his arm. The second thing is going for both his meds and said sling. The third thing is chiding him because Adam forgot to take half of the pills while Blake was gone.

Once he’s done fussing over him, he blinks at the flat screen and turns to stare at Adam with such a perplexed expression he can’t help but laugh a little.

He gives him a peck on the chin and shoves the half-finished coffee under his nose, hoping the caffeine will help Blake to keep his mouth closed and his brain to work.

“You were amazing,” he compliments, focusing back on the show. He shrugs like what he wants to ask it’s no big deal even though it kind of is to him, “Would you take me to one of your shows sometime? I know I said I don’t like Country but you make it sound so good. I’d love to be there, just once.”

Blake puts the mug on the coffee table, holds Adam close with both arms and kisses his temple, lips lingering there and breath caressing the side of his cheek softly.

“If I get my way, I want you to come touring with me,” Blake says, uncertainty turning his words to nothing but a whisper but it’s enough to make Adam smile softly, for him to kiss the underside of his jaw in quiet thanks even if Blake can’t make good on what he’s said. He knows it’s not up to him, not really, “I have to talk with the people at my label first.”

Adam knows the chances of them saying yes to him tagging along are slim but his heart starts hoarding hope before he can stop it. He splays his hand on Blake’s warm, slightly furry chest and feels the calm beating underneath, one of his legs sneaking between Blake’s own.

He wants more mornings like this, more days like this. He just wants more.

“You don’t have to.”

“I want to.”
He doesn’t ask what exactly he’d be doing. Even if the answer is keeping Blake sated and relaxed in between venues, that’s more than anything Adam could’ve ever imagined he’d be good for.

***

Blake is so happy when he gets back from the meeting with Warner Bros. Records that he sweeps Adam off his feet and spins him around like he weights nothing compared to his joy.

“They’re keeping me!” he exclaims and Adam kisses the big grin on his face without remorse for the first time ever, “And one of my producers wants to meet you!”

“That’s awesome!” Adam frowns when the second part of that registers in his head, “Wait, what?”

“We need a guitarist for the tour,” Blake it’s the one who kisses him enthusiastically this time but Adam can only stare and keep still. Blake puts him down and scowls a little at the decidedly not happy face he’s making, “And I told him you can play and that you’re really good so he wants to talk to you.”

“But,” Adam looks down, letting go of Blake’s neck to gesture grumpily at his cast, “I can’t even play anything right now. And why do you even need another guitarist? You’re not trying to get me a job with your connections, are you?”

“One of the guys had a baby and doesn’t want to travel anymore,” Blake explains. He sighs, touching Adam’s arm carefully before speaking, drawl thick and tone patient, “Now, don’t be silly, Adam. You’re a waste of talent, that’s what you are, and you can be damn sure I’m going to do everything I can for people to hear you. ‘Sides, you’d be sparing us from interviewing a bunch of musicians we’re not even sure are reliable and it’s going to be months from now. You’ll be all healed up by then.”

“Sounds like you’ve been thinking about it a lot,” Adam bites his lip, his cheeks burning for taking things the wrong way when Blake is doing so much to help him.

“I have,” Blake admits sheepishly, “I would’ve told you but I didn’t want to get your hopes high when I didn’t know if they were going to sign me again or not.”

“What if your producer doesn’t like me?” Adam asks because there’s a fair chance he will cause a bad impression, it’s everything he seems to know how to do unless he’s trying to bed someone, “What if he can tell that I’m—“

Blake pulls him into his arms again, one of his big palms carding through the short hairs of his nape. Adam feels more than hears the deep sigh he heaves and swallows but doesn’t relent.

“Blake, that you can look at me without thinking about that doesn’t mean everyone else is going to do the same.”

“It’s not tattooed on your face, y’know,” Blake says very softly, kissing his forehead as if to highlight the fact the skin is unblemished there, “And we all have something in our past that we aren’t proud of. You think there’s nothing after that but I want to prove you wrong. Give me one little chance, sweetheart, can you do that for me?”

Adam breaks apart just enough to look up at him. Suddenly, a lot of things that have been making him antsy for the past few days make sense to him and it’s still hard to believe—that Blake doesn’t only want him because of the amazing sex they have.

He wants to say yes so much but somehow it doesn’t feel right. He’s never wanted to take advantage
of Blake in any way and it still feels that way even though he hasn’t even asked for this.

“How do you even know I’m good? I’ve played for you two times. Two! And you’re trying to get me a job? Do you even listen to yourself?”

The country star shrugs, his hands trailing to Adam’s waist confidently.

“I know the real deal when I hear it. One time is all I need. And you’re good, Adam, don’t matter if you’ve forgotten it or if you never knew; you are.”

It’s stupid to be blushing over one little compliment after years of exposing the most private parts of his body for a living without as much as a fuss but he is.

Blake’s faith in his talent is a bit contagious.

Just a bit.

Adam accepts his defeat with a small smile. “I can’t really convince you you’re wrong, can I?”

“Nope,” Blake beams, “’Cause I’m not.”

***

“CeeLo Green?” if it were possible to shriek in a low voice, Adam would definitely be doing it right now, “Your producer is CeeLo Green? But you’re Country! And he’s—” he trips over his own thoughts, gestures with his hands in utter frustration and Blake only chuckles and keeps putting food on three plates as if CeeLo Fucking Green himself weren’t in the living room, “He’s not, what the hell?”

“He likes doing a bit of everything,” Blake says, as if it’s obvious, “And he’s the only one of my record producers who wanted to keep working with me after I told them I’m in love with a man, so.”

Adam flops on a stool and stares, blood rushing in his ears so fast it hisses loudly and drowns whatever it is Blake says next.

He doesn’t know why he’s so stunned but his mouth is dry and he wants to laugh and cry at the same fucking time and it’s—it’s maddening but wonderful and something no one will be able to take away from him, this little moment in which Blake so easily told him he loves him.

“He was?” he asks, breathless.

“Yes,” Blake nods, handing him a bottle of white wine that probably costs more than the rent of Adam’s old apartment for a whole year, “The rest were like ‘oh, sorry we’re not sorry that we can’t employ you anymore’ and I wanted to punch them all in the face,” he pauses, looking at Adam gripping the bottle with what is probably a weird expression because he’s so overwhelmed he feels likes he’s about to burst, “That too heavy? You okay?”

Adam glares at him, adamant in not making a big deal out of this since Blake said it like it was nothing. “Blake, my arm is broken. I’m not an invalid, okay? Yes, I can fucking carry one tiny bottle to the table.”

Blake furrows his brow at him anyway because that’s what he’s been doing whenever Adam so much as lifts a finger to do anything. “But it’s not tiny, it’s—”

It’s either smacking him or kissing him at this point—after over a week of Blake babying him and
Adam doing his best to let him despite being quite able to do things on his own, thank you very much—and Adam chooses the latter, shaking his head in patent but fond irritation to cut him off.

He ducks his head, trying to hide a smile. Blake licks the phantom of the kiss off his lips and grins.

“You’re a horrible host, just so you know. It’s rude,” Adam remarks, purposefully obnoxious, “Making guests wait.”

Blake just guffaws and saunters back to the living room behind him.

***

“I think it’s commendable,” CeeLo comments as soon as Blake leaves them to get dessert and refuses Adam’s help so he’s stuck with the celebrity currently having dinner with them, feeling like a fish out of water but doing his damnedest not to show it, “And courageous, inspirational of Blake not to back down of the genre because he’s not an obvious fit to it anymore. I truly believe it’s the right time for a change and I’m confident things will go well for him now that he’s found himself again. Some artists nurture heartache and despair and darkness for their creativity but I think it’s outstanding to be able to do that with happiness, you feel me?”

Adam gawks but nods furiously. “Of course,” he mumbles, because he gets the general idea and what CeeLo is saying sounds awesome, really, and anyone who cares this much about Blake and his career is a friend.

The eccentric man chatters on. “I couldn’t possibly admire Blake more. It takes a real man, a truly remarkably authentic human being, to handle things the way he is. It shouldn’t matter that you’re a man if you rouse in him these strong emotions that he shares through his music. I’ve listened to some of his new work and it’s going to be groundbreaking. You should be real proud of being his muse, Adam.”

“Right.”

Adam doesn’t even try to fight the blush that colors his cheeks and most of his face. It’s pointless when he’s remembering the sheets he’s read with songs Blake wrote just for him and that he spent hours gazing at as if he blinked they could vanish from his grasp.

CeeLo pats him on the shoulder, doing a spectacular job to pierce him with his gaze from behind his sunglasses.

He doesn’t squirm but apparently he doesn’t need to for the man to realize something all the same.

“You have no idea, do you?” he asks, disbelieving, “No idea how much you’ve done for him.”

Adam snorts, self-deprecating. “You mean besides jeopardizing everything he’s worked for in his life?”

“Damn,” CeeLo sighs, “Listen, Adam. He’d hit rock bottom and only meeting you pulled him out. We were all worried about where his career was going and his life was a mess after his divorce, I’m sure you know that. Things won’t come easy to him now, sure, but they never do when you’re in the road to real success, to doing something meaningful that will matter long after it’s done.”

Blake returns with ice cream and cake and they dig in, picking lighter subjects to comment on but Adam hardly engages in any of it, still reeling with every little and big clue of him having such a positive effect in Blake’s life when it should be the exact opposite, when he’s nothing but trouble and doesn’t know what to do with something so good right here for him to cherish and enjoy.
He smiles at the country singer in reassurance whenever he frowns and spoons the food lazily, not really used to such meals yet even though Blake’s spent the last five days buying ice cream of every flavor known to man after hearing Adam hadn’t had any in over ten years.

“So Adam, Blake tells me you’re a musician,” CeeLo addresses him later.

Adam fidgets but replies quickly. “Yeah, huh—I play the guitar, mostly. I used to play drums and piano and pretty much any instrument as long as I had it long enough to learn how to.”

“Self-taught?”

“Yeah.”

“And what would you like to do?”

He glances at Blake and relaxes slightly when his lover nods, encouraging. “Blake told me I could play the guitar for him, maybe.”

“Yes, but what would you like to do?”

“I,” he’s so not used to people asking him this sort of stuff, “I’d love to play the guitar on his tour, I really would.”

“He told me you’re a composer and that you sing too, is that right?” Adam nods, biting his lip not to yell at Blake because wow, how much exactly did they discuss him? “You don’t want me to hear you and see if I can get a deal for you? Even if you’re only half as good as he claims you to be and the rest is the love talking, you could have a promising career.”

Adam doesn’t even think about it, shaking his head and stating firmly, “No. No way I’m milking our relationship to get a record deal.”

“Why not?” CeeLo waves like it’s no big deal, “Everyone else does it. And this is a real offer, right here. I’m honestly interested in you.”

“Thanks, but—“ Adam looks at Blake for some help so he doesn’t have to explain it but both men are looking at him like he’s got three heads instead of one and he huffs, self-conscious, “I guess it’s dumb and crazy of me not to use Blake’s contacts to get a career of my own but I don’t want it to be that way. I don’t want to use him—no, shut up,” he says, holding a hand so Blake doesn’t interrupt him, “I’d still be using you even if you agree, damn it. Plus, I’ve done some stuff—bad stuff,” he adds as an afterthought, vague, mostly for CeeLo to drop the topic, “I couldn’t have a career even if I wanted to.”

“You are too rightful but I like that,” CeeLo smirks like it’s a fucking challenge and Adam wants to scream, “You’d be surprised of how many stars with dark pasts are around, brother, and I know a fellow who’s gone through pain in his life when I see him. I’m the same.”

_I seriously doubt it_, Adam thinks, almost viciously, but refrains from arguing and contents himself with burrowing closer into Blake’s side and tuning out the rest of the conversation.

It’s mostly business anyway and he’s going with Blake so he’s sure he’ll find out of what he has to find out later.

***

It’s a good thing CeeLo left early because they have a lot of things to say to each other and none of it
can be put into words or songs, no matter how much they try to achieve that (or how they’re going to keep trying anyway, because music is another language they have in common).

Blake has been incredibly elusive about any form of physical contact that doesn’t immediately involve cuddling ever since Adam was released from the hospital.

At first, he thought Blake was doing it for his health and he appreciated it a little bit because he was really, really tired and he vowed to himself he was going to rock his charming, dumb hick of a lover’s world as soon as he stopped feeling like he was going to topple over the minute he did anything remotely taxing.

After his—justifiable, sure, but still hurtful—slip, he thought Blake was a bit revolted by the idea of having sex with him so Adam didn’t even try to seduce him anymore. He felt too filthy which in his line of work had always been a good thing but was incredibly, annoyingly crippling in a relationship with someone.

Sex is the one thing he knows his way around and the fact Blake clearly doesn’t want that from him keeps him on edge constantly. He does his best to hide it from him though because the last thing he needs is making Blake feel like he’s fucking up. That Adam can do alone and it’s probably his fault anyway, the twisted way his mind turns what feels like an understanding break, a smooth transition of sorts, to flat-out rejection and inadequacy.

He’s been returning mild, gentle kisses and giving them whenever he can get away with it without feeling Blake will push him away, claiming some sort of excuse that always stings no matter how good of a distraction ends up being, like that time he dragged Adam to his studio and played All over me for him along with a couple of other songs that had Adam finally getting what ‘swooning’ really means; someone lovingly but ruthlessly plucking his heart out of him to warm it up so much that it feels like the world begins and ends there, in that attentive and unescapable touch.

Now, though—now Blake is kissing him like he’s been deprived from doing it for forever and can’t possibly take it any longer and Adam can only grin as he gives as good as he’s getting, tongue feisty and lips playful as he fuels the familiar need surging from Blake’s body.

It doesn’t feel like lust, not only, and Adam gets lightheaded with how inexperienced he suddenly feels when Blake puts him down on the bed and fumbles with the buttons of Adam’s shirt, most of his attention devoted to peppering his neck and collarbones with wet kisses.

It feels like a first time enough to make Adam’s breath stutter and his hands go impossibly clumsy when he realizes that yeah, this is how having sex—how making love—is supposed to feel; not like a chore but like a way of being close to someone you can’t bear to be away from so you want to crawl under their skin, inside their lungs and into their heart and leave as much of a lasting impression as you can there, in case you don’t get to stay.

And oh, how Adam wishes he gets to stay in Blake’s heart.

He’s so tight when Blake settles between his thighs and preps him that it brings shocked tears to his eyes and he feels like he should be laughing because he’s anything, anything but a virgin and it shouldn’t be fucking possible for anyone to be so tender but Blake is.

It’s disarming.

“Blake—‘he’s too nervous to come which is a good thing, being so embarrassingly close with only two fingers up his ass, ‘Shit, hurry up, you dipshit, are you trying to kill me or fuck me?’”
Blake chuckles, kisses the inner side of his thighs, stubble leaving a pleasant burn in his wake, and seals his lips over his left hipbone for a moment before sucking little marks on the skin of his belly and somehow managing to get him hard again with just that.

“I’m trying to make love to you, thought that was obvious,” he drawls, lapping just this shy of his groin but making Adam twitch with it all the same.

He seems overly fond of the patch of skin just beside it and Adam has an epiphany.

He knows what his next tattoo is going to be and where exactly he wants it.

He feels more than a bit smug already, aware that Blake is going to love it.

“Hey,” Blake draws his attention with a teasing bite underneath his belly button, “Eyes on me, honey.”

Adam makes a husky sound in vague agreement and goes cross-eyed trying to comply but he does try, letting out a loud, frustrated whimper as Blake removes his fingers and takes a few seconds to rip a condom open and roll it on.

Everything goes fuzzy once Blake breaches him and finally starts pounding into him, the scratch his short nails are leaving on the taller man’s shoulder blades and the fact he’s moaning worse than a five dollar whore not really registering as he hooks a leg on Blake’s elbow and pushes back forcefully, urgently, spine arching and neck bare for Blake to bite into, doing enough of a good job at it that Blake groans loudly, hips going wilder, and there’s no way they’re going to last much like this—even after being celibate for longer than Adam ever remembers being—and he really hopes Blake is close because the second Blake’s sweaty hand jerks him he’s coming so hard he sobs with it.

He feels the telltale pulse of Blake’s cock emptying inside of him and sags in relief, utterly spent and slack with pleasure but sneaking his good arm around Blake’s neck anyway so he can tug him down for a messy kiss.

Blake doesn’t ask but Adam says it because he’s not ready for a love confession but he wants to think this is enough for now and he needs Blake to know it as much as Blake needs hearing it.

“Yours,” he pants against Blake’s parted lips and the shiver he feels going through the big body practically glued to his isn’t as fulfilling as the glimmer on Blake’s blue eyes.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It takes a little under two weeks for his friends to notice he’s doing everything to avoid them and—most importantly—to avoid them coming to his place.

Once they do, there’s nothing Blake can do to prevent the fallout that follows.

They are quiet in their scolding at first. Brad stares and leaves without a word. Luke glowers but holds his tongue and backs out like he’s afraid being gay may be catching. Kelly, polite and sweet as ever, is the only one who stays and at least tries to get to know Adam before downright disapproving of him because of something as unchangeable as his gender, but her eyes give her away and there’s something judgmental in them that makes Blake escort her to his door before long.

Once it’s done and they’re all gone—in more ways than one—he sags against the door and Adam is quick to come to his rescue, tugging him one-handed until they reach the couch and he can cradle Blake’s head against his chest, his fingers carding through brown curls that are in sore need of a trim.

His heartbeat is steady and soothing in Blake’s ear. He closes his eyes and forbids himself from mourning friends that were never worth it if this is the reason they’re walking away from him.

Adam sings for him, silly songs he’s heard on the radio, tries to get a laugh out of him for a bit but then simply holds him close and kisses his forehead every now and then, lips warm and tender, lean legs pressing on his sides with just the right strength to stop Blake from drifting, curling around him like his very presence is all the shield Blake needs from the pain and it may be, in a moment.

Blake doesn’t want Adam to feel any guiltier than he already feels but it’s a while before he can move, a while before he can stop clutching his hands in fists.

He can’t be so greedy, he tells himself.

He has Adam and he has his music. That’s more than enough.

***

Once Adam’s cast is removed, he takes music in like a sponge absorbs water. He seems to simply breathe it in and exhale it out refined and perfect and if he takes longer than a day to learn Blake’s songs is because he can’t stop kissing him at every chance he gets and even cajoles him to the bedroom at noon for a well-deserved break that Blake spends making love to him to the point of worship; lips and fingertips outlining almost every line of ink on Adam’s skin.

Adam arches and moans and leaves crescent marks on his back, utterly unapologetic and louder than ever, clearly thrilled to finally be able to use both arms and play again, to touch him like he’s been unable to for the past couple of months.

He tips his head back and Blake latches onto the soft skin under his jaw, nipping as Adam’s heel drives him in deeper, a low grumbling chuckle vibrating through his chest when he realizes it was Adam who lured him into bed and not the other way around.

Blake is loath to let him out of bed though, especially when he sees Adam is smirking like he’s keeping a secret Blake isn’t smart enough to figure out.
“You’re up to something,” he says to the back of Adam’s neck while he’s making dinner, “Do I even wanna know? Should I be scared?”

Adam laughs, distracts him with skilled lips and a clever tongue until he has to be back to the stove.

“Don’t you worry about a little thing, darling,” he states then in a mock-Southern accent that has Blake in stitches, “You’re gonna love it.”

***

CeeLo somehow magics his way into getting an interview for him in People’s Magazine.

His agent isn’t very happy about it and neither is his mother, who just barely managed not to tell Blake how disappointed she is in him, but he has a good feeling about it so he takes it.

Blake invites them to his house outside the city, doesn’t want a space that feels as intimately theirs as the apartment does to be polluted by press and vapid approval of a radical lifestyle.

Adam hovers in the kitchen while he answers questions about their relationship and he’s so pleasantly surprised to be asked regular ones, to not be patronized with things like When did you find out you were gay? or Who’s the girl in the relationship? that by the end of it when they ask to photograph him with Adam he says yes without thinking.

It takes a bit of convincing—Adam is so incredibly selfless, still refuses to make the most of his fame and share the spotlight with him for all the good it could do to him—but soon enough he has his boyfriend sitting beside him on the big creamy couch of an extravagant living room he didn’t decorate, smiling coyly at him while their knees brush.

They look at each other, fingers entwined on top of Adam’s left knee, but even between the flashes and the gushing of the photographer—who showers Adam with so many compliments about his appearance that Blake is itching with jealousy by the end of it—and the women of the staff Blake can see Adam’s pretty hazel eyes don’t see anyone or anything but him and that… well. That makes it worth it.

***

Adam is extremely respectful of his music and Blake approves of every little suggestion he ventures to make out loud, aware the artist in him needs more freedom but that this is all the outlet Adam is letting himself have for the moment so they’ll have to make do with it.

There’s more of Adam in his new album now—a bit of pop and a bit of rock—and it makes Blake giddy with happiness. He starts recording it every morning with a big grin on his face that lasts until late at night, that doesn’t really go away no matter how many rude and borderline stalker paparazzi he finds on his way to the studio and back.

Adam gets out of the apartment more now that he’s all healed up. Blake doesn’t ask where he’s going or what he’s doing while he’s busy with his upcoming album and prepping for the tour. He’s been talking with the counselor at the clinic whenever he can, afraid things are going so well he’s going to screw up without realizing what he’s doing before it’s too late.

“He needs to be his own man,” Miss Aguilera tells him firmly, “You can’t afford to be controlling with him. You have to let him do as he likes even if you don’t like it, especially if you don’t like it. He needs to know you won’t flip out because he doesn’t accommodate to you every time, do you understand?”
“Yeah, I do,” Blake sighs, pressing fingers to his tired eyes, “I don’t want to control him, I just worry.”

“The best thing you can do is trust him instead, Mister Shelton.”

Most of the time Adam tells him anyway, tells him he’s spent the day with his buddies writing songs for a band with no name yet that Adam has agreed to sing in temporarily while they keep searching for a vocalist.

Jesse calls him one day, pleads to him to persuade Adam to stay in the band permanently because they need his voice as much as they need his songs but there’s really nothing Blake can do except silently wait for Adam to want that on his own, at some point or another, and maybe going on tour with him will make him want that for himself. Only time will tell.

Blake makes sure to let him know he doesn’t need his permission. He also makes sure to be with him every spare minute that he has—he misses him something fierce whenever his day drags until late at night and the younger man is sound asleep by the time he gets home even though the ache dulls now that he can curl around him and hold him close enough to stop feeling where his body ends and Adam’s begins—and takes him out even if it’s just for a rushed coffee break and there’s at least ten cameras pointed at each of them every time.

“Is it always like this?” Adam asks when they go to pick up some groceries on a Sunday and he ends up flipping off the reporters who just don’t take no for an answer and insist on shoving mics right on their faces.

“No,” Blake says even though he honestly doesn’t know. He’s never been this popular with the vultures, to be honest, “They’ll find something new soon, honey. Just ignore them.”

“Yeah, kind of hard to,” Adam grouses, squinting at the flashes all around them as Blake tries to get them out of the parking lot, “How can you even drive straight? I can’t see shit.”

He pauses to put the spare pair of sunglasses he keeps in the glove compartment on Adam’s nose and smiles gleefully at him when he huffs but keeps them on.

***

Adam is kind of antsy for a couple of days. Blake assumes it’s the tour nearing and doesn’t push, choosing to take him to a music store so Adam can pick a couple of guitars for himself and forget whatever it is that’s making him nervous.

“I don’t need new guitars,” Adam mumbles, brow furrowing and mouth quirking down in a way that can only be described as adorable, “You have too many, enough for the two of us.”

“That may be,” Blake drawls good-naturedly, “But humor me here, will you?”

His last single has been doing amazing on sells and he reminds Adam of that as he nudges him to a display of electric guitars that has already caught his boyfriend’s attention.

It’s when Adam is leaning down to take a closer look that Blake sees the bandage on the small of his back where his shirt is jacking up a bit. The concern hits him like a freight train then, makes him pale with the knowledge he didn’t even notice Adam was injured until he had evidence of it on his face but it’s not the place to make a scene so he bites his lip to keep quiet and smiles tensely whenever Adam turns around to talk to him and ask for his opinion.

It’s only when they’re on their way to the underground parking lot that he very deliberately puts his
palm on the patch of skin between Adam’s hipbones and watches him jump and hiss with a raised, riled eyebrow.

Adam stares at him for a second and takes his hand, squeezing it in reassurance.

“It’s a tattoo, you dickhead,” he declares and there’s that secretive smirk again, “I got a new tattoo but you can’t see it ’til it’s healed.”

Blake pretends he doesn’t sag with relief. Adam looks over his shoulder but doesn’t mention it. “Now that’s just unfair,” he protests, “That’s gonna take weeks!”

“Yup,” Adam stops to peck him on the lips and keeps tugging him towards his truck, “Patience is a virtue, baby. C’mon, don’t pout. It’ll be worth the wait, I promise.”

“I’m not pouting,” Blake objects, outraged, “I’m a grown man—“

“You’re a giant baby,” Adam butts in, giggling, “That’s what you are. What were you thinking anyway? You looked so grave. You scared me for a bit there.”

“Nothing,” Blake mutters, suddenly embarrassed for his obvious overreaction.

Adam gives him an incredulous look but doesn’t press for more.

Blake has the feeling he figured it out without help, judging by the way he stays close and soft and caring the rest of the day.

***

His new album debuts in the Top 5 of the Country charts and Adam joins them in rehearsals soon enough. He’s funny and lively, can’t keep still unless they’re deep into the chords of a song, and Blake’s musicians and backing vocalists laugh and joke with him as easily as they do with Blake.

Blake’s hands catch Adam’s hips in one of his impromptu dances around the studio. He’s the first one to initiate a kiss or anything that isn’t a passing brush of fingers between them in front of others.

He doesn’t do it on purpose, the people around them more of a family than anything else to Blake, and Adam is strung up like a wire at first but melts against him soon enough, licking into his mouth for a moment before breaking apart to look up at him with something naked and joyful in his eyes that look almost green under this light.

He hears Adam whispering yours like a love confession, like a promise all over again even though he says nothing, relishing the rush that comes with knowing Adam’s world narrows to him and his kisses, his touch, and nothing else.

***

Adam has been teasing him with showing him his new tattoo for hours but that’s all he does, really, just merciless teasing until it’s time for them to grab their duffle-bags and go.

Blake checks the kitchen and the fridge for the last time to ensure there will be no bugs building small cities while they’re out and strolls behind Adam, still pleased with the little things like Adam’s keys jingling in his hand as he waits for Blake to get out to lock the door and walk to the elevator together.

He stops dead in his tracks when he spots Luke right outside the building, hands in pockets and
shoulders hunched—either against the cold or mortification, Blake can’t tell.

Adam’s been a lot more confident in their relationship ever since the article got such positive feedback. He doesn’t cower from Luke’s presence, despite knowing how the man feels about them, and Blake surrounds his shoulders with an arm even as he has half a mind to ask him to go ahead because he knows Luke can be quite vicious when he’s mad, even if he says he doesn’t mean a thing later.

“He’s the whore you told me about, ain’t he?” Luke asks, confrontational, and Blake curses under his breath, “You rescued the bitch from the street, huh? I wonder what you’re gonna do when you get bored and realize there’ll be no refunding, pal.”

“Go wait in the car, Adam,” he says even though it’s too late. Adam blinks, nodding harshly before grabbing Blake’s duffle and tossing it over his free shoulder, trotting to the other side of the street where a company car is waiting for them, “You wanna know why I’ve been doing better? God fucking damn it, Luke, you know why, you told me yourself.”

“That can’t be the reason,” Luke snarls, throwing a derisive look over his shoulder, “You’re not a fucking fag, Blake, why are you doing this!?”

“Why are you doing this?” Blake spits out right back, pushing his former friend out of his way before he ends up socking him between the eyes right where it hurts the most, “You don’t approve, I get it, you’re welcome to get the fuck out of my life and never come back!”

“I’m not going to sit down while you ruin your fucking life over a fairy—“

“Listen to me,” Blake growls, turning back just enough for the smaller man to see his expression and realize he’s dead serious, “You ever talk about Adam like that again and I’ll make sure to personally knock all your teeth right outta that filthy mouth of yours. You think I’m making a mistake, that I’m fooling around? Fine! But you keep your opinions to yourself or I’m making you, understand?”

Luke seems quite stunned at his outburst. Blake leaves him, fuming, and almost dents the car door when he slams it behind him.

They’re quiet during the ride to where Blake’s RV is parked but Adam’s hand tentatively covers one of his and it doesn’t make him feel better, the fact Adam seems okay with being treated that way and—worse—with Blake referring to him in those terms.

***

They’re on their way to Texas. It’ll take almost a day to get there and the driver is familiar to Blake, discreet and polite, but it’s not like they can have a private conversation with him right there and frustration sizzles inside of him, making it hard to enjoy the first few hours of the trip together.

All that he wants is a chance to explain things to Adam, to reassure him even though it looks like it’s him the one in need of that.

Adam amuses himself with his iPod at first but pretty soon he frowns and stands up right in front of him, crossing his arms when Blake attempts to keep gazing at the landscape out of the window.

“Why are you sulking, man?” Adam asks, an edge of impatience in his quiet tone, “Spill.”

“Why aren’t you asking me questions about what I said to him?” Blake inquires in return, rubs his face with both hands and tries to keep his voice low, “Damn it, Adam, you should.”
“So you’re mad because I’m not mad?” Adam snorts, flops down on the couch next to him and slips closer without even trying to mask his intentions, practically climbing to his lap and shushing him with a quick kiss, hands weaving around his neck, “Oh, shut it, Shelton. We’re not going to give the poor guy a show. There’s no harm in a bit of PDA though, is there?”

“Guess not,” Blake stammers, thumbs gently caressing the bit of skin exposed between Adam’s jeans and his t-shirt, “So why aren’t you mad at me?”

Adam’s gaze drops, his nose demurely nuzzling Blake’s. It takes a lot of his self-control not to start kissing him silly because he’s even more gorgeous than usual like this, clean shaven and clinging to him with both resolve and the ever-present fear of something falling out of place between them. He distracts himself with the curve of his dark lashes and the alluring aroma of his new cologne, something strong but sweet, almost like a woman’s perfume.

“How could I ever?” Adam murmurs, breath hot against his lips, “You’re so good to me. You’ve always been so good to me.”

“But—“

“Let me finish, damn you,” Adam cuts in, no real fire in his tone, just fondness, “So you talked to him about me, told him I’m a—well, you know—so what? That’s what I am—what I was, back then, when you did, right?”

The small amendment in Adam’s speech is not small at all, not to him, and it makes him smile. “Right,” this time he can’t help it and kisses him, deep and overjoyed, only stops when Adam makes a little noise in clear warning, fingers tugging at the short hairs of his nape instead of digging into his neck to keep him in place, “I didn’t, though. It was just something I said in passing. He was being impossible.”

“Now that’s hard to imagine,” Adam jokes, sobering when Blake heaves a sigh and burrows into his shoulder, “I’m sorry he’s being an asshole, babe. Maybe he’ll come around.”

“Maybe he will,” Blake agrees, muffled and resigned, “It’s okay. I don’t need him.”

Adam hums, almost in disbelief, but limits to knead his scalp until Blake is dozing on him. He even drools and all. Adam makes a face and scampers to the opposite couch but welcomes him when he lies down with his head on his lap.

“I’ve been called worse,” he hears Adam saying, struggles to understand him just as he’s falling asleep again, “Really. As long as he leaves you out of it, he can say whatever he wants.”

***

The first location of his tour goes startlingly well. There are people outside calling him names and making obscene gestures at Adam but the staff handles it perfectly and they both make sure the other doesn’t do anything stupid in retaliation. They know it wouldn’t be worth it and it turns out it wasn’t a bad omen because during the concert everything goes smoothly, the audience cheers and swoons when Blake turns to sing to Adam on a whim in the middle of Over but he doesn’t test their luck and doesn’t give Adam even the ghost of a kiss or a touch, just the notes and words that Adam already owns after ripping them right from Blake’s heart.

Adam is a little ball of energy after the performance, the adrenaline rush lingering longer since it’s his first time playing for so many people. Blake tries to talk him into going out with a couple of other musicians but Adam insists on staying with him, reminding him in a husky voice that he still has a
Blake is breathless with anticipation by the time they make it back to his RV, alone at last.

“Show me,” he demands, eager like a kid at Christmas morning, grabbing handfuls of the hem of Adam’s shirt.

“Woah, okay.” Adam concedes, chuckling. He kicks off the cowboy boots Blake cajole him into wearing and unbuttons the plaid shirt that he jokingly put on to mingle better with the crowd too, “I love it so if you think it’s too much, keep your mouth shut.”

“Oh, sweetie, I even like this thing that you don’t even know what it is,” Blake teases, fingers wrapping around Adam’s right shoulder, “So I think I’m gonna love it too. C’mon.”

Adam flings the shirt to the side, turns with his head tilted to the side to smile at him over his shoulder, and Blake doesn’t know what he was expecting, really, but it certainly wasn’t this.

He has to blink several times to make sure he’s not seeing things and by then his fingers have caught up with the program and are already touching, tracing the letters beneath Adam’s back dimples.

There are a few parts of Adam’s body that Blake absolutely adores, obsesses with even, and this has always been on the list, his own name permanently written on Adam’s skin notwithstanding.

The handwriting is elegant, the strokes thick and sure, and Blake’s fingertips are reverent in their quiet memorizing of each character.

“My Gosh, Adam,” he breathes out, love drunk, “It’s—it’s beautiful, I—I love it. I love you. I love you so much.”

He dips his head low, nosing and kissing his way down Adam’s neck, his confession another gentle caress to his skin that makes Adam shiver.

“I knew you would,” Adam laughs breathily, the sound sensual and endearing at the same time, “You possessive jackass, you’re so predictable.”

“Am I now?” Blake asks, a sort of lazy challenge in his voice.

“Uh-huh,” Adam replies, cheeky and playful, pressing back with his whole body when Blake flushes his hips to him.

Tomorrow he can prove Adam wrong. Right now, he wants to put their mattress to good use and test the new confines of their bed with the low roof and close walls around it.

It doesn’t bother him, not hearing the L word back, and it surprises him; his faith in Adam, in what they have together, knows that whenever Adam is ready to tell him it will be sweet but it’ll change absolutely nothing because he knows how he feels already.

If anything, he loves Adam a little more for not faking it, for not uttering the words that are expected from him at the moment that he should say them back. That requires courage and faith too and it’s just as intimate as saying them first.

They’ve come a long way from where they started. That warms his heart.

He hopes they still have a long way to go from here, a long way to walk together and help each other whenever a bump—past or present—appears on the road.
He kisses Adam like it’s the one thing he wants to do until the day he dies and doesn’t let go.

Chapter End Notes

This is how Adam's tattoo looks like (the font is *Feathergraphy* clean):

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Blake Shelton
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I assumed Blake goes touring in one of these? I'm really sorry if it's innacurate. I also apologize for making Luke Bryan the 'bad guy'. He's not, I'm sure, but things had to go wrong somewhere and I wasn't going to ruin Blake's career, so.

Thanks for reading, guys. I hope that you liked this story half as much as I liked writing it. I might write a short epilogue later, I left some stuff out because it didn't make sense in this chapter but for now this is it.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

I should probably put like, a bunch of warnings here but this is an AU that involves prostitution so I trust you’re all here knowing you could find ugly stuff.

Thanks for all your comments and kudos, those are everything to me. Hopefully I’m not ruining this by adding more to it, I really wanted to offer better closure for Adam.

Writing this took me five tries (I’ve been trying for months), so this is it for this ’verse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is a question he doesn’t want to answer.

Blake can say he’s strong all he wants but Adam knows better.

Is he trying to be something he’s not? Or was he something he’s never been in order to survive?

He looks at the lyrics he’s scribbled and he could toss the notebook out of the window—he’s tried but he never quite manages to let go; not of the notebook, not of the dream blossoming in its pages—but the words would still be here in his heart, and he’d still want to sing at the top of his lungs, with all of his might. He’d still dream because being in love makes you foolish even when you know better, because being in love makes you feel strong and invincible even when you’re not.

He wants to sing and play the guitar and Blake says—Blake says he’s good enough to be heard, says being on a band is what he was born to do, and Adam believes him. So he dyes his hair, gets more tattoos to convince himself he’s comfortable in his own skin, and tells his friends he’s ready even though he isn’t, even though he will never be.

He stops touring with Blake and Maroon 5 is born. Now they just need a chance to get their big break and—if you ask Adam—a small miracle as well.

***

Blake stares at him as if he’d just seen a ghost and—hell, maybe he has. His ex was blonde. It’s not something Adam could ever forget.

He’s toweling his hair after washing the bleach from his head. He pretends he’s not holding his breath, pretends he shouldn’t have asked his boyfriend about the change. He’s got a plan B and it’s a damn good one so he’s edgy, sure, but he knows they’ll make it out of this one and that’s all he needs to keep his cool.

“Do you like it?” he asks, artfully looking down only to raise his eyes and lock them with Blake’s stunned baby blues. Lock him up if it’s a crime but he knows Blake’s soft spots and he’s not ashamed to use them to his advantage every now and then.

The Country star gapes a little as his hand brushes Adam’s cheek lovingly. Adam’s heart does twenty somersaults one after the other in the span it takes him to find his words, “You look… Gosh, Adam, out of this world. Striking.”
Adam grins, enjoys how Blake kneads his scalp experimentally through the lighter strands of hair, “Yeah? I bought more colors. You can help me pick.”

“I like this one,” his boyfriend smiles back, tilting his head down to kiss Adam’s hairline, “Brings out your eyes, your skin, everything, you’re—you’re glowing. I love it.”

He wraps his arms around Adam, still breathing against his skin as he flushes him to his body. Adam nuzzles against him and puts his hands around his neck, letting Blake rock them to some silent tune as they hold each other.

It’s not quite dancing but it’s close, better even, and just as exhilarating.

***

Adam loves waking up to Blake’s lips brushing down his spine, his kisses turning randy once he reaches the tattoo on the small of his back.

Sometimes it’s too early, sometimes it’s the middle of the night. Whatever the time, Adam just loves knowing and confirming Blake is so crazy for him he can’t spend more than a few hours without his hands roaming and claiming Adam’s body for himself again.

He’s still slick and open from the last time before they went to sleep. It only takes Adam spreading his legs for Blake to slip back in with a deep, satisfied groan and start fucking him slowly as they lie on their sides in the dark; Adam’s legs bent as Blake nuzzles his nape and holds him with a palm spread wide on his lower belly, flat and taut with the muscles rippling in pleasure every time Blake slams in just right.

It’s been over two months since they got their clean bills of health and Blake still goes wild when his dick is buried bare deep inside Adam’s entrance, seems to be more than a little bit addicted to the feel of them rubbing so intimately—to the hot and tight friction with no barriers between them.

Adam tosses his head back onto Blake’s broad shoulder, his left arm curling around Blake’s neck and the other curling around the base of his cock to stop himself from coming. He’s still oversensitive from the last orgasm Blake ripped out of him and it’s never taken a lot for him to make Adam careen over the edge so it’s necessary precaution. He wants to hold on for a little longer, wants to make all the noises he knows Blake adores and clench around his dick until his lover is drunk in the pleasure they always find together.

The deliberate, tantalizing rhythm of Blake’s hips tells Adam he plans on dragging this out until they’re both so high in physical sensations that they come just from this—no need to speed up or even wake up enough to want that.

He’s not even worried the only times he gets to come now are when Blake is with him—jacking off doesn’t cut it, not anymore, and in the rare occasion they’re apart Adam remembers just how utterly ruined sex is for him without Blake. Without his hands on him, without his mouth on him, it’s just not worth it and makes his chest uncomfortably tight in ways he’d rather not ponder on.

They’re practically still half-asleep but want each other bad enough to keep undulating against one another and that has him so hot it’s all he can do to let his jaw go slack and saliva drop from the corner of his mouth as he pants lewd and stuttering in Blake’s ear.

“F-Fuck,” Adam moans, high-pitched and long, the ‘u’ stretching until the tip of Blake’s cock rubs his prostate and makes his mouth close with a click, attaching the consonants starkly before his breath gets trapped in the onslaught of lust they’re sharing, his cheeks almost as hot and heavy with
blood as his cock jutting between his legs.

“Yeah,” Blake rumbles, his nose stroking the crook of Adam’s neck as his hand flushes Adam’s slight body impossibly closer to his sweaty and broader frame, his other arm busy keeping Adam’s leg in the right place to slam home as deep as he can go, “Hear that?”

Adam blinks fuzzily, moans louder when he strains his ears and catches the sloppy sound of Blake going in and out of his ass already filled with Blake’s spend and plenty of lube for him to just keep going at it for as long as he wants.

Blake loves coming inside of him now that he can, loves filling him up and eating him out. Just the memory of it has Adam spilling more pre-come over himself and arching, his damp eyelids fluttering against his cheeks.

“So wet, darling,” Blake marvels, teeth nipping Adam’s shoulder playfully, “Like a girl, you feel that?”

Adam keens in shameless yes, the filth pouring from Blake’s mouth too much to take. His balls tighten and he shakes between his lover’s arms in an almost dry orgasm that leaves him limp and twitching, still impaled in Blake’s big cock and clamping down on him instinctively as the taller man rocks into him with lazy delight.

He tightens weakly around him one more time, eyes closed and breath evening out and deepening, but it’s enough. Blake shoots inside of him, hips gyrating as he empties himself of what little he’s got left, and kisses Adam’s neck sloppily with parted and smooth lips.

Blake is careful not to roll them on top of any wet spot as he sprawls over Adam possessively, as if the younger man could go anywhere when they’re still joined or even wanted to.

They’ve been together for over a year and it doesn’t scare him anymore, how he wakes up every day and falls in love with his charming hick of a boyfriend all over again. He just also makes sure to be everything Blake could possibly want every day.

***

Christina heaves a long-suffering sigh, “Adam, give it back.”

“No, it was a gift!” Adam counters, holding the mirror stubbornly to his chest, “You gave it to me.”

They’ve been walking the thin line between friends and therapist/patient ever since Adam agreed to see her twice a week and he may or may not take advantage of that from time to time.

After spending the last half an hour echoing Christina’s self-confidence boosting words to his own reflection, he thinks he’s got every right to loosen up.

She allows it for a couple of minutes so she probably agrees.

“You did good,” she praises once Adam hands her back her red heart-shaped mirror. Not too long ago, he wanted to hurl it against the wall and break it into a million pieces but today he doesn’t mind it that much. It’s kinda cute, “Really good, Adam, I’m proud of you.”

He beams, humming low in delight, and scoots over to the edge of his seat. “More, more!”

His counselor giggles, knowing very well by now Adam is just fooling around and can’t really take compliments for very long.
Then she tricks him into talking about the family he doesn’t have because they don’t want him. She’s sneaky like that and so smart Adam gets chills sometimes.

Blake comes to her practice too and she asks them to sit together on her couch from time to time. Adam still gets anxious thinking what they could be talking about when he isn’t there but he’s not stupid enough to believe for a second it’s all about him; Blake has his own skeletons, Adam just happens to be the stone in his shoe and the light of his life at the same time so he obviously needs a little help coping with that too.

It took him a while to believe Blake wouldn’t think things through and leave him now that he’s talking with someone about it but he got there. If he’s still a teeny tiny bit paranoid, that’s his own problem. He’s got it too good, way too much to deserve even a quarter of it, so sue him if he has nightmares sometimes not about going back to taking dick for a living or living in a shitty apartment but about losing Blake’s love when—if?—he finds someone better for him than Adam could ever hope to be.

***

He still braces for blows that aren’t coming. Granted, not so much as he used to, but seeing his boyfriend’s heartbroken expression after each time he accidentally startles Adam is getting old. God, he’s such an idiot.

He wants to stop but it’s something so ingrained in him, something that saved him from more than a black eye and some shiners back in the day, that he can’t really think about it. He just jumps, cringes or moves out of the way depending on the situation long before his brain rationalizes it.

“Sorry,” it’s not often that they have this conversation out loud but the Country singer looks so upset after trying to wipe Adam’s milk moustache and making Adam huddle into himself and shut his eyes tight that he has to say it, “Old habits and all that. I know you’d never hurt me, babe, I’m just dumb.”

Blake takes a sip from his own milkshake. His shoulders are still hunched in defeat but his eyes are bright again so mission accomplished, Adam will take the small victory, “I am too. I keep thinking, what if I’d met you sooner? What if—“

Adam disrupts that line of thought with a lingering kiss. It tastes like sugar and strawberries and the burn of Blake’s stubble makes him shiver more than all the ice they put in the mix.

“You’re here now,” he points out. He leaves his stool and climbs to his lover’s lap to entice him into another deeper, longer kiss, “Don’t think about that.”

For a six foot five man, Blake delivers quite the convincing pout. Adam wishes his stupid reflexes didn’t weigh so heavy on the older man’s heart but they do so he just tries to kiss it better and is secretly charmed by Blake’s obvious concern. If he wasn’t already head over heels for the man, he’d fall in love fast and hard just because of this.

***

Their demo picks the interest of one of the big fishes in the industry. They get an appointment so fast Adam’s half convinced it’s too good to be true.

It goes surprisingly well for a while but the guy won’t stop staring at Adam and as used as he is to command the attention of a room in both good ways and bad, it makes him uncomfortable. He can scarcely speak as they’re asked questions and just when it seems they’re this close to sealing the deal, the record producer stands up from his big chair and points at Adam.
“I knew I’d seen that face somewhere. You’re that Country singer’s boy toy—what’s his name again?” he snaps his fingers, sardonic and triumphant, “Shelton! Blake Shelton.”

Adam takes a deep breath. This doesn’t mean anything, it can still work. He can make it work, regardless of how this douchebag decides to treat him, “Yeah, he’s my partner, we—“

The man sneers, cutting right in, “Your partner? What, you got a law firm with him or something? Please, spare me. We don’t tolerate these deviations in the company. I’m great but I’m not a miracle worker, I can’t sell your music if you’re eating dick every night. Sex sells music, as it does everything else, but not that kind of sex, pal.”

He ducks his head, willing his cheeks not to heat. He feels so stupid; he should’ve expected something like this with how open Blake and he are about their relationship but he wasn’t because he’s literally stupid.

He doesn’t have any comeback to that.

“Where did he pick you up, huh? The streets? I bet he did,” the producer adds, spiteful, and smirks when Adam flinches at the spot-on guess, “Go back to your stud’s bed, sweetheart, we both know that’s what you’re good at. Stop wasting my time,” he turns to James and talks to him as if Adam wasn’t even there anymore, “Now if Mister Valentine could take over lead vocals I think we could still make a deal, gentlemen.”

Adam doesn’t stop walking until he’s out of the building. He’s so in his head he doesn’t notice everyone has followed him until James surrounds his shoulders with an arm and sits beside him on the sidewalk.

“You should’ve taken it,” Adam croaks, “You don’t need me, not really, and I would’ve let you have my songs—“

“We all need each other, Adam, don’t be an idiot, okay? We’re gonna get a deal, just not with this dickhead.”

Jesse sits on his left, embracing him too and smiles at him when Adam turns to him, “Dude, you were there too. He’s a douche! We don’t want to work with someone like that, are you crazy?”

Adam blinks, looks up at and laughs when Mickey shows him he got their demo back with a little too much enthusiasm. They know his dirty little secret and they still support him and want him in the band. They’re too good to him and he doesn’t know how much more of this he can take, if the rest of the interviews will go the same way. Ruining his chances is one thing but theirs? That he can’t take lightly.

***

“He didn’t want me in the band and the guys got pissed so they didn’t sign either,” Adam explains to his very eager boyfriend, blinking up at him as Blake traces his cheekbones with the pad of his thumbs and looks so perplexed Adam wants to laugh.

If only everyone else saw him like Blake does, then—then maybe he’d have a chance at this.

“Why not?” Blake inquires, dead serious, and fuck—Adam was so hoping being vague would cut it but apparently not.

He shrugs.
He knows what I am, he doesn’t say, What I’ll always be.

He can almost hear Blake’s gentle drawl in his head, assuring him he’s wrong, but it’s not enough to keep the murky thoughts at bay, not this time.

He’s not sure how he manages to smile but when Blake leans down to kiss his head and heaves a sigh to his hair he knows he didn’t nail it.

He gives up. He can’t lie to Blake, not after all they’ve been through, even if he’s doing it to protect his feelings.

“What do you think?” he asks, keeping his gaze down not to see his lover’s reaction.

Blake’s hands tighten around his back. Adam knows even without looking at him that his jaw must be clenched. “Because of us?”

He sounds so—so fucking contrite it makes Adam want to scream. If there’s anything wrong with what they have, that’s on Adam and not on him.

He hears the stuff people shout at Blake sometimes, sees the crumpled notes Blake throws in the trash after big concerts filled with slurs and promises that he’ll end up burning in Hell and he wants nothing but to show everyone what a fucking treasure Blake is, how he doesn’t deserve any of the shit he gets for being with Adam.

If he could, he’d bear all the ugly by himself and protect Blake from it but he can’t because he’s the public figure and Adam’s just the trophy wife in the equation except he’s no trophy, just particularly inconvenient eye candy at best.

“Hey,” Adam draws his attention, fingers unnecessarily fixing Blake’s collar and lingering there to tug him down to him, “I’d rather have you than the best record deal in the universe, you hear? We’ll get some other label or I’ll convince the guys to get a new singer. It’ll be okay.”

He’s so glad that Blake’s alpha male looks and charisma allow him to keep doing what he loves. He’s sure he couldn’t live with the guilt if it were any other way.

“Alright,” Blake concedes, nosing the side of his face like a besotted dog and making Adam smile in spite of himself, “Just do me a favor first.”

Adam frowns slightly, peering at Blake curiously from beneath his lashes. “Sure, what?”

Blake scratches the back of his head, his other hand still firm on Adam’s waist. “Call CeeLo before finding another vocalist? Please. I showed him one of you guys’ demos and he freaking loved it, Adam.”

If Blake weren’t keeping him flushed against him Adam would fucking lose it, he swears. “You did what?”

“I didn’t tell him it was yours at first!” Blake hurriedly amends, “We were in a meeting and I have a couple of recordings from your rehearsals so I thought, why not? He made me promise I’d convince you to give it a shot with him, says you can go places.”

“I can go places?” Adam repeats, disbelieving and bitter. He fucking told Blake like ten times he didn’t want any help, not on this. He either makes it on his own or not at all and that’s non-negotiable, “Well, I did go many places in the back of a car, you know, like a dirty secret.”
“Adam,” Blake sighs, weary, and just like that Adam’s temper deflates and he’s standing on his tiptoes to kiss Blake’s jaw and ask for forgiveness, “That’s in the past. It’s up to you to keep it there.”

He wishes Blake was right but he can’t forget. He can only hide in the crook of his neck, where it’s warm and safe and familiar, and bite his tongue not to correct him in angry shouts.

Blake is so patient with him it’s the least he can do. He strokes Adam’s back, his palms outlining every shape of bone and muscle with confidence, and the younger man melts against him, closing his eyes as he entwines his hands around Blake’s neck.

It’s been such a long time since the last time he cried and yet his eyes prickle with unshed tears.

“He knew, Blake,” he whispers in an uneven breath, “The way he stared at me, what he said about what I was good for, he knew. He just looked at me and figured it out.”

The Country singer parts from him enough to cradle Adam’s face in his big hands, blue eyes wide and worried.

“You think he was a client of yours?” Blake asks, grave, “One of your johns?”

“What?” Adam frowns, confused, “I don’t know. I can’t even remember every cock I had in my mouth and you’re asking me if I remember their faces?”

“It’s the only explanation,” Blake affirms, so sure of what he’s saying Adam wants to punch him in the face, “Honey, listen to me. Unless you tried really hard, you never looked like a hooker, not even when you were one.”

Adam rolls his eyes. “Says the guy who fell in love with a whore at first sight.”

Blake chuckles, seemingly delighted by his comment, which—fuck, is really making Adam want to smile until his cheeks are numb from it and his lips are trembling with the effort to suppress his grin.

“Yeah, says me. You’re forgetting I slept with lots of them before you,” he drawls, “I know what I’m saying. Just keep trying. I know someone will love your music as much as I do.”

Adam is about to object but he forgets about it when Blake leans down and kisses him soundly, trailing more kisses over his cheek and ear once they run out of air. He murmurs praise after praise, as if trying to sear the opinion he has of Adam onto his skin so he can never forget, and Adam can’t be blamed if just for the briefest of moments he actually believes him.

***

Adam suits up for the next interview. It’s on a moderately new label and he really feels it’s their best shot at getting signed so he wants to try his best.

If he ruins it again, he—fuck, he doesn’t even know what he’s going to do. He’s going to be a mess and he can’t be a mess, not again. Blake deserves better.

He tries to keep it casual by wearing a blue button-down and choosing a pair of derbies as shoes.

The producer is a middle-aged, friendly man that laughs at their jokes and smiles at their easy camaraderie. It barely feels like they’re on a test even though that’s exactly what it is and Adam relaxes too much, taking off his suit jacket and rolling up his sleeves.

He has a full sleeve on both of his forearms now, all healed up and looking great, but it’s only when
the man stares that he remembers the small matching tattoo Blake and he got a few months ago—stitched together in cursive just right below his elbow, while Blake has his on his right arm near his wrist. It’s a bit of the lyrics of one of the cheesiest songs ever in Adam’s opinion but Blake wrote it for him and as much as he pretends not to, he loves it to bits.

Blake had asked him if he wanted a ring or this and it’d been a no brainer for him. He hates couple tattoos with a passion and he knows it’s pretty ironic considering he has Blake’s whole name engraved permanently on his back but sharing a bit of inconspicuous ink with the Country singer had been like a dream he didn’t even know he had and he’d agreed to it so fast and give his boyfriend free reign to choose whatever he wanted that the older man still teased him about it but Adam knew how to take it. Their banter comes easy as breathing for both of them, after all.

(“What if I’d gotten more ladybugs for the two of us, huh?”

“I’m sure I could pull them off better than you, cowboy.”)

He’d thought no one but some really observant people would pick up on it and apparently the producer is clever enough to notice it. His expression is enough to sink Adam’s mood to rock bottom.

“Sorry, I didn’t recognize you, Mister Levine,” the man says, incredibly gentle and polite but still somehow aloof, “You’re Mister Shelton’s lover.”

It’s not a question but Adam doesn’t know what else to do because this great chance is slipping right through his fingers again and he wants to stop it so bad he feels like he can’t breathe. “Yeah. Is—is that going to be a problem?”

There isn’t any judgement in the record producer this time and no disgust either but pity isn’t exactly Adam’s cup of tea, “I’m afraid so. You’re an exceptionally attractive man, the fact alone that you’re taken would deter fans from buying your music. The fact that your significant other is a man, well, I’ve seen it getting in the way of success before. Now, if you and Mister Shelton could perhaps take a break for—”

“No,” Adam interrupts before the guy can even finish the bullshit he was going to suggest, “I love him more than anything. I’m not leaving him and we’re not taking a break, so just please tell me if you can help us or not.”

The producer seems truly sorry for turning them down but he still does it. He gives his card to all of them except for Adam and encourages them to come back when ‘their situation is different’ which is the nice way to say they need another singer and pronto, if they want to make it in the cutthroat business that is music these days.

He tricks his friends into thinking he’s peachy, waves them goodbye as they take a bus and goes home.

He’s glad Blake got caught up in the studio so he doesn’t have to see Adam chain smoking his way to an early grave while crying his eyes out.

He really, really wants a drink too but he knows better than to go out and buy some crappy tequila to get blind drunk. Blake’s been doing so well, he’s been sober with hardly any trouble for months, and Adam won’t mess that up, not when he knows even the smell and the taste of it in Adam’s mouth could make it hard for his boyfriend to keep a hold of his abstinence.

Adam’s poisons of choice have never included alcohol but the craving is still the same and he gets it
too damn well to risk triggering Blake even with strong colognes.

***

The look of utter disappointment in his lover’s face cuts deep, deep enough to make his breath hitch and shivers go through him as he gets on his knees.

It’s automatic, his go-to tactic when he’s desperate, so he doesn’t even know what he’s doing until Blake hauls him back to his feet and stops his hands from fumbling with his zipper to get him out and service him to get in his good side again.

“You promised you’d try quitting,” Blake rasps, doesn’t even mention Adam is so fucked-up he tried to give him head to get out of trouble, “This isn’t quitting, Adam, this is bad. How many packages? Tell me.”

Adam ducks his head, shame burning so hot within him he hardly feels his face going hot with it too, “A-a couple…”

Blake shakes him by the shoulders a little bit—it doesn’t hurt, not really, but Adam flinches anyway and stops breathing, “Don’t lie to me.”

“Three!” he yelps, eyes closed as fresh tears run down his cheeks, “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry—I needed something and I didn’t think—I didn’t think you’d get this mad, please, I didn’t mean—“

He’d been having just a cigarette or two a day for a couple of weeks now and Blake had been so proud. He should’ve known better. He can’t believe he’s still so stupid and careless and so fucking ungrateful.

He’s not sure what’s happening to him; whether it’s the nicotine wrecking havoc in his system or the paralyzing fear of making a mistake that could cost him Blake’s love but he can’t seem to get enough air, and his shallow breathing makes him dizzy enough for his knees to buckle without his say-so this time.

Blake cushions his fall with his body, enveloping him with his arms and pulling Adam into his lap as his vision swirls from black to blurry colors. Both his head and heart are pounding so the urgent words he’s saying don’t make any sense until one of his warm hands cradles Adam’s head to his chest, the other one rubbing Adam’s back gently.

“I’ve got you, baby,” he’s saying, “Breathe with me, okay? Follow my lead, you’re okay, you’re fine.”

It takes some serious effort for him to control his breathing enough to slow it down to match the regular rise and fall of Blake’s chest. He doesn’t know how long it takes him.

It must’ve been a lot because by the time he sighs and is calm enough to wrap his own arms around his boyfriend, Blake doesn’t even sound mad anymore.

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“I’m sorry, baby. I can’t believe I still forget that you——” he trails off but Adam doesn’t need to hear that he gets spooked like a kitten to know that he does and smoking so much just made him even more sensitive and jumpy, “Are you okay?”

He nods slightly, head still tucked under Blake’s chin. His gut is in knots and he feels woozy but he’s a bit steadier now.

He wonders if he actually fainted and if he did, if that means he’s basically manipulated Blake to
forgive him after he screwed up. A little bit of smart flirting is fine if you ask him but that definitely is a whole new level of cheating, even for him.

“I didn’t mean to worry you,” he whispers, “I won’t do it again, I promise.”

Blake stays quiet for a while but the silence isn’t tense; his hands and the little pecks he peppers Adam’s head with make sure it’s anything but.

“The appointment with that label went that well, huh?” the taller man asks.

“The producer was really nice,” Adam replies, small, “But I blew it.”

“I’m sure you didn’t.”

“Trust me, I did.”

There’s something in his tone that seems to all but shout to Blake how tired he is of trying, of this whole trying to pursue a long lost dream thing. His lover doesn’t even bring CeeLo up, just tightens his arms around him as Adam burrows closer into him and even answers the phone when Jesse calls to check up on him.

Adam takes a long shower to get rid of the smell of smoke clinging to his every hair and pore. He even preps for Blake, thinking he owns him something nice before bed that night—and his boyfriend does love it when he just pushes him down on the mattress and rides him—but Blake doesn’t let any kiss or touch escalate and seems more than content just cuddling with him.

He gets that itch under his skin; the one he always gets after Blake is so unbelievably nice to him and wants nothing in return for it, the one that reminds him just how fucking dirty and undeserving he is.

He doesn’t tell Blake he doesn’t want to keep trying, at least not for a while, but he does tell the guys and they understand and don’t push him, just bump shoulders with him and pat his back when Adam—yet again—suggests they should maybe start looking for another vocalist like Adam’s just told a lousy joke.

And Blake—he just knows. He always does.

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“Hustling wasn’t that bad,” Adam remarks as he’s lying down on Christina’s comfy divan. His gaze is fixed on the ceiling fan, the rhythmic spin of its blades helping him to keep his cool. Christina’s been really relentless about getting him to talk about it but he still doesn’t want to. He looks back at her, raising an eyebrow in defiance, “There are worse things, you know. There’s not much to tell, unless you want pointers to give your hubby a hot surprise. I can totally help you with that.”

She makes some notes on her clipboard—she always does even when Adam doesn’t say a damn thing—and doesn’t frown at him, but her eyes spark in that way that lets Adam know she’s frustrated as hell with him.

“Are there?” Christina asks, completely overlooking half of the crap Adam’s just spit, “Are there worse things? How would you know, Adam? I’m pretty sure that’s the worst thing that’s ever happened to you. The way it haunts everything you do tells me as much and we need to work on it, whether you like it or not. Blake called me the other day and by how he described the episode, you had a panic attack because he grabbed you the wrong way at the wrong moment.”

Adam ducks his head, swallowing heavily. He doesn’t blame Blake for telling her, not at all, but he
still wishes he wouldn’t have. He hates this, can barely stand being victimized like this.

He’s not a victim, he’s never been one. He’s just always been an idiot, has taken bad choices at almost every turn of the road, and yeah, he has to live with the consequences even though his life is good now.

“We need to tackle that, you need to face the abuse you went through or you won’t get better, Adam. Do you want me to hand you over to a shrink? If you don’t talk, you’ll leave me no other choice.”

Adam deflates at that, huddling on his side until he’s just a tiny ball of shame and nerves. He stares at the wall, giving Christina his back, and he knows that won’t give him any points on her book but he can’t look at her if they’re really doing this.

“Some men like it rough,” he says, his voice a lot more composed than what he feels, “Some men don’t but they don’t like how you do it, so they hit you for wasting their time and money when they’re done. Some men just like hearing you scream, hearing you beg, watching you bleed. They’re all paying for something and sometimes that something is pain. Even on the good days, maybe your pimp will feel like reminding you what you’re there for. It’s part of the job, it’s how things roll. You can cry about it if you want but that won’t change anything. If that’s abuse, I don’t know, for me it was always a choice.”

“Did you cry?” she asks softly.

“Every day at first,” he admits because honesty hour and all of that and he wants to get this done, “It only made me feel more tired, so I stopped but—I couldn’t hold it in, not all the time.”

Christina keeps asking him questions here and there but mostly she just listens and after a while, Adam doesn’t even filter himself anymore. He tells her about one of his worst regulars, a big burly man that got off on hitting him while Adam pretended to be his maid—skirt and all—and how he’d jerk off and come all over his back, his hair, his face, only to repeat the process as soon as he could get it up again.

He tells her it was after one of those nights that Blake took care of him and gave him a reason to say no to johns like him and the way she smiles at that reminds him just how lucky he is, how Blake loves him despite he’s seen Adam at his worst.

Maybe he’s oversharing, crossing some kind of line, but he does feel better when their time is up and Christina bids him goodbye same as usual.

If she doesn’t think he’s disgusting after hearing half of that, then maybe—maybe there’s hope for him after all.

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One of Blake’s high school buddies is in town. He’s oddly okay with the Country singer’s relationship with Adam and for that Blake gives him free passes for—well, pretty much everything the guy wants.

Adam doesn’t really like him. He feels the man’s eyes on him every time they’re in the same room and he’s bumped against him more than once after stepping out of the shower and finding the dude outside of the master bathroom even though the guest room Blake has been letting him stay in has one.

His name is Jacob and he doesn’t exactly ogle Adam but it’s a close thing. It makes the hairs at the back of his neck stand every time Blake isn’t beside him and he’s fed-up of the feeling after the first
couple of days Jacob insists he’s going to look for a place to stay not to bother the ‘happy couple’—like they’re newlyweds or something—but does absolutely nothing to get the Hell out of their home and sadly, it doesn’t look like Blake gives much of a crap about it.

Adam can’t even wait for him to catch up on the weird vibe he’s been picking up from the guy. Jacob doesn’t do a damn thing when Blake is with them and he’s been so fucking chipper lately—all because of his friend’s easy acceptance of them—that Adam has no choice but to put up with the guy’s presence for as long as he decides to be in LA.

He’s back home after rehearsing at Jesse’s place with the band when he walks into the living room and freezes.

The large sofa gives the entry hall its back but Adam doesn’t need to see what’s going on up front to realize Jacob is palming his cock right there, the tangy smell of sex and the way he’s groaning more than enough clue to do that.

His mind starts replaying his last time with his pimp before his feet have time to take him back to the door where it’s safe. Blake’s friend doesn’t look one bit like Adam’s former boss—tall and lean if a bit heavy in the middle while his pimp was all muscle and didn’t need height to intimidate—but he feels queasy and wants to run away all the same.

“Ah, you’re here,” Jacob says, taking him out of his musing with a jolt. He’s looking at Adam with his head upside-down, showing his teeth in a sneer that has Adam paling, “Just in time! How much for head, huh? Ten bucks sound good?”

“Wha—” Adam squeaks, panicking. He can’t—he can’t possible know—

“What?”

“Oh c’mon,” the man grunts, exasperated, beckoning Adam to go around the couch with his head. The sound of his hand stroking his dick is loud and wet and unmistakable for Adam and it makes bile rise in his throat, “It’s the least you can do for one of Blake’s old friends, don’t you think, you little bitch? A friendly discount for your services? Been dying all week to have your pouty lips around my dick, not gonna lie. I’m gonna fuck your mouth so good you won’t talk for a week.”

“My not—” Adam stammers but he can’t do it, can’t refute something that’s so true it aches in his bones and has him on the verge of tears, “Blake would never tell you about—“

“Oh, he told me alright. I’m sorry, you thought he wasn’t gonna brag about how good you’ve been taking it? Because he did and I want a taste, boy. Now get on your knees so we can get this party started. Been jerking off to images of you all day, c’mon, I deserve the real thing.”

“No, he—” Adam blinks, covering his mouth to muffle the sob that seems to rip its way up right from his heart, “He would never—“

“Wanna call him?” Jacob offers, showing Adam his phone with a purse of his lips, “He’s gonna be pissed at you for making me wait but be my guest. I’ll get what I want and on the house when he gets here and puts you in your place, you stupid little whore.”

Adam doesn’t want to piss Blake off, not again. That’s all he can really think about so he reaches for the phone with a shaky hand but gets yanked to the man’s lap instead, the phone clattering to the ground as he struggles to break free. He screams for him to let him go, loud and piercing, but only for the second it takes Jacob to put one of his huge hands over his mouth. He uses Adam’s energy against him, starting to grind his fat cock against his thigh with enthusiasm, and that does it—Adam snaps and stops overthinking it.
He bites the douche’s hand hard enough to make him cry out in pain and squeezes both of his calves around his head to throw him off the couch and off of him.

He has barely enough time to jump and run to the bedroom, locking it behind his back just in time to stop Blake’s bud from coming in. He pulls his phone out of his pocket, dropping it two times and breaking the screen before his fingers can flick over it and call Blake.

When it goes to voicemail, he falls to his knees and sobs. Calling 911 is out of the question and he doesn’t know what else to do so he leaves a message for Blake without even knowing what’s coming out of his mouth.

Jacob keeps knocking violently on the door, calling him all sort of names. Adam is convinced he’s going to pull the door out of its hinges and cries throughout all of it, his legs too wobbly to take him to the bathroom and hide there for a little longer.

There’s no way Blake would do this—that he’d want Adam to—but he cares so much about Jacob that maybe sharing Adam isn’t that much of a big deal for him. Maybe Adam is screwing up royally by making such a fuss about this. What’s one more blowjob after all the times he’s sucked dudes that he wasn’t even remotely into?

It still feels too much like something Blake would never do, especially after taking one look at their matching tattoo, and it also feels way too much like cheating without hearing it from Blake himself. He won’t do it.

He crawls until his back is against the bed and squares his shoulders, ready to fight the man off again as soon as he gets in.

That’s when he hears Blake’s voice, shouting at his friend with so much venom in his tone it’s hard to believe it’s really him. He scrambles to unlock the door as a commotion breaks on the other side, opens it a little bit in time to see Blake dragging Jacob away by the collar and forcing him to pack and leave after a few well aimed punches to the jaw and stomach that have the dickhead scrambling to comply.

He manages to stand and walk with a hand leaning against the wall until he’s clutching the back of Blake’s shirt with his hands, burying his face between his shoulder blades as his so-called friend swears up and down he’s going to tell every tabloid in town what kind of bitch Adam is unless he has sex with him.

“You got any proof?” Blake inquires, sneering when the guy splutters, “Yeah, that’s what I thought. Now get the hell outta my property and don’t ever come back.”

It’s eerily quiet, once they’re alone at last. Adam feels like throwing up but he can’t move so he just stays put and cries quietly into Blake’s back.

“Adam?” his boyfriend calls gently, “I’m gonna turn around, okay?”

It’s hard to let go of him but it’s only for a second and it’s worth it; Blake embraces him next and lets Adam cling to him again.

“Did he hurt you?” his lover asks, his breathing tickling Adam’s temple a bit as he speaks, “Do we need to call the cops?”

He shakes his head slightly, nuzzling closer to rest on the crook of Blake’s neck. He wants to tell him what happened, knows his boyfriend must be driving himself crazy with every possible scenario, but his mind only draws blanks every time he tries to reach for the words.
Blake doesn’t force him, holding him close and only letting him go to wash his hands and scramble some eggs with bacon to eat. Breakfast-for-dinner is one of their favorites, quick and easy enough that it gives them more time to be with each other, so Adam chews a few bites and focuses more on snuggling in the Country star’s lap than anything else.

Slowly, the quiet in his mind goes away and he can think again.

He tells Blake what happened but leaves out the part where he doubted him.

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“I thought he was going to lend me to his friend,” Adam admits, so upset and mad at himself he can’t stop pacing in Christina’s office, “He’s never treated me like a thing, not even the first time he fucked me, and I still—what the hell is wrong with me, how could I think that?”

She sighs, putting her clipboard down in order to click her way to Adam on her red stilettos and take his hands in hers gently. Her eyes are suspiciously wet, her mouth too slow in opening so he keeps going.

“He deserves so much better than me. Why haven’t you told him that? You’re supposed to help him want to get a better life, right?”

She finds her voice quickly after that, scowling at him to keep him quiet as she speaks, “His life is better, Adam. He loves you, it’s what you have what makes it better than it ever was before. As many bad experiences as you’ve both had in the past, you balance each other; together you’re stable and happy, why would I mess with that? My sessions with him are only to make him understand some things you do are never because of him, that you still being afraid and having those kind of thoughts aren’t his fault, that none of that means you don’t love him.”

“Oh God,” Adam doubles over but Christina was already pulling him towards the sofa and she sits beside him while he covers his face, horrified, “I said some bad stuff in that fucking voicemail, didn’t I? Did he tell you?”

“You don’t remember,” it’s not a question but Adam peers at her through his fingers, shakes his head a little, “It wasn’t bad and it wasn’t anything Blake couldn’t bear to hear. He’s very understanding, as I’m sure you’re more than aware, and I’m good at what I do. I had him prepared for that and more. You didn’t hurt him. You’ve done so much for him that he’d forgive you anyway, if you had.”

Adam frowns at that but she doesn’t give in one inch and repeats how Adam has been so amazing to Blake so many times that Adam concedes she has a point only to get her to shut up.

It reminds him of what CeeLo always tells him and thinking about the eccentric artist and producer makes him antsy.

He made Blake a promise that not only involves trying again after two epic fails but also taking advantages of his connections so he’s not looking forward to calling their friend. At all.

***

Blake is waiting for him back home with a big grin on his face. He lifts Adam off the floor and spins him around like he’s just won the lottery or something and for him, he might as well have.

After a year of being passive-aggressively ignored by the industry despite his songs are charting constantly and selling like hotcakes, he’s nominated to five ACM awards.
Adam cups his face and gives him the biggest, cheeriest kiss. He’s smiling so hard when they break apart to get some air that his cheeks hurt but he couldn’t care any less, “Fucking finally,” he breathes, nuzzling Blake’s nose and hugging him tight.

“Language,” Blake chides but he’s beaming and he smooches Adam’s face before adding, a bit sheepishly, “You’ll be my date, right?”

Adam is aware going as Blake’s date will destroy any chance of anyone picking the band ever as long as he’s in it.

He says yes anyway. “You think I’d let you go with anyone else, you dumbass?”

If later on CeeLo changes his mind about their music—well, he’ll live. He had a blast being a part of Blake’s band, he’ll go back to it and convince his friends to go on without him.

***

He thinks about dying his hair back to its original color but just the idea of doing it because he’s embarrassed of being some walking cliché at the ceremony hardens his resolve to go blonde and unapologetic and that’s exactly what he does.

He convinces Blake to get tailored suits for both of them—Blake can afford them even with the extra fabric all six foot five inches of him need, so why not?—and makes sure his lover’s suit is a three pieces because a vest looks ridiculously good on him and he needs to take advantage of that. They don’t exactly color coordinate but the suits are both gray and classic—Blake’s suit darker and with a tie, while Adam’s is lighter and he picked a nice enough white shirt that he doesn’t bother with one —and when they go in hand in hand, it feels right and Adam is willing to bet they’d turn every head in the place even if they weren’t the peculiarity of the night.

Adam ends up with no chair but they apologize so much he actually believes it was an accident. He’s ready to spend the whole time sitting on the floor and he does as much, crossing his legs at Blake’s feet and getting as comfortable as he can there while his boyfriend chats with the artists around him, but it’s not even been a minute before Blake squeezes his shoulders and makes him look up at him.

“You got a seat right here, hun,” he says, patting his thigh, and Adam doesn’t think it’s a good idea, not at all, but settles on his lap since it’s not going to change one bit the fact that everyone’s staring.

“Thanks, baby,” he murmurs and controls himself enough to just give Blake an eskimo kiss instead of one on the lips, one of his hands gripping Blake’s neck, “Best seat in the house.”

Blake smiles with his dimples, curling an arm around his waist, “Damn right.”

***

Blake wins four out of five and kisses Adam soundly before getting in their car, the flashes of the cameras going off all around them. It’s one of those moments he could live in forever because he’s never felt so loved, so cherished despite of everything he’s done.

Adam’s so high in joy that he stays up writing songs instead of sleeping and calls the guys while Blake is still snoring. They agree to come because Blake obviously has better equipment than them to record a demo in his rehearsal room and he honestly doesn’t give a damn about using Blake’s stuff and connections anymore.

There’s a song Adam wants him to listen and he swears he won’t be able to calm down until it’s ready.
By the time a bleary-eyed, rumpled looking Okie joins them, they’re ready to perform for him and Adam grabs the mic, feeling like everything’s right with the world.

His falsetto is perfect for the song and Blake loves it so he goes there a lot and for the first time in his life he’s not nervous or afraid, he’s just living the moment and enjoying what he created, a fluttery feeling in the pit of his stomach that feels more like hope that anything else; hope for Blake to like it, for this to be what they need to make it.

*My broken pieces*
*You pick them up*
*Don’t leave me hanging, hanging*
*Come give me some*
*When I’m without you*
*I’m so insecure*
*You are the one thing, one thing*
*I’m living for*

Blake looks at him in something that can only be described as awe. Adam ducks his head, letting go of the mic stand as Blake stumbles to him and grabs his face tenderly to give him a kiss that is really as sweet as sugar.

“You gotta let me call CeeLo, Adam, please,” he pleads, “I’ll get on my knees until you do. That was incredible, you’re so talented.”

He pulls his phone out of his pocket, showing Blake the screen with a cheeky grin, “Beat you to it.”

Blake smiles, pulling him into another kiss by his belt loops, “Attaboy.”

His bandmates groan around them when it gets a little too intense but Adam flips them off and grips Blake’s nape just a bit tighter, skillfully tugging his hair to get Blake to hold him tighter.

***

CeeLo goes crazy when he hears the song.

“Where have you all been hiding, my friends? That this isn’t already on the radio is unacceptable. Your music will be transcendental, I can feel it. Let’s make some magic together, let’s make history.”

He practically kidnaps them to one of his studios after they sign the contract, booking it for like an entire month for them. None of them complains, they kind of love him unconditionally after that, zoo of strange pets included.

Adam opens the door with a big 222 printed on it and turns to grin at his friends, James and Jesse right behind him to grip his shoulders and push him right in.

***

When Adam was little he used to snatch his parents’ sunglasses at any chance he got and dreamed about being a big rock star while perching them on his nose.

His family doesn’t look for him after his dream comes true and Maroon 5 is one of those bands everyone knows and listens to but he isn’t bitter about it; he has a whole new family with his friends and Blake and that’s all he needs to be happy. He’s a singer, a musician, a composer and a performer and if he used to entertain people differently—well, that’s for him and a few trusted ones to know.
Since he has all the best comebacks for crappy questions, reporters learn quickly to leave his and Blake’s relationship alone.

Some still try to snoop though and it’s kind of funny.

“Please, Adam, tell us how being with a man like Blake feels like.”

Adam smirks, “So you’ve never been in love? Wow, I feel so sorry for you.”

“Adam! Who’s the man in your relationship?”

Adam snorts, “Sorry, last time I checked we were both dudes, maybe you got the wrong Adam to ask?”

Blake is their biggest fan, shows his support for the band like it's something to brag about and reacts so strongly to people shitting on Adam he has to talk him into doing some meditation for his boyfriend not to turn into a serial killer. He tours with them when they go abroad and they miss each other like crazy when he doesn't but they always find time to be together.

Every person who bets they won't make it ends up with pockets filled with bitterness and jealousy because they do and they don't ever, ever shut up about how much they mean to each other.

Chapter End Notes

Songs mentioned and/or quoted:
- God gave me you by Blake Shelton
- Sugar by Maroon 5

I took some liberties with the order of their albums as you've probably noticed. I needed the lyrics to make sense for them in the story. You can either imagine all Maroon 5 songs exist eventually but in a different way or that they release different albums after their first one that's sort of a strange love child of Songs about Jane and V in my head lmao.

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