Movie Time

by photojunkie3

Summary

Clay needs some down time, and who better to spend it with than Tony?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Clay

It had been a long school year. After Hannah’s suicide, the tapes, and the court case, he found himself needing a break. Walking out of the school building that Friday, backpack slung over one shoulder, he spotted a familiar red Mustang in the parking lot. Faltering for a second, the thought crossed his mind that Tony might be tired of seeing him, but he decided it couldn’t hurt to ask and made a B-line for the pristine car anyway. As he was approaching, he saw the trunk close revealing the leather jacket clad, slick back hair-ed Tony.

“Clay!” he exclaimed, a big sideways smile lighting up his Hispanic features. Immediately he felt the knot of tension in his stomach begin to loosen. How did Tony do that? Maybe it was all they had been through together, but he and Tony had been friends for a long time and he always remembered the feeling of calm he got from being next to him.

“Hey Tony! You busy? Or do you have time to hang out?” His fingers tapped the pockets of his jeans like they had a mind of their own.

“Sure Clay, what’s up?”

“Nothing, nothing, I’m fine.” He looked to the side, pretending to pay attention to the flow of students in the parking lot. How did Tony always know? Was he that bad at hiding his feelings? Or was Tony just that good at reading him by now?

“You sure?” Tony asked, tilting his head sideways as he leaned a hip against his car.

“Yeah…It’s just, I dunno. Feeling like I need a break I guess,” He admitted, shrugging, “My mom is, ya know, being herself and I just kind of need to veg out and not think for a while, ya know?”

“I know.” And he did, Tony always did. “I’m meeting my dad at the shop now, but I’ll be around if you want to stop by later.”

“Great, see ya later!” He nodded, giving a short wave as he turned towards where he had left his bike.

“Hey Clay!” Tony called after him.

“Ya,” he turned, half expecting Tony to have remembered that he had better ways to spend his Friday evening.

“You like black and white films?”

“Yeah man, I work at a movie theater, remember?” he said with a smile.

“Right. You’re in charge of the popcorn then,” Tony said as he slid into the mustang, not even waiting for a response.

‘How can you have a movie without a snack?’ he thought as he unlocked the chain to his bike. He made a mental note to stop by the store on his way home for popcorn and candy feeling much better than he had been just a few minutes before.
He was at the table eating Mike and Ikes while doing homework when he heard the front door open and the unmistakable clatter of his mom’s heels.

“Hey mom,” he said, closing up the box and heading towards the front hall where she was unloading her purse and briefcase.

“Hey sweetie, how was school today?”

“Fine. How was your day?”

“Good, good. I’ve got to meet with a new client in a bit so you and your father are on your own for dinner,” she said as she took her shoes off and checked her makeup in the front hall mirror.

“Uh, actually, I’m going over to Tony’s in a bit. Having a movie night. If that’s ok?”

“Yes, sure sweetie. It’s been a while since you two hung out, you spent so much time together when you were working on that history project.”

“Yes, that,” he said, guiltily running a hand through his short hair, ruffling it at the back a bit. “It’s just that, you know, he’s been spending a lot of time with his boyfriend.” He didn’t know how his mom would respond to Tony having a boyfriend. Not that it mattered to him, but according to Tony it was a common fact that everybody knew.

“That’s nice, you should always make time for the people you love,” his mom said with a smile. Apparently Tony having a boyfriend was no news to her, furthering in his mind how clueless he must have been. She looked up at him from her briefcase for the first time since she had gotten home and immediately a frown crossed her face. “Oh dear, that scar is still showing on your forehead, when will that ever heal?” She reached up as if to rub the spot from his face.

“Mom! It’s fine, it’s healing just fine,” he said, turning back towards the table where he’d left his homework. Seeing a text from Tony he picked up his phone read, ‘Home now, just cleaning up. You can come over anytime’. It would take a while on his bike so he figured he would start now.

“Hey mom, I’m leaving. Good luck with your new client.” He sent a thumbs up emoji to Tony and started gathering his homework from the table.

“Thanks sweetie, text if you’re going to be very late! Say ‘Hi’ to Tony for me.”

“Will do,” he said with a smirk and a salute as he headed upstairs to dump his homework and grab his backpack with the snacks. He sniffed his shirt on his way up, opting to change into a fresher one and reapply his deodorant before the ride to the other side of town.

“Hey Mr. Padilla,” he said as he swung off his bike at the end of the driveway.

“Oh, hey Clay,” Tony’s dad called out, barely looking up from under the car hood, “Hey, grab me that wrench there in my toolbox, will ya?”

“Sure, this one?” He said as he grabbed the one on top and started handing it over.
“No, not the screwdriver, Clay, the wrench, the wrench! How do you work on your bike if you don’t know what a wrench looks like?”
He dropped the tool and grabbed for another that Tony’s dad was pointing to. He turned his head to the side and shrugged, “Uh, well Tony usually fixes it for me?”

“Dad, give him a break,” he heard Tony say from behind them as his dad shook his head. “I don’t mind fixing it,” Tony said with a shrug and a look in his direction.

“If you always do it for him, how is he supposed to learn anything? I had you under the hood of this car since before you could walk.”

“Alright dad, next time Clay’s bike breaks down, I’ll make him fix it on his own,” Tony said with a smile. “You hungry Clay? I was just about to eat some dinner when I decided to rescue you.”

“Yeah, I haven’t had dinner yet either, my mom had a meeting – she says ‘Hi’ by the way,” he said as he followed Tony inside the house. “Hey, you weren’t serious about my bike, right?”

“You’ll have to learn sometime, and a bike’s not that difficult Clay,” Tony said with a smile and a sideways glance as he held the screen door open.

“Mmm…unhelpful Yoda,” he mumbled softly as he walked by Tony and into the house, a soft laugh his only indication that Tony had heard him.

Dinner at the Padilla house was always nice, and very different from the quiet dinners he was used to at home. Tony and his three brothers all talking and laughing loudly, recounting their day in a mixture of English and Spanish to their parents, his sister louder than them all. He found it hard to focus on his own thoughts, which was quite refreshing. He even found himself swept up in the laughter and dinner talk, and out of the corner of his eye had caught Tony smiling at him more than once. Now he and Tony were in the living room on the couch all set up with their popcorn and miscellaneous candy. Tony’s siblings had gone their separate ways, his mom in the kitchen, and his dad had gone back out to the garage.

“Hey, thanks again for having me over,” he said as he watched Tony pick through a box next to the TV. The lights were off, but he could still see Tony’s handsome features from the light coming from the TV.

“No problem man, anytime,” Tony said with a look over his shoulder, “You spend way too much time in your head, you need a break.”

He sank more comfortably into the couch, “Yeah, but it’s harder to do in your house, your family is a lot noisier than mine.”

“Hey,” Tony said in a mock stern voice as he waggled a VHS at him.

“I mean in a good way!” he exclaimed as Tony inserted the VHS, “I love my family, but it’s too easy to get lost in thought and forget you’re not alone.”

“I get it,” Tony said as he planted his smaller frame next to him on the left and put his socked feet on the table in front of them. “But it’s hard to find a moment of peace and quiet to yourself here. Why do you think I love my car so much?”
“You love the car cause it’s awesome,” he said, grabbing a handful of popcorn from the table and leaning back. “Now, what are we watching?”

“Be patient, you’ll see,” Tony said slyly as he toyed with the remote.

“Is it Casablanca?” he guessed, watching to see Tony’s reaction.

“Dude,” Tony said as he lightly smacked his chest, “the movie’s starting, don’t ruin it.”

He smiled to himself, how many times had they seen this movie? It didn’t matter, it was a classic and they were hanging out without talking about Hannah or Alex or any of the number of messed of things that seemed to be happening in their lives right now. He started as a piece of popcorn bounced off his forehead, jogging him out of his train of thought. He looked over at Tony who was watching him with concern in his eyes. “Thanks,” he said as he popped the piece in his mouth and returned to watching the opening scene. Tony nodded in response.

Not twenty minutes later, Tony’s dad appeared with a beer in hand and took up a position in the armchair to the side of the couch. “Ah man, not this again,” he said half-heartedly as he swiped their popcorn bowl and settled in. “How many times have you guys watched the movies in that box, huh? Must have seen them all a hundred times…”

“Shhhh, dad, this is the good part,” Tony said with a smirk. As his dad turned back to the screen he sprawled out a little more between the couch and the table, one arm on the armrest and the other coming around the back of the couch.

He took a second to marvel at how much Tony resembled a cat. Relaxed and content, yet ready to spring at a moment’s notice. Hair still neatly held in place by goodness knows what kind of hair product. He turned back to the television screen, now wondering since when had he taken to staring at Tony so much? But the longer Tony sat next to him, the more inviting his relaxed position seemed to be and he felt himself nodding off not much later.

“Is that comfortable?” he heard Tony whisper over the sound of his dad’s snores. Tony was lightly touching the back of his head that had slumped to his chest of it’s accord.

“Mmmm…mmhmm” he murmured sleepily as he shook his head lightly. Still sleepy, he leaned his weight to the left, his head finding Tony’s chest. When his move seemed to bring about no commotion, he tucked his legs onto the couch and let his body relax against Tony’s. He was about to ask if it was alright, but slowly Tony’s right arm made it’s way down to land on his side, fingers curled around his arm, softly keeping him right where he was. He let a small sigh escape him as he happily breathed in Tony’s aftershave, but before he drifted off he felt something brush the top of his head. His last thought before succumbing to sleep was ‘Was that a kiss?...’
He was vaguely aware that it was morning, sunlight streaming in through the window and falling against his closed eyelids. He took a deep breath, keeping his eyes closed, enjoying the subtle weight of Clay’s head still resting on his chest. The quiet rhythm of Clay’s breathing telling him that Clay was still asleep.

He hadn’t realized how tired Clay had been yesterday, but he had fallen asleep not halfway into the movie, not much past 9pm. For as long as he’d known Clay, he knew him to be a bit of a night owl, so the early night had surprised him almost as much as the cuddling. Almost.

Not that he didn’t enjoy having his arms wrapped around Clay, but he had to ask himself what it meant? As far as he knew Clay had been in love with Hannah. But there had been those rumors in 9th grade that Clay liked men...he had tried not to get his hopes up back then, figuring they were just rumors at the time. He tried telling himself that now too. All just rumors, and rumors had a dark history in their lives…

After all, he was with Brad, and Clay was probably just overly tired; he tried convincing himself. It had been hard for him to pull Clay in with just one arm, however. It felt so good to be next to him. It had felt even better when Clay leaned his body into him. He had allowed himself to lean his head down and ruffle Clay’s hair with his nose, just for a moment, when he was fairly certain that Clay had drifted off, taking in his slightly musky scent mixed with shampoo.

He had always tried his best to never make his friend feel uncomfortable, taking care that any touch was always welcome or initiated by Clay. But they had known each other for a long time, so it was only natural that they stood or walked closer to one another compared to other people, wasn’t it?

Brad wasn’t so easily convinced. He was always saying he and Clay were ‘pretty close’ and that they fought like an old married couple. It was a recurring theme in their arguments as of late.

Thinking of Brad, he felt a heaviness in his chest that had nothing to do with the weight of Clay’s head. He sighed, he had to meet Brad later at Monet’s for yet another ‘talk’. Brad, who had once been so comforting and supportive, especially when he had finally broken down and told him about the tapes, was acting differently. Lately he could tell there was something on Brad’s mind, and Brad was putting off talking about it. Instead, Brad seemed to be picking fights about random things. He tried to shake off the feeling of dread by shaking his head and opening his eyes.
He was just in time to catch sight of his mother rounding the corner.

“Hola mi hijo, you’re up early,” she said greeting him with a smile. “Do you and Clay want some breakfast?”

“Sure mama, thank you. We got to sleep pretty early, what time is it now?” he answered, searching for the clock even as he asked.

“Oh, about 6 dear. And I know, I came in and you all were snoring away. I collected your father and put a blanket on you two. I didn’t want to wake you, Clay looked so pale and tired at dinner I felt it best to just let him rest,” she said knowingly with a nod of her head.

He looked down noticing for the first time the blanket. “Thank you, ma, I’ll get up in a minute and help you with breakfast.” When he looked back up he saw his mother walking away, giving him a slight wave as an indication that she had heard him.

He looked down at Clay’s reclined body and reached up to comb his fingers through his hair. After a few passes through, he heard a change in Clay’s breathing and noticed the stirrings of Clay waking up.

“Morning sleepyhead,” he said quietly, softly raking his fingers down the back of Clay’s slender neck.

“Mmm, morning,” Clay replied. Clay pushed into his hand slightly for a moment, then began to sit up, wiping the sleep from his eyes. “Oh man, I was really out of it, sorry about that.”

“No worries man. You needed some rest, nothing to be sorry for,” he replied, taking stock of Clay’s still sleepy eyes, lingering on his pouted lips.

“No, I mean I’m sorry for drooling on your shirt,” Clay said, pointing towards his chest.

He looked down to assess the damage when suddenly Clay’s outstretched finger bopped him in the nose.

“Ha, gotcha! You gotta be faster than that in the morning,” he said laughing, dodging as he wiped at him with a fist.

“Haha, I shouldn’t worry about you if you’re cracking corny jokes! C’mon, let’s go get some breakfast,” he said, already getting up from the couch and stretching. He felt his back release a few pops and he breathed a sigh of relief.

“Hey Tony, I AM sorry about that. You could have moved me, I was dead to the world I probably wouldn’t have even noticed.”

“I was asleep to, I didn’t even hear everyone else get home,” he said, which was true. Maybe he had needed a quiet night in just as much as Clay did. They made their way into the kitchen where they could smell the delicious aroma of scrambled eggs.

The three were finishing clearing the table of their small but hearty breakfast of eggs with vegetables and salsa, when his father rounded the corner.

“Ah, early risers on a Saturday, what’s the plan for the day boys?” He said as he made a B-line for the coffee maker, kissing his wife on the way and accepting her offering of leftovers from breakfast.
“Well, I’ve got a shift at 10 at the movie theater,” Clay said, standing at the counter waiting to dry the dishes Tony was washing and handing over.

“I’m meeting Brad for coffee later, then I’ll be by the shop,” he said, sneaking a sideways glance at Clay. He couldn’t say why, but he wanted to see if Clay had a reaction to his boyfriend’s name. He didn’t seem to.

“Mmm, you guys still doing that? You don’t seem to spend much time together anymore.”

“Dad!” he said with a tilt of his head and an annoyed glance in his direction, despite his dad clearly not paying attention. However, he noticed that Clay’s head had shot up at his dad’s statement. He licked his lips and continued with a shrug, “I dunno, all he wants to do lately is argue without saying what’s really bothering him.”

His dad seemed to think on it a bit while he sipped his coffee. “Well, everyone disagrees and argues, it’s part of life. He’ll tell you what’s wrong when he’s ready, you just have to be patient.”

“So wise, mi corazon,” his mother said, giving his dad a pat on the cheek and a kiss. She turned back to him and said, “Before you run off, mi hijo, would you mind running these plates back to Mara? I’ve got to leave for work or I’ll be late!” She gestured to a stack of three blue plates on the island counter and turned to leave. “Oh, and don’t forget to invite her to the neighborhood barbeque next weekend!”

“Of course, ma,” he said, handing off the last dish to Clay. “We got a new neighbor last week and ma just had to have her over to meet everyone. You wanna go with me and then I can give you a lift home?”

“Sure, sounds good!” Clay said, hanging the dish towel.

“You might like her, she reminds me a bit of Skye.”

“You mean scary?” Clay replied, making him and his dad snort with laughter, “Not really my type. I just make an exception for Skye because we were friends when we were kids.”

“Skye’s not that bad,” he tried to say nicely.

His dad laughed, “Skye has nothing on Mara as far as scary goes. And watch out for the dog.”

“Dog?!” Clay said apprehensively.

“It’s fine, she’s not that bad, you’ll be fine,” he said, laughing to try and lighten the mood.

“Mmhmm, well just be careful, you don’t have that kind of dog unless you’ve got something to guard. Girl can take care of herself though, I’ll give her that. Tried to show her some self-defense moves since this isn’t the best part of town, she nearly knocked me out! In my own backyard!” his dad said, shaking his head, making Clay look concerned.

“Really, she’s not that bad,” he said, trying to be reassuring. He grabbed the plates and headed towards the door with Clay in tow. “Oh,” he said turning to meet Clay’s gaze, “whatever you do though, don’t try and touch the dog, he doesn’t like it.” He walked quickly again, not giving Clay a chance to back out.
They crossed the street and took a right, Mara was renting 2 houses down. He spared a glance at Clay, who looked a little nervous. “She really is great, I don’t think she’s hiding anything,” he said, trying again to be reassuring.

Clay looked at him like he didn’t believe him, then said, “Actually, I’m thinking about the dog… I’ve gotten chased by a lot of them on my bike. The Clark’s down the street from me have this collie…” he trailed off, raising his hands in question.

“Ooh,” he said with a raise of his eyebrows and a nod, “that makes sense then why you always take the long way to get to your house.” Clay shot him a surprised look, but they were at the driveway. He stopped and put his hand out so Clay was stopped on the sidewalk instead of going up the drive. The garage door was open and he knew from experience owner and dog were bound to be close by.

“Mara!” he called, ignoring Clay’s questioning look, he would find out soon enough.

“Hey Tony!” came a voice from the backyard. “I’ll be right out!”

As they waited, Tony tried to read Clay’s face. Mara was blonde haired and blue eyed, covered in colorful tattoos, and from his brother’s reactions to her, very easy on the eyes. Again though, he had trouble reading Clay’s response. The wide eyes could have been for her or the giant black mastiff at her side. He frowned slightly, wondering why he cared so much all the sudden who Clay found attractive. He turned towards the pair coming towards them. The dog was quite a sight, he wasn’t sure of the breed as his owner had only vaguely admitted that he was a mixed breed, but he was sure that mastiff had to be mixed in somewhere.

“My mom wanted me to return these to you, and to make sure again that you know about the barbeque,” he said with a slight roll of his eyes. It had become a bit of a joke between them as his mom had invited her no less than 15 times already.

“Haha, well thank you and tell her I’ll definitely be there with some more dessert,” she said as she accepted the plates with a mock bow.

“Will do,” he said with a nod, the he gestured to Clay, “This is my friend Clay by the way. Clay, Mara. Mara, Clay.”

“Nice to meet you,” Clay said as he nervously shot his hand out towards her, earning himself a warning growl from the giant opposite him. Clay immediately retracted the hand, instead grabbing Tony’s arm and stepping in closer. He could feel Clay pressed at his side and it was quite distracting, so much so that he almost forgot Mara was there.

“Sorry about that, he’s not very trusting of strangers,” Mara said, setting a warning hand on the dog’s back. “This is Lewis, by the way. He’s great once you get to know him, but very protective.”

“It’s ok, Clay’s just had some run-ins with dogs on his bike, you know how it goes. And Lewis is a pretty big dog.”

“Oh yes, Lewis loves to chase things. I’d tell you not to run if he comes after you, but either way would end badly,” she said glancing at the dog. “So, Tony,” she continued with a swat to his other arm, “no more Brad then huh?” Indicating Clay’s hand, still on his arm and seemingly reluctant to let go.

“Oh, no, uh, Clay really is my friend, we had a movie night last night and I’m giving him a ride
after this. I’m meeting Brad for coffee in a bit,” he tried to look excited at the thought.

“Oooh, ok,” she said, a knowing look in her eye as she looked at him. “Well I hope it goes well, you should come by after.”

“Thanks, I’ll tell you about it later.”

“Ok, well bye boys. Nice to meet you Clay! Hope to see you at the barbeque!” she said as she turned, dog in tow.

“Nice to meet you too,” Clay said from beside him.

“Dude, that dog is huge,” Clay said as soon as they had crossed the street.

“I told you. So, what did you think of Mara?” he asked.

“She seems nice, despite being utterly crazy for having a dog like that,” Clay responded with a shrug.

“You don’t think she’s, I dunno, pretty?”

“I really wasn’t paying attention, dude, a little busy trying not to become a hell hound’s next meal! Uh, I like her tattoos though, they remind me of yours.”

He was glad Clay wasn’t looking at him because he had broken into a smile. That had to be good if Clay met someone attractive and thought of him…Right?

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 2 is all about introducing some characters, and setting up for events to come. As always, thank you so much for reading!
Chapter Summary

Tony is acting strangely, and Clay is determined to get to the bottom of it

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clay

It was just another boring gym class that Thursday. He was hanging back as Coach explained the rules of basketball, trying to catch Tony’s eye. He was worried about Tony, all week he had seemed preoccupied, even skipping a few of his classes. Part of him wondered if Tony was distancing himself after their night on the couch the past weekend. He had seemed fine Saturday morning though?

It was eating at him that Tony had been sailing by him all week without so much as a second glance. He was determined to get to the bottom of it. Tony had always been there for him, how did he do it? Tony always seemed to be able to anticipate his every move, knowing what he needed before he knew it himself. He sighed, disappointed in his inability to be as helpful.

Coach was pairing them off into teams and giving them positions, he landed a forward position and noticed Tony was a guard for the rival team. Like most other sports, he was not good at basketball, trying his best to pass the ball each time a team member threw it his way. Despite his best efforts to get next to Tony, the man was a running machine; flying up and down the court with the guys who were actually on their school’s basketball team. It was amazing to watch, but frustrating that he couldn’t get a word in.

Coach called for a time out as he switched out some players. He took the opportunity to try and talk to Tony.

“Hey, you alright man?” he asked as Tony wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“Fine Clay. Just needed some exercise I guess,” he said as he ran a hand through his hair, slicking it back into place.

“I mean this week…”

“Jensen!” Coach yelled, “back in the game, no fraternizing with the other team.”

He watched as Tony ran back to his position, not realizing they were in play again. Next thing he knew his teammate was yelling and waving a hand at him, he frowned for a fraction of a second before getting hit in the face by the basketball, followed by the body of an opposing team member who was trying to intercept the pass. He went down in a crumpled heap, smacking the back of his head on the court in the process.

From there things got a little blurry, Coach’s yells to give him some space ringing in his ears. And then a face appeared above his – Tony! He felt Tony’s hands cradle his head, velvety tones calling
his name, echoing through the pounding in his head.

“Clay! Clay, man, are you alright? Can you hear me?” concern written in the creases of Tony’s forehead.

He responded with a thumbs up.

“Do you feel like anything’s broken?”

He shook his head ‘No’, but that was the wrong thing to do. He felt his head swimming and watched as little stars floated in front of his vision as he tried not to lose his lunch. He let out a groan as he tried to will the room to stop spinning.

He heard the coach yell for a bucket somewhere in the background as Tony gently began to sit him up. One moment admiring how strong Tony was, and the next hurling in the gym trash can.

“I think he’s got a concussion, Coach, I should take him to the hospital,” he heard Tony say.

“Yeah alright, it looks pretty bad, take the bucket with you though.”

“Sure.”

He felt a hand on his back and looked up slowly to see the water Tony was offering him.

“In case you want to rinse.”

There it was again, Tony anticipating exactly what he needed before it even crossed his mind.

“I feel better now, it’s probably nothing,” he said, trying to downplay the booming in his head.

“This ain’t nothing Clay, you hit your head pretty hard. Twice,” Tony said, reaching up to tenderly touch the scar on his face. He could already tell he was going to have a bruise. “It’s like you have a target on that side of your forehead,” Tony continued with a wince.

Agreeing, he allowed Tony to lead him out of the gym towards the parking lot.

“Wait, shouldn’t I call my mom, I don’t have my ID or anything.”

“I’ll take care of it,” Tony said as he sat him on a bench in the hall and handed him the bucket. He turned back and headed towards the locker room.

“Wait! Tony?”

“Yes Clay?”

“Can you get me an empty trashcan for the ride, I don’t want to spill this in your car.”

He saw Tony’s eyebrows shoot up, “Really Clay? How are you always the most polite person I know? Even with a concussion?” he laughed.

He shrugged, “I dunno?” Dropping back to the bucket after trying to shake his head again, too much movement still.

“Hold on buddy,” he heard Tony say as he ran to the lockers.
“Did you break my gym lock?” he mused, almost to himself in the waiting room of the ER.

Tony looked up briefly from the admittance paperwork to shoot him a look, then went back to filling out the information from the card in his wallet. He felt silly that they had been in such a rush to get here, just to sit and wait. They could have changed into normal clothing at least, he felt self-conscious sitting in his gym shorts and tee. At least Tony had his tattoos. He snuck a peek at greaser friend, how did he still look good in gym clothes? How was that fair?

“Okay, on to patient history,” Tony declared. “Any medications?”

“Uh…”

Tony looked up at his pause, glancing down at where his fingers were beating a rhythm onto his thighs. “You don’t have to tell me, you can just write it down, and then we’ll be on the last page, ah, family history, which, for a concussion, I’m sure we can skip,” he said, flipping through the paperwork.

“No, no, it’s fine, really. It’s just that…well, I have a prescription for anxiety meds, but I haven’t taken them since I was a kid,” he looked down, avoiding eye contact. He wasn’t ashamed of Tony knowing about his anxiety, but he didn’t want to know how Tony would respond to the fact that he hadn’t been taking them.

“Alright. Well if you’re not taking them, we probably shouldn’t write it down. Keep things simple.”

He looked up with a raised eyebrow, “You’re not going to lecture me about not taking my meds?” he asked with trepidation, there had to be a catch.

“Do you feel anxious?”

“No…” replied with a squint. In part because the bright lights were bothering him, and in part because he was trying to figure what Tony was getting at.

“Ok then, that’s that,” Tony said with a nod and a set to his lips. “I will, however, lecture you on paying attention in gym class…Is it your goal to get hit in the head in every sport?”

“Hey, you hit me in the head with that rock!”

“That was an accident! And we were out for a walk, I’m talking about gym class,” Tony replied with a smile.

They shared a laugh, settling back into the hard chairs now that the paperwork was done with.

“What were you thinking about anyway? You had your Clay Jensen, ‘I’m not here right now, please leave a message’ look on your face,” Tony said with concern, leaning forward again, elbows atop his knees. He liked the way Tony gave him that little bit of extra space, looking back to watch him. It felt so different from the way his mom got right up to him, as if she could soak up the answers she wanted through mere proximity.

He swallowed, preparing himself, “You just seem, like…like you’re having a hard week or something. You seem off and distant and I just,” he sighed. “I just don’t know how to help you or what you need,” he blurted, shrugging and looking at the opposite wall.

“Whoa, whoa,” Tony said with a wave of his hand. “It’s just something I have to get through, there’s nothing to worry about.”
“Yeah, well, I just feel clueless and helpless…”

“Ok, let me stop you right there. I’m fine, just going through some stuff. This isn’t a repeat of history. I’m sorry you feel helpless Clay, but you do help. You’re always there for me and I know that.” Tony paused, looking like he was about to say something else. Just then a nurse called for a Clay Jensen.

“Shut up,” he growled at Tony over the top of the red mustang. Sure, he was a big help getting through that doctor’s appointment, but Tony hadn’t stopped laughing since the doctor had suggested Clay wear protective head gear during team sports. “I’m not doing that, so you can just keep driving me to the hospital,” he said as he settled into the passenger seat.

“I’m sorry, I really am, man,” Tony said, still laughing as he gracefully slid into the car, shifting his weight towards the door after it was shut and leaning an elbow out of the window. Tony looked at him as he wiped a tear from his cheek, trying to stifle another chuckle as he put the keys in the ignition.

“Mmmhmmm…you know where you can stick that apology…”

“Brad broke up with me Saturday,” Tony interrupted. Quieting his laughter as he heaved a sigh and stared out the windshield.

“Oh, shit man, I’m so sorry.”

“Yeah, you know, it sucks, but it’s part of life. But that’s what’s been going on this week,” Tony said tiredly, glancing over at him.

“Gosh man, I’m so sorry. I don’t know what to say? Do you want some ice cream?” he asked, eliciting half of a laugh from Tony. “Want to T.P. his house? Should I go beat him up? You tell me, what’s gonna help you out?”

By now he had Tony laughing again. “You think if I wanted someone beaten up I’d ask you and not my brothers?”

“Well, ya know, if you didn’t really want him to get hurt, then yeah,” he said with a shrug, catching Tony’s amused glance.

“Naw, naw, thanks though Clay. I appreciate it, I really do,” he sighed again. “It feels better just to say it out loud, ya know?”

“Yeah, I do,” he remembered the tapes and how hard it was to keep them to himself for as long as he did. He looked over at Tony. “You want to talk about it?” he offered.

“Nothing much to talk about,” Tony shrugged. “He graduated in the spring and he’s leaving for college in Sacramento. He’d been wanting to tell me for a while, but just didn’t know how to say it. He’d been picking fights with me for the past few weeks, trying to get me to break up with him first I think.”

“That’s too bad, Brad was nice,” was all he could think of to say, even as his stomach felt suddenly like it was housing a swarm of butterflies, and he know that it had nothing to do with his concussion.

“Well, as far as the nice department goes, he was definitely a step up from Ryan,” Tony said as he revved the engine, looking over his shoulder before pulling out of the parking lot.
“You said it, not me.”

Tony nodded as they sped down the road, hand catching the wind.

“Mom, mom, I’m fine, really,” he said trying to fend off his mom’s doting arms in the front hall of the house.

“Oh, my baby…”

“He checked out just fine Mrs. Jensen. Really, I have his discharge paperwork right here. Clay just needs some rest…and a helmet,” Tony reassured his mom, at the same time dodging his half-hearted kick. He really shouldn’t be giving his mom any more reason to be the helmet police.

“Oh, thank you Tony! I’m so glad you were there to take care of him. Who knows what they would have done? Given him an ice pack at the nurse’s office and sent him back to class? He could have been really hurt!”

“Actually, mom, an icepack sounds good right about now, I also got hit in the face with a basketball,” he said quickly.

“Oh Clay, of course baby, I’ll meet you upstairs,” she said as she rushed towards the kitchen.

“You need help up the stairs, don’t you?” Tony guessed, smiling.

“Dude, I’m still pretty dizzy. But you can’t tell my mom…”

“I got you Clay,” Tony said as he took him by the arm and helped him slowly up the stairs towards his bed.

“Thanks Tony,” he said as he settled in.

“No problem! You get some rest, I’ll check on you later. If you’re up for it you should come by Sunday for our neighborhood’s barbeque.”

“Are you kidding? I wouldn’t miss your dad’s grilling no matter what I did to my head! I’d crawl there if I had to!”

“Haha, I’ll pick you up on the way home from the shop, I’m sure your mom’s not letting you near your bike for at least the rest of the week!” Tony said as he made his way towards the door of Clay’s room. He turned suddenly, “And Clay, thanks again for, you know, listening.”

“Always,” he said, his response treating him to a genuine smile before Tony turned to go.

‘Hmmm,’ he thought as he watched Tony leave, ‘at least if he has to go, I get a nice view.’ Startled, he thought, ‘Now where did that thought come from...?’

Chapter End Notes

I really hate seeing any of my precious babes hurting, but nurse Tony is just too adorable to pass up...and Clay is there for Tony as well. Thank you for reading!
Much more to come...
“Honey, there’s only so much you can comb your hair.”

He looked up from the side mirror of his mustang to throw a glare Mara’s way. They were waiting at the shop for Skye before heading to pick up Clay for the barbeque. She was leaning on an old El Camino, watching him with a smirk as he shoved his comb into his back pocket.

“Besides, it looks good a little messy,” she added, striding over. He had to swat at her hands as she tried to muss up his hair. She really did remind him of his siblings.

“Hey now, leave it be sis, I just got it where I like it,” he laughed.

“You two lovebirds ready to go?” they heard Skye call from behind them. She smiled as she walked up.

“Almost, this one has to have his hair perfect for Clay.”

“Hey!” he warned, lightly swatting Mara on the shoulder. “Don’t go gossiping!”

Skye got a gleam in her eye and began to rummage through her purse, “You know what you need Tony?”

He didn’t, and he didn’t want to find out. “You ladies getting in the car or staying here? C’mon, let’s go.”

“Now hold on, Skye’s got a point,” Mara said with her hand at her chin, finger tapping her lips pensively. She turned to Skye, “He is missing something…”

He huffed, trying to look annoyed as she turned and grabbed her purse from the hood of the other car.

“No, no…no,” he said with a shake of his head as Skye held up what he knew could only be eyeliner. “I am not doing that. Get in the car,” he said as he started to open his door.

“Oh, come on Tony! Just a little, it would look so good on you…” Mara begged, linking arms
with Skye and pouting. Both girls nodded, watching him expectantly and not making any move towards the vehicle.

He shut his door, biting his lower lip. “If, IF, I let you do this, can we go then?” he said, knowing that they were probably right. He knew he should just get in the car and threaten to drive off, but a part of him was curious if it would look good.

“Yes!” they shouted in unison. God, girls were loud. Why were they so loud all the time? He tried to stand still as they fluttered around him with the dark eye pencil.

“This comes off easily, right?” he asked, just in case they made him look too much like a racoon.

“Yes, yes, you’ll be fine. Really this is just for our benefit, but if Clay likes it maybe you should do it more often…” Mara said with a smirk. He should never have said anything to her about that, but it had been nice to have a friend to talk to about Brad. And, as with any friendship, they had talked about other things too, Clay being one of them.

“You are pretty handsome Tony,” Skye admitted as she switched to his other eye, “You know, I wouldn’t even be mad if Clay was more interested in you than me.” She gave him a sideways smile and turned his face so she could look at her work head on. “That’ll do I think, now just a touch of mascara,” she said, letting his face go and looking at Mara for approval. Mara nodded in consent and Skye proceeded with the wand. After a minute they looked at each other, high-fived, and filed into the backseat of the mustang.

He was nervous to see what she had done to his face, but was pleasantly surprised when he checked himself out in the rearview mirror. Skye had had a light touch with the eyeliner, making his eyes pop but still leaving him feeling masculine. He thought it actually looked pretty decent against his dark skin, completing his style nicely.

“Alright, we’re off,” he said as he pulled out of the parking lot in the direction of Clay’s house. He tried to push his anxious feelings down. Clay probably wouldn’t even notice, he tried to tell himself. Though he found himself wishing that he would. Since when had Clay made him feel so self-conscious?

Clay climbed into the passenger seat, setting a bowl of ranch dip in his lap and a bag of cut vegetables on the floor between his feet. It had only been a few days since his concussion, but the bruise over his scar was already a healthy mixture of blue and green.

“Hey brother, you look like you’re feeling better,” he told him, fist bumping as he pulled away from the curb.

“Yeah, thanks, I’m feeling much better. No more pounding headache or dizziness,” Clay answered looking his direction. He got an odd look on his face, looking from him into the backseat and back again, “Are...are you wearing makeup?”

He thumped his non-driving hand on his lap in defeat. “Fuck. It was the condition that was made for asses to get in the car,” he said, pointing and glancing over at Clay. “This is not how I normally spend my day,” he added, glaring in the rearview at the snickering coming from the backseat.

“Oh, yeah. Well, uh, it looks good. They did a good job,” Clay remarked nonchalantly, nodding his head. “Although I don’t know how,” he said taking another look in the backseat, “they’re both wearing a ton of the stuff.”
“Tony doesn’t need a ton of makeup, Clay,” Skye piped up from the backseat.

“Okay, I’ve had enough of this. We’re listening to music the rest of the way there,” he said, popping in a cassette. Although it did nothing to despair the girl’s chatter in the backseat, at least his eyes were no longer the topic of conversation in the car. He did, however, feel a tingle of happiness that Clay had indeed noticed.

It was quite a block party, almost all their neighbors were out and in full force. Music blaring from someone’s garage, tables of food out everywhere, it was a regular fiesta. After saying hello to his parents, Clay had dropped of the dip at their table and they began snacking and chatting with a few of his older brothers.

“Oye, Clay, por que no trabajas en la tienda de reparacion con Tony?” asked Alejandro, his eldest brother.

“Oh, I’m not very good at fixing things, I’d just be in the way at the shop. Besides, I like my job at the theater,” Clay answered.

“You could always work with us, make a few bucks on the side if you want,” his other brother, Hector, said. He put a hand out towards his brother’s chest to stop him from saying anything further. Just then his dad called for some help moving the grill and his brothers moved to help.

“Hey, Tony, why do we take French?” Clay asked him suddenly.

“What?” he said, with a confused frown. What did French have to do with anything?

“I mean, we speak Spanish all the time, why are we bothering with French? You don’t even have that good of a grade in French?”

“But I already speak Spanish, why would I need to learn it?” he replied, just glad Clay didn’t pursue his brother’s offer.

“For an easy A?” Clay said, searching his face for understanding, and finding none. “Never mind. Should we go rescue Skye?” he said, pointing down the street.

He followed the direction of Clay’s hand to see the youngest of his older brothers leaning close to Skye trying to show her his new chest tattoo.

“Hijo de puta!” he exclaimed, setting down his coke, “Yeah, let’s go.”

He was surprised to hear laughter as they approached, had he read Skye’s body language wrong? But then he heard his brother swear at her in Spanish and storm off. At least Skye was laughing.

“What did you say to him to make him call you that?” he asked as Skye flipped her hair back, looking pleased with herself.

She smiled devilishly, “Oh not much, just telling him his new tattoo makes his chest look flat. Mmm, and that it looked like a penis.”

“Wow, way to crush a man’s soul there dear,” Mara said as she sauntered up, offering Skye a beer.

“Yeah, no wonder he didn’t like that,” he said, laughing and thumbing his lip as he looked down at the pavement. He was a little sorry he had missed it, but he did feel bad for his brother. He had
thought the same thing when he had first seen the tattoo, he just didn’t say it out loud.

“So, what are you guys doing after this if you’re not drinking?” Mara asked, turning towards him and Clay.

Clay looked at him and said, “I dunno, I think this is it.”

He nodded in agreement, wondering what Mara had up her sleeve. He knew she worked tonight but wasn’t sure what she was angling at.

“You should come visit me at work then!”

Ah, there it was.

“Sure, ok. Where do you work?” he heard Clay say. He shot him a quick look, clearly Clay wasn’t aware of Mara’s job.

“Ah, Clay,” he said carefully, “Mara works at a bar on the outskirts of town.”

“Oh, come on, we’re having a fun theme night. I can get you in, you don’t have to drink or anything, just come and have a good time,” she tried to persuade. “Come on Tony, you need a fun night out, you haven’t been anywhere since you and Brad broke up, you could use a laugh,” she said, rubbing his arm. He knew she meant well, but he was reluctant to appease her.

“You and Brad broke up?” Skye asked. She actually looked halfway interested. “See, I knew there was a reason I felt compelled to do your makeup.”

“Ok la bruja, I’m sure you would enjoy putting makeup on anything, there’s nothing mystical about that.”

“No, I’m serious Tony. You guys should go! I’ve been, and it’s a lot of fun!”

“You’ve been?! To where she works?” he said, not really knowing why he was surprised.

“Yes, she has! And she had a great time, everyone loved her,” Mara said with a sly smile and wink at Skye.

He looked at Clay, who raised his eyebrows and shoulders as if to say, ‘Why not?’ How was he getting sucked into this, he thought? Clay’s whims should not hold this much power over him.

“Really? You really want to go? You can say no, ya know,” he told Clay.

“I’ve never been to a bar, sounds kind of fun,” Clay responded, cuffing him on the shoulder. “Besides, you should get out and have some fun! You’re always so stoic.”

“I have fun,” he bristled. Knowing he was outnumbered, though, he consented. He had been wanting to check it out for a while now, and who better to go with than Clay?

“Oh yeah! I’ll text Carl with your names, you’ll be able to walk right in,” Mara said, taking out her cell phone. She looked up at Clay, “It’s ‘The Lion’s Den’ down on 15th. Have you heard of it?”

“No, I haven’t,” Clay replied, looking at him as if for an explanation. He had to smile, Clay was so innocent it almost hurt sometimes. But he was just so damn cute.

“I have a feeling you’ll really like it! See you guys there!” Mara said, waving goodbye, heading for her house with Skye in tow.
“How come you had the hook-up at a fun bar, and we haven’t been yet?” Clay accused, turning towards him.

“Do you not know what the 15th street district is?” he asked, trying to feel for the best way to ease Clay into the answer.

“No. Why, what is it? What is ‘The Lion’s Den’?”

“Clay - it’s a gay bar,” he said, hand outstretched, finding no other way to say it. He squinted slightly, searching Clay’s face as he processed the information. He looked for any signs of uncertainty or regret, but found none.

“Ooooh, ok! You scared me, I thought it was like a drug trafficking street or something. You’ve got to work on your delivery, man.”

“And…you don’t have a problem going to a gay bar’s theme night?” He felt the urge to ask. Clay was his friend, but he hadn’t shared a whole lot of that part of his life with him.

“No, why would I have a problem?”

“I just mean that you don’t have to go if you don’t want to. I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable if guys are hitting on you or wanting to dance with you...”

“No, I’m fine,” Clay said with a reassuring clap on his arm. “Besides, I like both men and women.”
Chapter Summary

Clay an Tony head to the club, where a surprise awaits them...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Clay

He took in the sight of Tony’s frozen face with amusement. It wasn’t often that he surprised Tony, and he was going to treasure every second of it.

Gazing into Tony’s eyes he found that he couldn’t look away from their dark depths, the eyeliner making them even more striking. And since when had his lashes gotten so long, he pondered.

“Come again?” Tony finally asked as he straightened. He looked as though he was trying for a neutral face and failing.

“I’m fine, I want to go to the bar.”

“No, not that part, the other…” Tony fumbled, as he waved his free hand in the air as if to conjure up some sort of explanation.

“Ooh, I like men and women,” he replied with a nod, taking in the cute way Tony’s eyes squinted when he was thinking.

Tony nodded and pursed his lips. “Ok then, so you’ll be comfortable. If you’re not, though, we should come up with a signal in case one of us needs to be rescued.”

“That’s a good plan,” he thought out loud, relieved Tony wasn’t asking him to elaborate. That was the wonderful thing about Tony, he was so accepting. And handsome. He let his thoughts wander as he pretended to think, finally saying “How about yelling like a crow? Just like a big ol’ ‘Caw caw, Caw caw’!”

He was treated to a very hearty laugh from Tony, who answered, “I forgot you’ve never been to a club before, it’s going to be noisy as hell Clay! How about we just give the peace sign if we’re in trouble?”

He nodded, it sounded easy to remember.

“Ok man, let’s get some of the carne asada before my brothers eat it all,” Tony said, leading him back towards his driveway.

As Tony seemed preoccupied with thoughts of food, he took the opportunity to stare at him. The eyeliner really did look good. Tony looked like a sultry GQ cover from the top of his perfectly shaped hair down to his laced-up army boots and dark denim jeans. He couldn’t help but linger on the line his shoulders cut in the leather jacket…
“Hey, brother,” he heard Tony say, shaking him out of his daydream.

“How?”

“You want spicy, or not?” Tony asked, clearly not for the first time.

“Uh, better not, thanks,” he replied.

“Ok, here ya go,” Tony said, handing over a plate. “You all right there, you were kind of spacing out a bit?”

“Yeah, no, I’m fine, he assured him. “It’s just…” he paused.

“Yes Clay?”

“I don’t have anything to wear tonight.”

“Oh, it’s ok, you can borrow one of my shirts,” Tony answered, looking him up and down. “You’re about my size, I’m sure we can find something,” he said as he sat on the curb to eat his food.

He sat next to Tony and couldn’t wipe the smile off his face as he enjoyed the meal. He was going to get to wear something of Tony’s, that smelled like Tony, and nothing could bring him down.

“How about this?” Tony asked, holding up a plaid navy button up.

“I don’t know…” he started, watching a shirtless Tony pick through a drawer, trying to keep his mind from thinking of ways to get Tony to change his jeans as well. He shook his head, displacing the mental image.

“With an undershirt, of course,” Tony said, pulling out a white tank top.

“Ahh, ok, then yes, looks good,” he pulled his shirt off over his head and reached for the tops.

“Are you going to wear those shoes?” Tony asked as he rummaged through the closet he shared with his brother.

“What’s wrong with my shoes,” he asked, looking down at his pair of Converse’s. He pulled on the button up and began to flatten the collar.

“Nothing’s wrong, it’s just…” Tony stopped as he looked back. “Yeah, not with that shirt, we’ll go with a solid color,” he decided, tossing him another button up, this time in solid navy.

“What are you wearing?” he asked, curious, as he switched shirts.

“I’m not sure,” Tony said, looking back at him from where he was surveying the closet. “What do you think I should wear?” he asked as he looked him up and down, obviously approving of the change.

“Umm…” he said, taking the opportunity to cross the room and stand next to him, pretending to be looking at the selection instead of Tony. “Where’s that white one with the button up V-neck?”

“You like that one?”
“Uh yeah, it looks good on you. Especially with your leather jacket.” He could feel himself begin to turn red under Tony’s inquisitive gaze, “but, I mean, I dunno, what do you think?”

“No, no, I’ll wear that one,” Tony said as he stepped away, grabbing the shirt in question and putting it on, jacket close behind. He turned back, arms wide as if looking for final comment.

He felt his throat tighten and didn’t trust himself to speak, so he just nodded in approval.

He was surprised to see a line outside the building, a single ‘The Lion’s Den’ sign in small letters the only other indication of the popular spot.

“I didn’t even know this was out here,” he said, trying to get his bearings.

“There’s really nothing much here, especially if you’re on your bike,” Tony answered, leading them towards the head of the line where a massive bouncer stood, guarding the set of double doors. “Carl?” he asked tentatively.

“Who’s asking?”

“Tony and Clay, Mara said she put us on the list?”

“Ah yes, she mentioned that. You’ll probably find her near the bar, she’s working the tables tonight,” the muscular man said as he opened a door for them, music and lights enveloping them on the sidewalk.

“Thanks!” Tony said as they walked in.

He leaned in closer so he could hear Tony say, “Now, we should meet back here if we get separated.”

“I don’t want to get separated,” he said, placing a hand quickly on the small of Tony’s back.

“Ok, but I’m just saying if we do.”

“Alright, but please don’t leave me, this place is a lot louder than I expected…” he remarked as he looked around. The bar was to their right, opening up into a dancefloor lined with tables and chairs, a stage with a single pole on the far side of the room.

He jumped in surprise as he felt Tony take him by the hand. “Don’t worry, I won’t let anything happen to you,” Tony said with a smile and a slight squeeze. He turned and led them towards a few open barstools. He could feel the cold band of Tony’s ring and hung onto that thought, nervously running his thumb up and down Tony’s knuckles.

Before they even reached the bar, they were intercepted by a smiling Mara dressed simply in black shorts and white tank top, the only spot color a bright red bow tie around her neck.

“You guys made it! I’m so happy! And you’re just in time! Follow me!” she said, taking Tony’s other hand and leading them towards a booth nearest the stage. The sign read ‘Reserved’ and already had several, very muscular men sitting at it, dressed in the same manner as Mara. Clay scooted into the booth while Tony took the spot on the end.

“Ok, we’re almost up, I’ve gotta go, enjoy yourselves!” she said, placing a light kiss on Tony’s forehead. “Promise me you’ll stay for some dancing, and get at least one guy’s phone number! Or, ya know, do something fun, you don’t have to get his number,” she said with a wink, leaving
before Tony could protest.

“I thought this was a theme night,” he said looking around.

“Oh, it’s a theme night,” said the guy next to him with a smile, gesturing towards the stage. He looked at Tony, who also looked like he didn’t have a clue. The guy continued, “Magic Mike! It’s a stripper theme!”

His head shot around to look at Tony’s reaction. Tony raised his eyebrows and shrugged. He guessed they were really staying for this…not that he minded all that much.

He started to get anxious as the other men started filing out of the booth.

“Uh, Tony, where are they going? Should we be sitting here?”

“I think they’re the entertainment….” Tony replied, looking towards where the men had disappeared.

“What?! She doesn’t expect us to dance, right? That is not going to be pretty…” he said, his anxiety doubling. He had no coordination and he was still sporting that bruise on his forehead.

“I don’t think so Clay, she wouldn’t do that,” Tony said as Mara took the stage, introducing the first dancer.

He settled in closer to Tony. Even though they had the whole booth to themselves, he still felt more comfortable pressed against Tony from knee to shoulder. If he hadn’t been watching, he would have missed the small smile on Tony’s face as the back of their hands brushed.

The first two dances passed quickly, startling him. He had never seen a strip show, figuring they would just take off clothes, but he was pleasantly surprised it was more like risqué gymnastics. Especially the second dancer, who seemed set on being the comedic relief to the show. Laughing, he felt himself relaxing. And as he did, he could feel the stiffness start to thaw from Tony’s body as well.

Just as the second dancer finished, Mara came back out, introducing the next act – a Diva by the name of Dotty Von Tease. Another dancer brought a folding chair to the center of the stage as Miss Von Tease took the stage amidst raucous applause, calling out for a volunteer from the audience.

He turned to say something to Tony, when he felt himself pulled up and out of the booth, hurtled towards the stage where Mara was waiting to pull him up.

“And we have a winner!” he heard Dotty call.

“Wait, wait, I can’t dance!” he said frantically to Mara as she gestured towards his body, showing him off like Vanna White, much to the pleasure of the crowd.

“Turn him around!” the crowd yelled. Obviously, this happened here enough that they knew what to expect.

“You don’t have to do anything, just sit in your chair and don’t touch the dancers,” she said as she turned his back to the crowd, beginning to pull his button up down over his shoulders.

He was about to protest, but she leaned in and whispered, “For Tony! Look at him, I’ve never seen him so happy!”
He looked over, spotting the biggest grin he had ever seen across Tony’s face. They made eye contact for a second and he turned back, sighing. “Alright,” he said, giving in with a roll of his eyes. This was really not his cup of tea, but in that moment, he felt he would do anything to keep Tony smiling that way.

“Oh!” she yelled, relieving him of the button up before leaving him in the hands of the other dancers, who led him to the chair where he was instructed to sit on his hands and smile.

It was hard not to smile, although he was a little embarrassed, feeling awkward knowing everyone was staring at him, including Tony. When it was over and he was allowed up, Mara made him take a bow before he was allowed back to the booth to an awaiting Tony, who stood to applaud him.

“Man, that was great, I was sure you wouldn’t stay up there,” Tony laughed as he patted him on the back, clearly having a good time.

“I wasn’t going to do it, but you looked so happy…” he said as he slid into the booth, not realizing until he looked up that Tony was no longer beside him. He looked around frantically before spotting him being lifted onto the stage himself. Tony looked to be denying Mara, waving his arms as the music started.

Another dancer relieved Tony of his jacket, tossing it to Mara, who was now backing up towards the pole on the left side of the stage. He saw Tony laugh as she put on his jacket and scaled the pole, taking a seat at the top, appearing to goad him into climbing it if he wanted his jacket back.

By now other dancers had begun their routine, sliding around Tony, placing a hand here and there on him, trying to distract him from Mara. To his amusement, and from the looks of it, Tony’s as well, one dancer appeared to be showing Tony how to strip off his shirt. He watched on with uncontained glee as Tony gave in and tried copying the dancer. Whoops and hollers escaped the crowd as Tony finished. To which Tony opened his arms and tilted his head in a mock bow, only to have his shirt stolen by a dancer.

The rest of the song seemed a game of keep away with Tony’s shirt, dancer’s incorporating his movements into their act. His shirt finally being tossed up to Mara, who made hand gestures suggesting Tony do a trick on the pole for it. He watched happily, trying to catch every movement Tony made. He was actually quite good, his strength enabling him to climb to where Mara was seated.

She laughed, dismounting the pole around him gracefully, making a show of turning the chair to face him and sitting cross-legged motioning for Tony to do a spin as the song began to end. Tony laughed and obliged, landing to much applause.

However, as Tony had been spinning, Mara had taken off somewhere with his shirt and jacket. He stood as Tony hopped down from the stage, barely noticing that tables and chairs were being quickly moved far away from the dancefloor.

“Wow!” he exclaimed, clapping. “You’ve got some moves! All I did was sit there!”

“Haha, thanks Clay,” he smiled. “Hey, have you seen my shirt?” he asked, a little more seriously as he looked around them.

“Hey, you guys were great, thanks for being such good sports! I’m Geoff,” said one of the dancers, extending his hand to Tony.

“Uh, thanks, nice to meet you,” Tony said politely, shaking his hand. “Hey, have you seen
Mara?”

“Oh, yes, she’s in the DJ booth, she said you can have your clothes back once you dance.”

He tried to stifle a laugh at the look on Tony’s face, earning himself a glare. “What?! It is a little funny,” he defended as Tony continued to gaze irritably at him. “C’mon, one dance,” he said, taking his hand. “Then we can get out of here,” he promised, earning him a squint that told him Tony was at least considering it.

“Oh, you can’t go on the dancefloor with that shirt on!” Geoff exclaimed, shaking his head. “It’s stripper night, no shirts allowed!” indicating his obviously over-dressed state.

“Oh, no problem,” he said, watching Tony’s face as he pulled off the tank top and secured it in the waistband of his jeans.

Tony’s face lit up. “Alright,” he agreed. “We’ll make our way to the booth through the dancefloor,” he said, pointing towards the bar side of the building.

He nodded in agreement as Tony headed onto the now crowded dancefloor. He grabbed for Tony’s hand again as he felt himself getting jostled about, using him as an anchor in the sea of people.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, he felt someone grab his face and pull him into a sloppy kiss. He tasted tequila and limes and pulled back on his lifeline as quickly as he could. When the kisser released him, Tony was right there in the guy’s face, letting him know with his stare-down that Clay was not a plaything. Or at least, that’s how he read the situation…

Tony faced him, leaning in close enough that he could feel his breath on his ear. “Hey, you ok?”

He nodded quickly, then realized Tony probably couldn’t see it. An electronic song he recognized and liked came on. “Dance with me,” he said into Tony’s ear.

Tony retracted his head quickly, gaze raking his face. He tried to slow his breathing, determined not to let Tony see his nerves. He stared at Tony’s full lips as they parted, watching as Tony’s tongue darted out to moisten them in a thoughtful gesture.

Finally, after what seemed like ages, Tony gave a slight nod and placed a hand on his hip right above where his pants hit, pulling him in close and taking his breath away.

Chapter End Notes

I had to have a character who ships #clony just as much a we do - so we have Mara! She is my matchmaker princess, and I gave her my dog because, well...you'll see ;)
Tony

He pulled Clay in towards him, until they were mere inches apart from one another. His gaze never straying from Clay’s stunning blue eyes, searching for any sign of rejection - ready to pull back at a moment’s notice. But as they began to sway to the rhythm, he felt himself relaxing as he enjoyed his proximity to Clay.

As they continued to dance, he found himself wondering how he had gotten so lucky? To have such a handsome friend like Clay, who wanted to dance with him? Out of all people?

He pulled Clay in a little closer, pressing their foreheads together gently as he felt the song begin to end and flow into the next. Why did it have to end so quickly, he thought? He took a step back.

“Heard a familiar voice suddenly say behind him. He turned to see Geoff sporting a container of paint while dancing whole-heartedly by himself. He saw that the paint had a shine to it and realized blacklights had replaced the regular lighting on the dancefloor. He must have really not been paying attention, too distracted by the sway of Clay’s hips.

He turned to Clay as Geoff splattered him playfully with paint. Laughing at the innocent look of surprise on Clay’s face.

“I guess that’s why the ‘no shirt’ rule on the dancefloor, huh?’ Clay said, looking back and forth between them, doe-eyed.

“Well, you’re already messy, I guess we should make the most of it,” he said, taking some paint and smearing it playfully across Clay’s chest.

“Hey!” Clay exclaimed, getting him back with a paint splatter to the stomach.

They continued to dance with Geoff and a few others in a circle, paint flecks littering their bodies as the floor became more and more crowded. He didn’t realize how much fun he was having until he almost doubled over in laughter as Clay tried to copy the moves of the dancer next to them.
He held his hand up to his mouth, trying to cover his smile as Clay attempted to squat low while trying to keep his balance.

“What?” Clay asked. “This isn’t that hard,” he said standing back up again. “Let’s see what’s next,” he mumbled more to himself as he frowned intently at the dancer next to him.

“Haha, you’re moves are fine,” he reassured Clay. He snaked an arm around his slender frame, trying to turn Clay’s attention back to him.

“Oh, wait, here we go,” Clay said as he turned his back towards him and swayed his hips to the beat, imitating their neighbor. He placed his hands on the front of Clay’s hips, pulling him in tight. Clay had no rhythm, but he found that he didn’t mind at all, burying his face in the side of Clay’s neck and breathing him in.

“Oh fuck! I can’t do that!” he heard Clay exclaim. He looked towards where Clay was pointing.

He laughed, “I can’t break dance either.”

“How can they make their bodies do that?” Clay asked, turning his head to look him in the eye.

“Lots of practice,” he said, nodding back their direction as the dancers continued their flips and handstands. Smiling at Clay’s soft exclamations of ‘wow’ every once in a while.

The latest song was beginning to wind down and they heard the DJ announce they had one more song to buddy up or be free game.

“What does that mean?” Clay said in a slightly frightened voice.

“I’m not sure, let’s ask Geoff.”

“Ask Geoff what? I’m already taken loves,” the man in question said, pointing to a set of initials surrounded by a heart painted on his chest.

“What does that mean?” he asked?

“Ooh, right, this is your first party! Well no initials means fair game, an empty heart means that you’re on the prowl,” he said with a cat claw hand gesture, “and a heart with your lover’s initials means you’re taken. Oh, but initials surrounded by a circle means you’re here with someone but are willing to share. So…which are you?” he said, offering a paintbrush.

Clay grabbed for the brush, thrusting it at him with a determination in his voice, “Mark me Tony.”

He paused, watching the set of Clay’s jaw as he waited for him to respond. He found himself wondering how Clay wanted him to mark him. But he knew how he wanted to. He reached up and brushed “T.P.” surrounded by a heart on the left side of Clay’s chest, earning him a giddy smile from Clay.

“Haha, now it looks like I belong to toilet paper,” Clay grinned devilishly, looking up at him.

“Shut up, your turn,” he said, turning the brush around and offering it to Clay.

He saw Clay’s smile falter for a split second before he asked, “You’re sure?”

He nodded, raising his eyebrows. He watched, mesmerized as Clay licked his lips, leaning forward to paint ‘C.J’ inside of a giant heart across his pec. He found himself wondering what Clay was tasting - he had witnessed no less than 3 other people steal a kiss from his lean friend.
He felt jealousy rising, wanting to pull Clay in possessively, wiping those other kisses from his memory.

Clay pulled away and passed the brush back to Geoff, looking back to admire his artwork. Hopefully, he thought self-consciously, admiring more than just that. He turned his face away to hide his expression, a familiar face catching his attention by the entrance. Mara was chatting with a bouncer by the door, his missing clothing in hand.

“Hey,” he said, catching Clay’s attention and nodding towards the door. “You wanna get out of here?”

He saw Clay spot Mara then turn back to him, smiling as he nodded in consent. He grabbed Clay by the hand and they began to weave their way to the door. “Ah, you boys looked like you were having a good time,” Mara said sweetly. “Although it looks like you’re both leaving here with something better than a phone number,” she added with a wink and a smile.

“Cute,” he said, accepting the articles of clothing.

“Wait, don’t forget these,” Mara said, waving a box of baby wipes at him. “Can’t be getting all that paint in your mustang!”

“Do you just have these lying around? Or was this your plan all along?” he asked as Clay laughed and accepted the box.

She just smiled and sauntered off behind the bar, waving a goodbye and calling over her shoulder, “You can thank me later!”

They walked back to his parking spot in companionable silence. He placed the shirts and jacket on the trunk as he accepted a wipe from Clay.

“So, what did you think? You have a good time?” he asked after a minute. He had to say something to try to keep himself from staring as Clay attempted to wash away a stubborn mark on his stomach.

Clay looked up, catching him staring. “It was fun. I’m glad I tried it. Though there are some really handsy people in there!” he exclaimed with wide eyes, waving his hand emphatically in the direction of the club.

“You’ve got that right!” he almost growled, remembering all the men pawing at his Clay.

“Here, let me get your back,” Clay said, motioning for him to turn around.

“Huh, oh, thanks man,” he said, complying. His eyes closing of their own accord as Clay begin to rub the back of his neck. He barely contained a moan of pleasure, biting his lip as Clay moved down to his sore shoulders.

“Did you have a good time?” Clay asked, snapping him out of his trance as he worked his way down his left arm.

“Yeah,” he replied with a nod as Clay lifted his arm to wash his side. “It’s not really my kind of scene though,” he continued, noticing how one of Clay’s hands lingered on his side as the other switched to work on his right arm. Fingers tickling his ribcage, sending sparks that he felt all the way down to his core.

“No, I wouldn’t think so,” Clay laughed softly, now scrubbing around the top of his jeans. “You
looked good up there on the stage though,” he added, turning him around to face him.

He smiled as Clay continued to wipe paint off his face and neck. “If you say so, brother. I missed quite a lot of gym time chasing your ass around town there for a while,” he taunted, enjoying the way Clay used a hand to steady the back of his head while he worked on wiping paint from his cheek.

Clay frowned slightly, making a swipe at his chest. “Hey, you chose to do that,” he said, using the same hand to run his fingers through the hair on the side of his head. “How do you manage to get this stuff in your hair?” he asked, now running the fingers of both hands through his styled hair. He shrugged noncommittally with one eyebrow raised as he enjoyed the sensation in his scalp. Shivering as the tingles seemed to radiate through his body, giving him goosebumps.

Breathing deeply, he begrudgingly shook his head, dislodging Clay’s fingers, “C’mon, it’s getting cold. It’s your turn,” he said, grabbing a clean wipe from the box and motioning for Clay to turn around.

‘This skinny white guy is going to be the death of me’, he thought to himself as he shook his head and surveyed Clay, memorizing the way his back muscles gleamed under the streetlight. He tried to steady himself as he reached towards Clay, wanting to take his time and enjoy the feel of him underneath his fingertips. He didn’t know how long this dream was going to last, but he didn’t want it to end. And he wasn’t going to ruin it by being in a rush.
7-Clay

Chapter Summary

Tony and Clay share a special moment, then spend time remeniscing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clay

He shivered at the gentle touch on his neck, feeling as though Tony had just set his skin on fire. He should have taken more time on Tony’s back, he thought as he enjoyed the way Tony lingered with each stroke. The slow pace driving him crazy in all the right ways. He had to shove his hands into his pockets to keep from grabbing Tony and pressing him up against the mustang.

How did Tony do that? He found himself wondering, closing his eyes as he basked in the warmth radiating off Tony’s body.

“How did you get a handprint down your pants?” Tony asked inquisitively as he tugged the waistband of his jeans lower, meticulously cleaning the paint off the side of his hip.

“Uh, that was you, remember?”

“It most certainly was not,” Tony shot back as he turned him around. He could see the look of amusement in Tony’s dark eyes fade to hunger as he reached up to clean carefully around the bruise on his forehead.

“Mmmm…”

“Close your eyes,” Tony said softly, surveying him. “You’ve got paint everywhere.”

He complied, letting Tony clean around the sensitive area. He kept them closed as Tony’s hand made its way down to his lips, inhaling sharply as Tony’s thumb pressed against his bottom lip, causing his mouth to open slightly. He waited impatiently as Tony’s fingers crept their way to his cheek and lingered there.

For a second he could feel Tony’s breath against his lips as he exhaled, but then he felt him start to pull away slightly.

He opened his eyes a touch and looked at Tony, who now seemed hellbent on retreating, an unsure look in his eyes. He closed his eyes again and leaned in, pressing his lips fully against Tony’s.

Fireworks seemed to explode from behind his eyes, an answering moan from deep within Tony encouraging him. How long they stayed like this he couldn’t say, their lips and Tony’s fingers on his cheek the only parts of them touching.

He felt Tony begin to pull away, and began to as well, but was held back by the gentle strength of
Tony’s hand on the back of his head. They stared into each other’s eyes for a brief moment, Tony breaking the silence.

“Clay,” he breathed out.

All he could muster was a hoarse, “Yeah?”

Before he knew it, Tony had wrapped his arm around his waist, kissing him hard as he spun him around to press his hips up against the trunk of the car.

Where Clay’s kiss had been chaste, Tony’s was filled with passion. He felt his mind go blank at the depth of it, feeling a rush of adrenaline down his spine as Tony’s tongue brushed against his bottom lip. His body responded automatically and he felt his mouth open to receive him. He felt his knees go weak as he struggled to maintain the kiss. Tony’s arm shifted lower and his body pressed in tighter, hips holding him up against the trunk of the car as if he knew just how his kiss was affecting him.

“Mmmm…” he groaned into Tony’s mouth, his mind trying to shift into gear enough wrap his arms around Tony. But just as he was about to get his bearings, he felt Tony nibble at his lower lip, sucking it between his teeth before letting it snap back into place. Immediately pressing back again with full force.

He was lost in a sea again, head swimming as he took in as much of Tony as he could. He gave in gratefully to every pause and exploration of his mouth, glad that at least one of them seemed to be able to think clearly.

They broke apart only at the catcalls from another couple walking out of the club, giving him time to catch his breath as Tony waved them on. He smiled as he stared at Tony, reaching up to tickle the tattoo on his ribcage.

Tony smiled as he grabbed his hand and brought it up to his mouth, never breaking eye contact as he placed a light kiss on the back of his hand, his lips red and pouty from their kiss. The thought bringing him back to his own bruised lips, where he could feel his heartbeat.

“You want to put a shirt on and go for a ride?” Tony suggested.

He nodded in response, swallowing, not trusting his own voice. He grabbed his borrowed clothing from behind him and joined Tony, settling into the mustang.

“Sooo…” he started, smiling coyly in Tony’s direction, “how long have you been waiting to do that?”

Tony glanced over, looking him up and down. “You don’t want to know,” he said with a shake of his head. They turned onto the road leading up to the overlook. He remembered it from the night he had listened to his own tape, Tony pulling him back from the edge and consoling him in his lowest moments.

“I do though. I want to know everything about you,” he said, reaching over to let his fingers dangle and play on Tony’s leather clad shoulder.

Tony mouth twitched in a crooked smile, reaching over to squeeze his knee. “That’s a lot of information for one evening,” he replied, turning to park the car.

“Let’s start with how long you’ve been wanting to kiss me then.”
He watched as Tony’s face turn more serious, contemplating. “Let’s get more comfortable first,” he said, reaching into the backseat and pulling out a blanket.

They got out of the red mustang and hopped over the guardrail. He watched with amusement as Tony laid out the blanket, sitting down with his back against the guardrail.

“What’s so funny?”

“Nothing,” he replied, breaking into even more of a wide grin. “Just remembering that there was once a time you beat up a certain young nerd when all he wanted to do was go stargazing…” he said as he planted himself on the blanket next to Tony, watching his facial expressions closely.

“We are not stargazing, we’re appreciating the city lights,” Tony countered with a wave of his hand at the cityscape below. “Besides,” he continued, “We were 8! I didn’t know why you wanted to map out constellations?!”

“Mmmhhmmmm, nice. Would you want to go stargazing with me now?” he teased.

“We can do anything you want,” Tony said with feeling, reaching for his hand and hugging it close to his chest.

He tried not to smile like an idiot, but to no avail. “And what do you want to do?” he asked.

“Whatever makes you happy. I want you to be comfortable Clay,” Tony said, settling their clasped hands between them on the blanket, one leg curling in so he could rest his other elbow. He could see Tony’s gaze flickering over his face, trying to read him.

They sat for a while, taking each other in, ignoring the view of the city. He marveled at the curve of Tony’s strong jaw, studying the way the stubble there beckoned to him.

“Was tonight your first time kissing a guy?” Tony asked, breaking him from his train of thoughts.

“Hmm, uh, no,” he said truthfully, looking off in the distance. He thought back, “The first time was at math camp one summer…I kissed my first girl earlier that summer too. I remember she tasted like strawberry lip gloss, but the only thing I could taste of him was the chocolate cake we had snuck back to our bunks that night.” He laughed, remembering fondly. He looked back at Tony, staring at his lips, “That’s the first time I’ve ever been kissed like that though.”

He watched as Tony’s face broke into a smile, enchanted by the way his thumb traced his lips while he was thinking.

“Yeah, well, that uh, that had been pent up for a while,” Tony said, still smiling as he stared into his eyes. Tony should definitely wear eyeliner more often, he thought. Although if he did, he didn’t know if he would ever be able to keep his hands off of him during school hours.

“How long is ‘a while’?” he asked, pressing for an answer again.

“You remember that summer my dad tried to get us all to go camping?” Tony asked. He nodded.

“That was a fucked-up camping trip,” Tony stated, causing them both to break into laughter. “Everything that could go wrong, went wrong on that weekend. I don’t even know why he kept trying to make it work? The weather was terrible, raining constantly, the tent had this big ol’ tear down the side, the cooler with all of our food in it got broken into by wild animals – it was a disaster!” Tony paused, locking eyes, “And I just remember I woke up in the morning and you
weren’t in your sleeping bag.”

“You mean your mom’s old Mexican blanket with all the holes in it from where you had tried to sneak home that dying badger?” he interrupted, recalling like it was yesterday.

“Yeah, that one!” Tony laughed. “Anyway, I just remember waking up and you were gone so I got up to find you. I was running around looking through the campsite and around the car when I heard this yelp, like a wild animal, coming from the direction of the river. So, I ran down to the water, looking for the animal, but there you were! Little Clay Jensen, soaking wet and on your ass holding this tiny little fish that was flopping everywhere!” he paused as they laughed.

“What the fuck? That’s the moment you knew you wanted to kiss me?” he asked, genuinely surprised.

“No, stupid,” Tony said, flirtatiously whacking his shoulder. “I brought you back to camp and my dad started drying you off, swearing up a storm. The whole time he was storming around, you were just trying to make him take your little fish. You were just so determined that we were going to turn that camping trip around! It was the cutest thing I’d ever seen.”

What began as a chuckle evolved into a full-blown burst of laughter, doubling him over. “Tony…” was all he could squeak out.

“What?! What is so funny?” Tony said, his laughter becoming contagious. He felt Tony try to pull his hand away, but he tightened his grip and pulled their hands into his lap as he tried to compose himself.

“What?!?” Tony said again, impatiently.

“That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard,” he spat out, still laughing. He started to calm down as he saw Tony tilt his head to the side and give it a shake.

“Well, it is! Here I am expecting some romantic tale of budding sexuality, but instead I get stuck with this story in which I’m a drowned rat,” he laughed again. “Can we change it?” he asked hopefully.

“Nope,” Tony said stubbornly, shaking his head emphatically. “You wanted to know, and that is the exact moment I knew that I wanted to kiss you,” he said, hand reaching up to cup his face, leaning closer to pull him into another kiss. This one lighter, but no less passionate.

He could feel his body shake like Jello at Tony’s touch, and he was grateful they were sitting down this time.

Tony pulled away slow as molasses, then dove back in, placing one last peck on his lips before resting back against the guardrail.

He tried to catch his breath as he watched Tony with glazed eyes, willing his heart to slow down. It was like they were free climbing that boulder again.

“So, does this mean you’re like my boyfriend now?” he asked eagerly.

Tony smiled, “If you want me to be…”

“Yes. Yes, I definitely do,” he replied, pausing as a wave of anxiety reared its ugly head. “It’s just…I’ve never dated anyone before?” he admitted, scared of Tony’s reaction.

“That’s ok. We’ll take it as slow as you want,” Tony said reassuringly, rubbing his thumb against
their clasped hands. “You just let me know what you need.”

God, he loved this man. He wanted everything, he wanted to have all of Tony and give him everything he needed too. But he wasn’t ready for that yet, and he and Tony both knew it. So instead of pushing his boyfriend back onto the grass like part of him wanted to, he nodded his consent and enjoyed relaxing in the moonlight holding hands.

‘Hmmm, ‘Boyfriend’,’ he thought, ‘it has a nice ring to it.’

Chapter End Notes

Yay...first kiss! I really enjoyed writing this chapter, I hope you enjoy reading it! I see more kisses in their future...
Chapter Summary

Tony and Clay share a special day, but Tony has to leave abruptly...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The past two weeks had passed like a dream. He felt like he was living the fairytale he never knew he wanted. When he wasn’t at the shop or in school, he was either with Clay or dreaming about him.

That particular sunny Saturday afternoon in February, he was driving Clay out of town to a place that was very special to him.

They had been in his room earlier that morning, after sharing breakfast with his family. Clay asked him where he found all his vintage stuff. He had smiled, liking the way Clay had become comfortable enough in his space to explore his things. This particular ‘vintage’ thing being his grandfather’s ring.

“I’ll show you,” he had said. “You up for a ride?”

Clay had been eager enough, not having to work that day.

And now here they were, tearing down the highway in the mustang. He felt more relaxed than he had in his entire life, knowing it was due to the incredible man sitting next to him. He spared a glance over at his handsome passenger, feeling a smile spread across his face. He turned his attention back to the road, knowing their exit was coming up soon.

“Where are we going?” Clay asked impatiently, turning his head to look around.

“Be patient, you’ll see,” he said, reaching a hand over to squeeze Clay’s knee. He kept his hand there, rubbing small circles across Clay’s jeans.

He spotted his destination, smiling as he parked. Confusion written on Clay’s forehead as he tried to figure it out. “A gas station?”

“Gas station, wrecking yard, and emporium,” he corrected, getting out of the car.

Clay followed suit, still looking confused. “I don’t get it,” he said.

“Well, come inside, take a look,” he replied, taking the opportunity to pull him in for a quick kiss. “Have I ever told you how cute you look when you’re confused?” he asked, taking a step back to admire his partner.

Clay pouted and swiped his hands away. “You’re just pulling my chain, aren’t you? You’d never
show me something as intimate as where you shop.”

He knew where Clay was coming from, he had always been an extremely private person and he knew Clay had felt he was being slow about opening up. “Just trust me, Mi Corazon. I promise,” he said, taking Clay’s hand and kissing it softly.

He saw as much as felt Clay melt, the taller man pulling him into a gentle embrace. “I trust you,” Clay whispered, placing a soft kiss on his temple. He stayed for a moment, wrapped in Clay’s tender embrace. He breathed in his subtle scent, tracing his nose along his collarbone where he knew he had left a hickey the previous night.

He put a little space between their faces so he could look Clay in the eye. “You know you’re the first boyfriend I’ve had the pleasure of holding hands in public with,” he told him, trying to show Clay how much he had, indeed, been opening up.

“Really? Why me?” Clay wanted to know, a slight frown forming across his brow. “Is it because I make you?”

“No,” he said, laughing. “It’s because I’m comfortable around you. I don’t mind if people see us and know that I’m yours. Because you don’t make me feel like a possession, or make me feel that I have to,” he paused, lifting their clasped hands and giving Clay’s a squeeze for emphasis, “I hold your hand because I want to be close to you.”

He watched Clay soak up the information, stepping back and pulling him towards the gas station once he saw the goofy smile he loved.

He heard the familiar tinkle of the bell above the door as they walked in, the cashier giving them a nod of greeting.

“Whoa!” he heard Clay exclaim behind him.

From the outside, the gas station looked just like any other, but inside, it was a strange mixture of auto parts, snacks, and antiques. He laughed, pulling Clay deeper into the store.

“Come on,” he said, heading towards a room in the back. “I’ll show you my favorite part.”

The room in question was clearly added on as an afterthought, looking more like a crowded storage unit from the 50’s. They picked their way through the tiny aisle, passing sets of old fishing equipment serving as hooks for various articles of clothing, stacks of books, and other miscellaneous items. He loved the mixture of junk and treasures in this place, it had an eerie way of calming his senses every time he came here. He came to a stop before a box of old cassette tapes, turning to survey his partner.

Clay was busy looking at a mounted swordfish hanging on the wall, an elbow length opera glove hanging from it’s bill. He watched as Clay turned his attention to the box in front of him.

“Oh wow! This is awesome!” Clay exclaimed as he looked up at him, his expression softening. “Thank you for sharing this with me Tony.”

“Oh of course,” he replied, giving Clay’s hand one last squeeze before letting go to flip through the tapes. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Clay wander off, rummaging through the mass of items.

“Hey!” Clay called suddenly, motioning for him over to where he was straddling an old engine, reaching for something hanging from a hook on the wall.
“Whatcha got there?” he said as he held Clay by the hips, stabilizing him as he stood on one long leg, reaching for the item. “What is that?”

He knew it must be of some significance by the look on Clay’s eager face.

“I think it’s an old Rolleiflex,” Clay stated, inspecting it eagerly. He could see now that it was an old, square camera.

“I didn’t know you were into photography?” he said, surprised.

“I’m not,” Clay stated, looking up from the camera. He licked his lips, dropping his head to look back down as he continued, “I just haven’t really talked to Tyler since, you know, the tapes, and that photo…” he trailed off. “I’ve just been looking for a way to apologize to him for what I did,” Clay continued, looking at him with sadness in his eyes. “It was unacceptable and I don’t expect him to forgive me, but I just saw this and felt like I should get it for him.”

Tyler would probably forgive him for anything if Clay just gave him those sad puppy dog eyes, he thought to himself. Instead saying, “I think that’s a great idea Clay.”

After a few more minutes of exploring and laughing at the randomness of the gas station, they picked their way back to the main part of the store, careful not to disturb anything else. He turned to Clay as they approached the register, “I’ve got to gas up the car, you ok here?”

“Yeah, thanks,” Clay said, turning towards the register with his find.

The drive back to town was nice, the sun just beginning to set as they turned onto Clay’s street.

“Hey, do you want to stay for dinner?” Clay asked, turning his body towards him as he parked.

“Sure Clay.”

“I mean, as my date?” Clay asked, biting his lower lip. Clay must know how distracting that one little movement was for him he thought, taking an extra second to stare before answering.

“I’d love to,” he answered. Adding curiously, “do, uh, your parents know? About us?”

“I asked them if I could bring a date to dinner tonight,” Clay said, breaking into a huge grin. “I didn’t know if you’d agree, so it’ll be a surprise.”

He couldn’t resist pulling Clay down for a kiss. “Of course I agree, silly,” he murmured against Clay’s lips before he pulled away to get out of the car.

They walked through the door, Clay calling out a greeting to his parents. He felt his palms begin to sweat. He had known the Jensen’s his entire life and yet still he didn’t know how they would react to him going out with their son. Being friends with a kid from the other side of town was one thing, but dating him? He wasn’t so sure.

“Clay!” he heard Mrs. Jensen yell from the direction of the kitchen. “Will you set the table dear? Matt, dinner!”

He snuck a glance at Clay as he led him into the kitchen to grab the dishes. They ran into Mr. Jensen as he was coming out of living room.

“Hey Clay, oh, hello Tony! How’s your family?”
“They’re doing well sir, thank you,” he replied, grateful for the small talk.

“So, you’re the one my son’s been spending all his time with these days…” Mr. Jensen said, startling him with a clap on the shoulder. “Running around all day with that shit eatin’ grin on his face,” he continued with a smile as he followed them into the kitchen. “Honey, it’s Tony!” Mr. Jensen said, beaming at his wife. “You owe me twenty bucks!” he said, slapping the counter, startling Mrs. Jensen.

“Well it’s about time!” Mrs. Jensen exclaimed as she handed plates and silverware off to Clay.

“Mom!” Clay said as he reddened, clearly embarrassed.

“What dear? We can’t make a silly bet about your love life?” Mrs. Jensen defended, shrugging and throwing her hands up. Turning back to the stove, she said over her shoulder, “Tony, honey, we’re so happy to have you, make yourself at home.”

Mr. Jensen clapped a shocked Clay on his back, “Like father, like son!”

“Dad!” Clay said, shaking out of his stupor. “That’s way too much information!”

“What?” his dad asked as Clay fled to the dining room.

He followed to help him set the table, hugging him from behind and kissing the back of his neck. “You know your parents are great, right?”

“Yes, I do,” Clay replied, turning to return his hug. “I just don’t want to think about them having sex with each other, let alone with other people.”

“Good point,” he stated with a nod, returning to the task of setting the table.

Dinner had been a nice, polite affair. So different than in his home. He tried remembering when he had come out to his family. They had been loud, noisy - asking all manner of questions, some inappropriate, some just downright dumb.

His dad seemed to take it the hardest, asking him how he expected to give him grandchildren. It had been an emotional time in his life; he had three older brothers, he never imagined that he was his father’s favorite son…

Sometimes he would catch his father looking at him when he thought he wasn’t looking. Like last week at the shop when a mother and her two small children had come in to pick up their car. His father had entertained the two while their mother payed and signed for her vehicle. After they left he saw his father looking at him sadly for a long while before shutting himself in the office for the rest of the day.

He pushed away the thought as he felt Clay snuggle deeper into him on the couch. After dinner, Clay’s parents had gone out for ice cream, he and Clay opting to stay home and watch a movie.

He smiled happily to himself as Clay moved his head to his favorite position atop his chest. He wrapped his arms around Clay’s shoulders in response, intentionally blocking his view of the television.

“Hey…” he heard Clay protest.
“Hmmm?”

“You’re blocking my view…”

“Mmm, I like the view from up here,” he teased, scooting lower on the couch as Clay lifted his head to smile at him. He lifted Clay slightly sliding a leg underneath his body on the couch, his upper back now leaning against the armrest allowing him to gaze up at his partner. He paused, taking in the lines of Clay’s body in the dim light from the television.

Not wanting to waste any more time, he pulled Clay on top of him by a beltloop and down into a kiss.

He happily allowed Clay to take the lead, enjoying the hungry way Clay kissed a trail down his neck. One of his hands reaching up to stroke Clay’s hair the other securing his hold on the beltloop, pulling Clay deeper into his lap. He felt one of Clay’s hands wander beneath his shirt, sending ripples of pleasure throughout his body and nibbled at his earlobe in response.

Just as he was about to relieve Clay of his t-shirt, he heard his phone wail angrily - his oldest brother’s ringtone. He huffed impatiently, letting it go to voicemail. Except, it kept ringing. And ringing. And ringing.

“It seems like it could be something important,” Clay panted, pulling away from him to sit back on the opposite end of the couch. His body ached in protest this sudden, unwelcome change, causing him to frown and sigh louder than he normally would.

“Haha, you look like I just stole the last tamale,” Clay said, getting up and ruffling his hair playfully as he walked by. “Go ahead, answer it, I’ve got to use the bathroom anyway.”

He sighed again, pulling his shirt back down and grabbing his phone from the coffee table. He saw a series of texts from his brother:

911
CALL ME.
WHERE ARE YOU?
COME HOME NOW.
SANTOS IS BACK.

He felt as though a bucket of ice water had been dumped on him as he read the last text over again. He sent a reply:

HOME IN 10.

He leapt up, hastily throwing on his jacket and stepping into his shoes, not bothering to lace them. He caught Clay as he came out of the bathroom, giving him a quick peck on the cheek.

“I gotta run.”

“Is everything ok?” Clay asked as he ran to the front door.

He paused in the open door, taking one last look at his handsome partner. “I don’t know.”
Hmmm...what to say about this chapter...
first of all: I feel like where Clay refers to Tony as his 'boyfriend', it's more his kind of word. It's fun and cute in an adorably romantic way, whereas Tony seems to not like the term. I felt like Tony would be happier calling Clay his 'partner' or 'Mi Corazon' (my heart) - so that's why I went with those word choices for each perspective...
second: I just felt like Clay having a boyfriend wouldn't surprise or concern his parents that much, especially his dad.
-as always, I hope you enjoy the chapter! As you can see from the ending, some crazy shit is about to go down...
Chapter Summary

Tony is absent from school and Clay is determined to get to the bottom of it, disregarding his own safety.

Chapter Notes

rough waters ahead...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Clay

He was worried about Tony. He hadn’t heard from him for the rest of the weekend, and he had been absent for their usual morning cup of coffee at Monet’s before school. He scoured the school’s hallway before his first period, dodging the cheerleaders trying to sell their latest Valentine’s Day fundraiser. After Hannah’s tapes had been made public during the court case, the old matchmaker game had been abandoned.

“Send someone a rose, let them know you’re thinking of them!” Sheri called to him as he pushed by.

“Uh, maybe later, I’ve got to get to class,” he told her.

He made his way to the front doors of the school, quickly scanning the parking lot one last time for the tell-tale red mustang but finding nothing.

“Hey Clay, you alright?” he heard behind him. He turned quickly, startled to find Courtney standing right behind him.

“Uh, ya, just looking for someone,” he said, checking his phone again in case he had missed a text or call from Tony.

“Tony?” she asked with a tilt of her head.

He looked up quickly. “Have you seen him?” he asked, hoping that his boyfriend was ok.

“Not since school Friday, is everything alright?” she asked, appearing genuinely concerned.

“I’m sure it is, he just took off Saturday night and I haven’t heard from him since, some family thing I think,” he felt the words tumble out before he could think. Tony was a pretty private guy, he may not want people at school to know his personal business. But it was just nice to have someone to talk to about it, he hadn’t even told his parents that Tony had fled their house in too much of a hurry to even tie his shoes. He looked into the parking lot again.
“Oh, well I’m sure that he’ll text you when he can. He cares about you Clay,” Courtney said kindly with a pat on his arm. “Hey, I’m having a small party on Friday, you guys should come, it would be good to see you!”

“Um, yeah, maybe. Thanks Courtney,” he said over his shoulder as they walked to history class together.

He was wandering the halls aimlessly, having snuck out of the movie in history. The teacher always put on something ridiculous and then promptly fell asleep. Courtney promised to cover for him if the teacher did, for some reason, wake up and notice he was missing.

“Hey Clay,” he heard as he passed the stairwell, “don’t you have history?”

He looked up to spot Tyler perching on the middle of the stairs, no camera for yearbook in sight.

“Uh, yeah, but I skipped,” he said with a shake of his head, starting up the stairs towards him. He stopped a few stairs below, pulling his backpack off his shoulder as he sat down, rummaging around in it, “I was actually looking for you.”

“Really?” Tyler asked skeptically. “What for?”

“Well, um, I uh, I’ve been wanting to apologize,” he said, looking up at Tyler, then quickly back down again as he found what he was looking for in his bag. “Look, I know what I did was wrong and I can’t take it back, but I shouldn’t have done that man,” he said shaking his head. He lifted out the old Rolleiflex and offered it up to Tyler. “I don’t expect you to forgive me, but I found this and thought that you might like to have it. I don’t know much about cameras, but I thought it looked cool…and it’s not that it’s going to make up for my mistake, but I just thought of you when I saw it…”

“Clay!” Tyler exclaimed, disbelief written on his face as he took the camera from him reverently. “This is an original! From like 1929, where in the hell did you find something like this?!”

“Uh, well Tony and I were antique shopping this weekend…”

“What?”

“We were antique shopping. Ya know, looking at other people’s old junk and…”

“I know what antique shopping is dork,” Tyler interrupted. “I just mean, like, that’s like something old married couples do to pass the time and reminisce about better times,” he said, laughing.

He broke into laughter too. “Ya well, you know Tony’s style! It was actually really fun, not old married couple at all,” he said, letting his mind wander. He imagined himself going to classic car shows with an elderly Tony, trying to convince him the cars of today were now classics…but thinking of Tony made him feel a sudden surge of anxiety, where the hell was his boyfriend, and why was he M.I.A. all of the sudden?

“Hey Clay, you alright man?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine.”

“You sure, you look like you’ve got something on your mind?” Tyler asked, though obviously more interested in checking out his new camera.
“No man, I’m fine. I’ve gotta run though,” he said, hopping up from the stairs as the bell rang. “Hey, I hope you enjoy the camera,” he added before departing.

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Tyler
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He stared after Clay’s retreating figure as students began to fill the halls. The items in his backpack suddenly feeling like they weighed a million pounds. He looked down at the Rolleiflex in awe, absentmindedly petting the side of it with his index finger. Students jostled by him without much notice, the flow of people forcing him to stand and make his way down the stairs.

“Tyler!” he heard Sheri call, as if from a great distance. He stopped and turned around, waiting for her by the glass doors that led out of this teenage prison. She was sporting her cheerleading outfit, hands full of flyers for the Valentine Roses.

“Hey! Ooh, whatcha got there?” she asked as she got closer, attention turning from him to the camera.

“Oh, Clay got this for me,” he answered, head still feeling bogged down by the items he was carrying. If he could just make it out those doors, everything would be ok.

“Oh that’s so nice of him, he’s such a sweet guy,” she said with a smile.

“Oh, yeah, yes he is. So…was there something you needed?”

“Oh yeah! Well, the squad and I were wondering if you could maybe come with some of us as we handed out the roses to everyone on Valentine’s next week Tuesday, shoot some pictures? We’ll be handing them out during second period?”

“Um, yeah, sure, I can do that,” he said, turning towards the doors. He stopped as he felt her hand on his arm.

“Hey wait! Don’t you want to send a rose? It’s a couple bucks, but since you’re helping out I wouldn’t have to charge you,” she said, grabbing a folded paper heart from her stack and holding it out to him. “You just write down the name of the person you want to send it to, and a message if you want. You can leave it anonymous or sign your name,” she continued with a smile that caught him off guard.

He hesitated, then took the heart. “Um, do you have a pen?” he asked, not wanting to reach in his backpack.

“Of course, here you go!” she said cheerfully, holding out her purple one.

He wrote on the heart, then folded it, handing it and the pen back to her.

“Great! Someone lucky will receive your rose! See you later Tyler,” she said with a wave as she headed off to class.

He watched her for a second before he turned to flee out the doors.
He stared at his reflection in the lake, the seriousness of what he had almost done taking its toll on him. He sat on the dock next to his almost empty backpack, letting his feet dangle over the water. He imagined he could still see the rifle as it sank to the bottom next to the other guns and their ammunition.

He picked up his backpack and withdrew the last items from it—a series of pictures. He stood and zipped up the backpack, making his way back down the dock, towards his car.

He stopped next to a trashcan in the park, flipping through the pictures of his classmates, letting them fall one by one into the garbage. Until he reached the last picture. He hesitated, deciding to keep it. He turned back to his car and got in.

He sat staring at the image for a long time, the Rolleiflex sitting comfortably on his lap. How different this day turned out to be, he thought.

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Clay
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Second and third period passed by slowly, especially French class. He would normally sit next to Tony, but the seat was empty today. He kept staring at the desk, as if he could magically make his handsome hombre appear out of thin air.

He ran out of the classroom when the bell rang, practically bowling over none other than his boyfriend.

“Tony!” he exclaimed, hugging him enthusiastically. “Is everything ok? I was worried when you didn’t show this morning.”

“Clay, we have to talk,” Tony said. He stepped back, now noting the serious, but tired look on Tony’s face.

“Yeah, sure, what’s wrong,” he said, reaching to cradle Tony’s head, taking note of his curly, tousled locks.

“We can’t see each other anymore,” Tony said, looking down at the ground as he stepped away from him.

“What?” he asked, thinking he must be hallucinating. Tony couldn’t be serious, he must have heard him wrong.

“It’s over, we’re done,” Tony said. He didn’t even seem to notice the small crowd of people around him, all trying to pretend they were not listening in.

“Wait, what happened Saturday?” he asked as Tony turned away, “Tony?! TONY!” His chest felt tight, like a bunch of bricks had just landed on top of him, but he chased after Tony down the hallway and outside into the parking lot.

“Don’t come after me Clay, I’ll explain later. Right now, we just can’t be seen together. Please, trust me,” Tony said cryptically when he caught up to him.

“So, what, you’re breaking up with me? Or we just can’t be seen together? Which is it Tony? What is going on?”
“It’s complicated, please, for your own safety, just stay away from me,” Tony replied as he angrily got into his mustang. He could see the tears falling down Tony’s face as he started the engine and took off, despite his protests.

There was no way he was letting this go without a fight. He grabbed his bike and took off after the red mustang.

He watched from the corner of the street, behind a rhododendron, as Tony pulled up to a house and parked. He got out of the car, looking around as he wiped his eyes. Tony walked up to the house and knocked on the door.

He didn’t know who lived here, or even anyone in this neighborhood. Who was Tony rushing off to see in such a hurry? Just then the door to the house opened and he felt his stomach drop. He was going to be sick.

It was Brad.

He didn’t even watch them greet each other, turning away to be sick in the bush. When he was done, he turned back to gaze at the house, hurt and confused.

He didn’t return to school. Instead heading to Blue Spot Liquor to grab a cheap beer.

He sat in the ally next to his bike, legs sprawled out in front of him as he desperately chugged the 40. What was going on with Tony? At first it seemed like Tony was worried for his safety, but then he went over to his ex’s house? It didn’t make sense, and it didn’t seem like Tony.

He couldn’t figure it out, the bitter taste of the beer making his stomach feel sour. He made the decision to confront Tony and stood, wiping the streaks of tears from his face. He wobbled to the recycle bin, dropping the empty glass bottle in before getting on his bike.

He saw Tony working on his car, the garage door open but no one else in sight. He rode right up to the car, earning him a startled glance.

“What is going on? Are you with Brad now?” he sputtered loudly, feeling the effects of the malt beverage. He let his bike clatter onto the driveway.

Tony ran to the end of the driveway, looking up and down the street before taking him by the arm and pulling him into the garage.

“What are you doing here Clay?! I told you it’s not safe!”

He shrugged out of Tony’s grip, now feeling fully frustrated. “Answer the question, Tony. Are you hanging out with Brad again?”

“No. Clay, lower your voice. Someone could see you here, you have to leave,” Tony said with alarm, trying to catch hold of his arm again.

“That’s a lie!” he cried, the beer making him even more emotional. “I followed you, you went to his house!” he pushed Tony away.
Just then Tony’s dad came running into the garage.

“What? Clay, that’s not what you think. You have to trust me! Are, are you drunk?”

“Que diablos esta pasando?” Tony’s dad said, ignoring the boys as he surveyed the neighborhood, looking as paranoid as Tony. What the hell was going on, he thought? “Saca a tu novio de aqui,” he continued, picking up the bike.

“Estoy intentando,” Tony replied, turning from his dad and back to Clay. “Please, Mi Corazon, please just be patient with me, you can’t be seen around me. Trust me, I just don’t want you hurt.”

He turned away, spying a concerned looking Mara running up the driveway. She clearly had sped over from her house, barefoot and in yoga clothing. She took his bike from Tony’s dad, motioning him to follow her. “Come on honey, let’s go to my house, ok?”

“Is anyone here going to tell me what the hell is going on?” he asked as Tony’s dad gave him a shove out of the garage, pressing the button to close the doors on him and his son.

“Hurry up Clay, come on. I’ll get you some coffee,” Mara said, already crossing the street.

He followed, silent until they reached her house. She fiddled with the gate hook, trying to open it and keep his bike upright.

“When did you get a higher fence?” he asked, holding the gate open as she pushed his bike into the yard, noticing a miniature ‘Beware of Dog’ sign.

“It should be higher, actually. Lewis is 6, but he could still jump over a 5-foot fence if he wanted to.”

“Really?” he asked, not really interested. They mounted the steps to the front door. She opened the door a crack, holding back the dog as she waved him inside. Lewis sniffed him aggressively, startling him. He stood with his back against the wall in Mara’s front hall as he got what felt like a pat down from the giant black dog.

Mara didn’t seem concerned, taking him by the arm and pulling him down the hall into her kitchen. Lewis followed, inserting himself between them as Mara dropped him off next to a barstool and began preparing the coffee. He sat and looked down at the dog’s droopy eyes and slightly stooped shoulders. He wondered if Mara was just exaggerating about his athleticism.

“Cream or sugar?” Mara asked, startling him into taking his eyes off the dog.

“Huh? Ah, cream. Please,” he said, watching her as she retrieved it from the fridge. He ended up staring at the pictures strewn on the freezer door. Most were of her and her dog, but there was one of him, Tony, and Skye from the day of the barbeque. Remembering that day made his eyes swell with tears and he had to look away.


“What the fuck is that?” he thought, before turning back to ask Mara.

He turned to find Lewis was now standing with his head over his lap. He jumped, startled, a string of drool connected his right knee to Lewis’s massive jaws.

“Mara…”

“You’re fine,” she said dismissively, bringing two cups of coffee over and sitting on the stool next to him. She patted the big dog, who turned to give her a sloppy kiss before laying down at her
feet. “He’s just protective, Ojeriza.”

“What kind of dog is he again?” he asked, sipping his coffee.

“You’re drunk in the middle of a school day starting yelling matches with your lover in the middle of the most dangerous street in town right now, do you really want to talk about my dog?” she asked with raised eyebrows.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “What the hell is going on? Why will Tony not talk to me? And why the hell was he with Brad this morning?” His last question coming out with more of an angry force than he meant, upsetting Lewis back to standing. He let a warning growl, huge ears coming to attention as his lips began to curl.

“Lewis,” Mara said in a warning tone, “down.” He complied, grunting in disapproval as he glared up at him. Or at least, it looked like he was glaring, he really couldn’t tell with the alcohol raging through his system.

She sighed, setting down her coffee cup, “Clay, honey, all I can tell you is that Tony loves you. You know he does. If you saw him with Brad then there is a good reason, you know Tony better than anyone.”

“I thought I did. But I’m not sure what to think? ‘It’s not safe’ – what the hell is that supposed to even mean? I’m not a child, why can’t anyone tell me what’s going on? Why can’t you tell me what’s going on?” he asked, frustrated.

“Because I don’t know,” she said with a shrug. “All I know is that it has something to do with his brothers and their business and that it’s not safe here right now. Tony wouldn’t do anything to hurt you, if he’s not telling you about it then he has a good reason,” she tried to reassure him. “Every relationship has their ups and downs, this is one of those tough times you have to just get through. But you will get through it,” she took his hand in hers and held it until he nodded his head, feeling defeated.

Chapter End Notes

Tony is clearly trying to protect his loved one the only way he knows how, by distancing himself. But Clay is having none of it...

Thank you for reading! I wrestled with this chapter a lot, like a lot a lot! ...but their story, like all love stories, isn't filled with all fluff and bunnies - but with darker things as well...

But please, stick around! I'm not just some dark, tortured soul hellbent on destruction - I promise. Life is going to have it's ups and downs - there are times it's not going to make sense, when it will be painful and grueling and fucking suck - but it will all be worth it...
10-Tony

Chapter Summary

Tony reveals who Santos is, later he rescues Clay from a party

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony

He turned from the closing garage door and punched the side of the workbench. “FUCK,” he yelled, pain searing through his fist. But it wasn’t enough. He slammed both fists down on the top of the bench until they went numb, stopping only at the feel of his father’s hand on his back. It was then that he realized that he was crying. He couldn’t see through the tears and he let his head hang down, overwhelmed.

“Oh, Mi Hijo,” he heard his dad say, now rubbing his back with both hands. “I’m so sorry, but it’s for the best, you know that.”

“How do I know that? How do you know that? How do you know those goons won’t just run Clay down on the street like a dog?” he asked angrily, his temper giving way to despair. “How do you know that Clay won’t hate me?”

“Because he loves you.”

“That’s a bullshit answer. Love doesn’t fix everything. Hannah was surrounded by people that loved her, that cared about her – and that didn’t change what she did,” he turned to go into the house.

“You have to trust him to Mi Hijo.”

He looked back questioningly, his dad standing in the middle of the garage looking more tired than he had ever seen him.

“You have to trust that he knows you. Once he gets over the shock he’ll calm down. When this is all over you can tell him whatever you need to.”

“Yeah, but when will that be?” he asked rhetorically, walking through the door and into the house.

He washed his bloody hands in the sink, relishing the sting. But he knew his hands would be bruised tomorrow. He grabbed an ice pack and sat at the kitchen table, thinking back on the past few days.

How had his brothers fucked up this bad? He hadn’t known how deep they were into smuggling. Two years ago, he remembered a deal that had gone bad. But he’d only been 15. Deemed too young to be included in the business, he had been sent away with his mom and sister until they dealt with Santos.
He looked around the kitchen, missing his mother now. His father had sent her and his sister somewhere that even he and his brothers didn’t know about, in case they were caught and tortured for information. He got up hastily, making his way upstairs to his bedroom.

From what his eldest brother, Alejandro, had told him, two years ago he had been making a run for Santos when he got stopped by a rival smuggler. Several pounds of cocaine and an entire shipment of guns had been taken. They left only a half dead Alejandro and an empty truck.

His brother had been held responsible, and by default, his family and loved ones as well. They had been tasked with getting the product back, in full, or the equivalent in cash. His brothers and father had instead teamed up with the rival smuggler against Santos and made an attempt on his life.

Apparently they had failed, he thought as sat on the edge of his bed. He reached for the photograph that had been haunting him for the past two nights. It was from the last time he and Brad had had coffee, the day Brad had broken up with him. A large red ‘X’ was drawn across his body, with the note ‘give me what I’m owed, or he’s next’. There had been a picture for each of his brothers and father, each with an ‘X’ drawn over the person they were pictured with.

As gut-wrenching as the picture was, he had almost cried in relief that it wasn’t Clay. He couldn’t stand if his Clay were put in danger.

Saturday night he had left with his brothers to try and find anyone with information on the whereabouts of Santos. That morning, when he had pulled into the school, he knew what he had to do. He didn’t know how he did it, walking away from his beloved like that. But if he told Clay what was going on, he would want to try and help. Or call the police and get them involved, and he couldn’t put him in danger. Clay just had to keep clear of him until this was all over.

Afterwards he had stopped by Brad’s house to tell him that he needed to get out of town. He didn’t explain much, but Brad had seen how emotional he was and had incorrectly assumed it was about him. Their ensuing argument ended when Brad had tried to kiss him, telling him he still loved him and that they should leave together. He had stormed out, telling Brad to forget about him.

He thought of Clay now as he threw the picture down. He should have known Clay would follow him, how had he been so stupid? Oh, he hadn’t slept in two nights, that was why. He pulled open his phone, scrolling through the pictures of Clay he had stored there.

He lingered on one in particular. His partner was laying right there in his bed. He remembered the day, they had come in after school and retreated to his room after the teasing from his brothers about their cuddling. He looked at the picture: Clay was smiling and shirtless, sprawled out and beckoning for him to join.

He put his phone back in his pocket and laid down, turning his head into the pillow, breathing deeply as he tried to pick up the scent of his partner.

Friday. He had made it to Friday. Tomorrow was the big day, the day where he and his brothers would meet with Santos. He was nervous, restless - his pent-up energy begging to be released in some way. He paced through the house all day, like a wild animal.

At around 8 o’clock that night he heard his phone beep, alerting him of a message. It was from Courtney. Puzzled, he opened it up reading:
He panicked, fear making him careless as he ran out of the house.

He made it to Courtney’s in record time, barely putting the mustang in park before hopping out, running into the house.

He searched desperately for Clay in the sea of people, finally spotting Courtney near the hall.

“What’s wrong, where is Clay? What happened to him?” he asked, wondering why there was a party that appeared to be happening if Clay was in trouble.

She grabbed his arm and pulled him down the hallway. “He had a headache so I gave him some aspirin. Or, at least what I thought was aspirin,” she said as she opened a bedroom door. Clay was sitting shirtless on the pink bedspread, petting a stuffed lion. “I think I accidently gave him ecstasy instead.”

“Tony!” Clay yelled. “Shhhh, I just got him to sleep!” he whispered, referring to the stuffed animal.

“He wouldn’t calm down, just kept saying your name!”

“Fuck. Alright, I’ll take him home,” he sighed, looking around for Clay’s shirt, finding it on the floor. He felt trapped in the small room, adrenaline still coursing through his veins. He took the lion from Clay, who began to pet his chest instead. Clay refused to put his shirt on, now standing to rub his whole body against him. He felt himself grow hard instantly at the contact. Grinding his teeth, he shifted uncomfortably, “When did he take the pills?”

“I dunno, like an hour ago?” Courtney replied, oblivious to his dilemma as he shifted from one leg to the other.

“This is a disaster,” he said, ditching the idea he would ever get Clay’s shirt back on. He tucked it in his jacket pocket and began to lead him from the room.

“You’re telling me, he took the last of my stash!”

He glared at her as he left the room, trying to keep Clay from petting the other party-goers on the way out the door.

“Vroom vroom!” Clay stated at the sight of the mustang.

“Ok, yes, let’s go vroom, all the way home, I’ve got you,” he replied, gently settling Clay into his car, hoping he would fall asleep on the way to his house.

Unfortunately, he didn’t. Clay proceeded to pet the seats and play with the radio the whole way, being entirely unhelpful when it became clear that his parents weren’t home and they needed a key.

“Do you remember which pocket the keys are in?” he asked, searching through Clay’s jeans on the doorstep.

“Mmmm, I remember you said you couldn’t see me anymore,” Clay said with a pout. “But you’re here now, with your hands in my pants....” he said as he leaned the full weight of his body against him and bit at his neck.

“Alright, alright, let’s get you to bed, ok?” he said, finally finding the keys in a front pocket. He
opened the door, locked it behind him, and carried Clay up the stairs to his bed.

“Just rest, I’ll get you some water,” he told him. As he watched, Clay wiggled out of his jeans and proceeded to rub along the bedspread.

“It feels so good, you have to join me,” Clay said, sitting up and reaching for him.

“No, you’re high as fuck Clay. Lay down and sleep it off,” he said as he turned to get the water. But Clay got to him before he could reach the door, pulling him into a hearty kiss and stripping off his jacket in the process. He broke the kiss, breathing heavily, “Clay, I have to go.”

“Don’t.”

“I have to, you don’t understand. If anything happened to you I wouldn’t be able to live with myself,” he said cupping his partner’s face in his hands, rubbing his thumbs over his high cheekbones.

“You say things like that, but you refuse to tell me anything! I’m just supposed to wait around for you? Stay. Don’t leave me,” Clay said, pulling him back towards the bed. Either he really didn’t want to go, or the ecstasy was giving Clay extra strength because he felt himself drawn towards the bed.

He relented, sitting to take his shoes off, sighing, “I’ll stay until you fall asleep, then I have to go.”

“Mmmhmm,” Clay answered, pulling at his shirt from behind him. Clay seemed to get distracted, petting his back and making cute purring sounds. He reluctantly began to pull his shirt back down.

“Nooooono,” he heard Clay cry, as he tugged the shirt up again, this time making it up and over his head before pulling him back onto the small bed.

He wrapped his arms around his Clay, trying to imprint on his memory the feeling of their bodies pressed together. He listened to Clay’s moans and other appreciative sounds as his partner explored his body with his hands as if for the first time.

“Clay, you have to go to sleep,” he whispered, turning to lay on his back to give Clay space to rest. Instead, Clay nuzzled into his arm while running his hand up and down his exposed upper body. He closed his eyes in pleasure at the gentle touch, startled when Clay’s hand cupped him in his jeans suddenly.

He reached down and moved Clay’s hand back to his chest, “You’ve got to stop that, or you’re going to get yourself in trouble,” he teased, receiving a giggle from Clay.

“Or what? You’ll tie me up with your climbing rope?” Clay asked. He frowned, he was pretty sure he had never shared that particular fantasy with Clay…

“I might have to if you can’t keep your hands to yourself. I’m a dangerous man to be around, remember?”

“Oooh, dangerous and sexy,” Clay said, swiftly sitting up and bringing a leg up and over his hips, straddling him on the bed. “Like James Bond…,” Clay goaded. He placed his hands low on his abdomen, causing him to growl involuntarily. Clay smiled widely at the sound, tracing one hand up his chest towards his neck, tucking it under the back of his head, holding him in place as he bent down to kiss him.

He should stop this he thought, but he had been craving his partner’s touch all week. He hadn’t known if Clay would ever forgive him for his sudden and cryptic absence as of late – but here he
was, still wanting him. He marveled at the thought, bringing his arms up to pull Clay in closer. He felt Clay sigh into his mouth at his touch. He began to trace circles over Clay’s back, feeling him relax under his arms.

He moved his head so that Clay could rest his head in the curve of his neck. He pushed gently at his hips, encouraging him to lay down fully on top of him. God, he felt good, he thought. He tried to shove down his desires as he attempted to coax Clay to sleep by massaging his back, but Clay did not appear to be sleepy…

“You’re mine,” Clay said pulling his head up to look at him with dilated pupils.

“Mmmhmm, and you’re mine,” he tried to say soothingly, stroking Clay’s cheek with the back of his fingers, but his voice stuck in his throat making it sound deeper and more possessive than he meant it.

“Not Brad’s. Mine,” Clay said decisively. He nodded his consent, clearly pleasing Clay. “Then you’ll come back to me?” he asked.

“Mi Corazon, I never left. It’s just a dangerous time right now. We’ll be together soon,” he assured, pulling him down for a light kiss.

“Not soon, now,” Clay whispered before kissing him harder, drowning his reply. He was distracted by the way Clay sucked at his tongue, not realizing that one of Clay’s hands was wandering…

“Mph,” he managed as Clay stroked him roughly through the denim, trying to pull away from the kiss before all sense of reason left him. He felt as Clay’s hand moved up, fumbling at the button to his pants and stopped him with a hand.

“Off,” Clay demanded, staring intently into his eyes.

“Not now, you’re high,” he tried to reason, earning him a huff of impatience from his partner.

“Come on, please…? If you take them off, I’ll go to sleep, I promise,” Clay bartered, grinding his own erection hard against him.

He laughed despite his obvious enjoyment of Clay’s antics, “You most certainly will not. And I am not going to be taking advantage of you in this state.” He rolled Clay to his side easily, wrapping him in the comforter and holding him there. He raked one hand through his partner’s hair, kissing him on the forehead. “It’s time for sleep,” he mumbled despite Clay’s now feeble protests. After a time, Clay’s breathing slowed to normal. He knew his partner was asleep when his hand stopped petting his chest.

“Te amo Mi Corazon,” he whispered into Clay’s hair, hoping that his partner would be as forgiving when he wasn’t high.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! As the plot thickens I hope you can see that our babes are still very much attached to each other, despite Tony’s distraught way of protecting Clay.
He woke with a start, his mouth dryer than he had ever felt it. He tried to recall the events of the previous evening when he felt the bed move. He opened his eyes, seeing Tony sitting on his bed, bent over to lace up his shoes. It came crashing back to him, something happened at Courtney’s party and Tony had come to get him.

He reached out to touch Tony’s back, just happy he was here. He saw Tony gaze at him, sadness in his eyes. Oh no, he thought, he was going to leave him with another cryptic goodbye.

And he wasn’t wrong. Tony tried telling him again that he needed to stay away from him, until he told him it was safe. He frowned, trying not to be angry, remembering how fantastic Tony’s body felt underneath him last night. He must have been pouting quite profusely because Tony knelt by the bed, resting his head on his arms to stare at him.

“Why can’t you just tell me what’s going on?” he asked, feeling like a child.

“In time, Mi Corazon. If all goes well today, then all will be back to normal.”

“And you know that? For sure? Or are you just trying to leave me alone for Valentine’s Day?” he said, suddenly frustrated. He turned over, his back to Tony.

“Clay, Clay?” he heard Tony say. “How can you think that?” he asked.

“Tell me why you broke up with me and then sped right over to Brad’s,” he countered, turning back to look him in the eyes.

Tony looked haunted, his eyebrows drawing in tight. “Clay, that’s not what you think.”

“How do you know what I think? How do you always seem to know what I’m thinking?”

“Because it’s written on your face, Mi Amor. You can’t hide anything,” Tony said with a smile, reaching for him. He dropped his head away from Tony’s extended hand, causing him to pause, pain in his eyes.

Tony drew his hand back and put on his shirt. He grabbed his jacket from the floor and turned back to look at him curled on the bed. “Maybe it’s better you hate me right now, but when it’s safe I promise you’ll be the first to know, and I’ll tell you everything,” he said before he turned and walked out the door.

He heard Tony thump down the stairs and walk across the hallway to the front door. He heard it shut and the roar of the mustang from outside his window. He held himself in a little ball, eyes shut, trying to stop the flow of tears. He clenched his jaw, chewing on his lower lip to keep from...
Monday. He had sat all weekend waiting to hear from Tony, but to no avail. He kept his head down in the hallway before school, trying desperately to avoid looking at the pink and red hearts that littered the hallway.

He made his way to English class, keeping his head down as he took out a poem he had been trying to work on for their weekend assignment. All he had seemed to be able to do was write about Tony. There was no way he could turn this in, he thought.

“Well, don’t you look haunted?” a voice beside him said.

He looked over to find Ryan, watching him.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said, turning back to the poem, knowing he must look like shit if Ryan was paying any attention to him.

“I’ve been through it too, ya know,” Ryan said, looking away at his curious glance. “Getting over Tony,” he added, looking down with a shake of his head, “it’s the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do.”

“It’s not like that.”

“Isn’t it?” Ryan asked, gazing at him with pity. He felt a sudden swell of emotion, threatening to cause a break down right there in the middle of the classroom. He slammed his books into his bag and tried to make a run for it.

“Clay, where do you think you’re going?” the teacher, Mr. Gibson, asked.

“Ah, sick,” he replied before he ran out.

Ryan

He watched as Clay ran from the classroom, feeling a pang in his chest. He looked down, Clay had dropped his poem in his rush to get away. He frowned as he picked it up, starting to read.

Geez, Clay was sappy, he thought. But he couldn’t stop reading, feeling emotional as he remembered the poems he himself had written about Tony. To Tony. But had never made known.

And this was obviously a poem about Tony, he would know.

He sighed, looking up at the clock, knowing what he had to do. He had one hour before they would start to print the newest issue of the Zeen, Valentine’s version. He grabbed his bag and made his way to the door.

“You too Ryan?” Mr. Gibson asked, clearly making his way to stop him.

“Kiss my ass, Jeff. Enjoy spending Valentine’s Day with your wife,” he taunted, glaring at him as
he pushed past and into the hallway, heading towards the printing office.

He knew the teacher wouldn’t follow, too afraid he would tell everyone about their short-lived affair. It had been thrilling at first, but he was small below the waist, and there was the extra annoyance of his wife. It hadn’t been worth it for him, Jeff being a rebound anyway. But he did enjoy perks such as this - who else got to tell a teacher off and then storm out of a classroom without repercussion?

He passed Tony in the hallway, looking beat to hell. His handsome face bruised and cut in two separate places, walking like he had more hiding under his clothing.

It took him aback, but he still felt the need to say something. “You should be ashamed of yourself,” he told Tony’s back.

Tony turned, quizzical look in his eye. “Excuse me?”

“Your latest plaything. It’s despicable.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, he’s not a plaything,” Tony said, now angry, scowling.

“Well, it doesn’t look that way,” he said, tilting his head and raising his eyebrows to accentuate the point.

Tony huffed, looking right and left. “You don’t know anything. It’s going to be ok, Clay is going to be fine. We’re going to be fine.”

“If you say so,” he said, turning back towards the printing room. He looked down again at the poem. He really had to make sure this made it in his issue, even if he had to stick it on the cover.

Valentine’s Day, yeah! He tried psyching himself up, without any luck. He sighed heavily, walking up to his ex and holding open the latest copy of the Zeen.

“Tony,” he said, steeling himself.

“What is it Ryan?”

“You need to read something, and I’m going to stand here until you do.”

“I don’t have time to…,” Tony started.

“You better make time,” he said with feeling. “Or you’re going to make the biggest mistake of your life,” he added, nodding his head in the direction of Clay’s locker.

Tony frowned and followed his gaze to the gaunt looking Clay. He swallowed and looked down at the magazine in his hand.

Clay

He didn’t know how he had made it through the previous school day. Tony looked a mess, but
had refused to make eye contact with him all day. It had rocked him to the core. He felt helpless as he
had peaked at him changing for gym, bruises littering Tony’s otherwise perfect torso. He had
had to turn away, least he start crying again. What was going on?

But now it was Tuesday. Valentine’s Day. He stood staring into his locker. He didn’t want to go
to class. How could he watch Tony from a distance again? His heart couldn’t take it.

He closed his locker, about to turn down the hallway when he heard his name.

“Clay! Wait!” Tony yelled. He turned and looked down the hall. Tony was coming towards him,
Ryan standing behind him holding an open copy of the Zeen. He waited, ‘what now?’ he thought.

As Tony pushed his way closer through the students, he opened his mouth to say something
sarcastic. But Tony got to him first, kissing his open mouth passionately. He felt Tony crash into
him, kissing him like he was a drowning man and Clay was the only thing that could save him.

At some point, he ended up with his back against the lockers, arms wrapped around Tony amid
whoops and whistles from the other students. He couldn’t bring himself to care, giving Tony back
as much as he was getting. Still angry, he bit at Tony’s sultry lips, eliciting a moan of pleasure that
only egged him on. He felt a familiar weakness in his knees and flutter in his chest as Tony’s
hands gripped his sides roughly, pulling him closer.

His boyfriend eventually came up for air, gasping as he looked up into his eyes. “I’m sorry,” he
said, “I love you Clay.”

“I’m sorry too.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Tony assured, shaking his head before kissing him again.

“Alright, alright, break it up you two, no PDA in the halls,” a passing teacher said, knocking Tony
in the back of the head with a handful of files as she walked to her classroom.

He was breathing deeply, now aware of the taste of blood in his mouth. He reached his hand up,
“Tony, you’re bleeding?!”

“Yeah, there’s been a lot of that these days, I’m fine. I’ve been an idiot, can I take you somewhere
after school and tell you everything?”

“Of course,” he said with a nod, now tracing his fingertips lightly over a cut above his boyfriend’s
eye. “You trying to be my twin for Valentine’s? That’s a little macabre…,” he laughed. He was
glad to see Tony laughed too. Catching Tony’s stubbly chin, angling his gaze up, he added, “And
Tony – Te amo.”

He watched Tony’s face light up, still incredibly handsome despite the bruising and cuts marring
his features.

“Oh, get a room you two,” Ryan said as he sidled up, fanning himself with his beloved magazine.
“I fully expect to be receiving something pretty. Oh, and an honorable mention at your wedding,”
he said as he sauntered off down the hallway.

“What is he talking about?” he wanted to know, looking for answers in his boyfriend’s grinning
face.

“Uh, I think he stole something personal of yours…and he might have published it. Or it might
just be in his copy, I’m not really sure?” Tony said. “Either way, it made me realize what an idiot
I’ve been.”
“Well then, he does deserve something pretty,” he muttered, reaching for Tony’s hand as the first bell went off, warning them they had 5 minutes to get to class.

Tony laughed in response, gripping his hand as they walked down the hallway.

He stopped in front of the cheerleader’s Valentine’s Day table, causing Tony to turn his attention to the roses.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” he asked.

“I think he’d love that,” Tony replied with a smile.

They made their way to their seats for second period, continuing to hold hands between their seats.

Ryan walked in and saw them, he took a seat on the other side of the room, making a show of rolling his eyes at them before taking a seat, smirking to himself.

Class was just getting started when Sheri and another girl, Jenny he thought, from the cheerleading squad, came in with a box of roses. Tyler was in tow, snapping pictures left and right. Tyler stopped when he spotted him and Tony, giving a small wave and a smile before snapping a picture of the two of them.

“We’ve got some deliveries!” Jenny said peppily, reaching into the box. She seemed to think she should announce each one, which he didn’t really mind as it was taking up a good chunk of time.

“Ryan!” she called.

“What?!?” Ryan asked, clearly surprised. He tried to cover it up by acting aloof, but he grabbed at the paper heart as soon as she handed it over.

As he saw Ryan smile to himself, he wondered if he was reading his or Tony’s note.

A few more roses got passed around before she called Ryan’s name again. People oohed, asking him who his admirers were. He soaked up the attention, telling people to mind their own business, smiling ear to ear as he read the second heart.

A few more roses were passed around, when she called out, “Clay!”

He blinked, looking over at Tony, who was barely suppressing a grin. He accepted the rose, reading ‘Te amo Mi Corazon’ on the card. He smiled, looking over at his boyfriend. “When did you find time do this?” he asked softly.

Tony began to laugh. “I have my ways,” he whispered with a wink and a squeeze of his hand. As they were gazing into each other’s eyes, a ‘click’ sounded, startling him into remembering they were not alone. Tyler smiled as he retreated, following Jenny as she took out the last two roses.

“Ryan again!” she said as she read the name on the card.

He frowned and looked over at an equally confused Tony. They had each only sent one rose. Who was this one from, he wondered? Ryan looked confused as well, reading the card with a small frown.

He tried covering for his confusion by saying, “I guess I’ll just have to make these boys wrestle in
some chocolate pudding over me. Or, maybe I’ll take all of them, who knows?”

“She, I like chocolate,” he said quietly, hoping only Tony could hear. He was rewarded with an intrigued look from his boyfriend. “What, just sayin’,” he said coyly, turning his attention to the front of the room for the calling of the last rose. He couldn’t ignore the hungry way Tony looked him up and down, like he was a giant chocolate bar.

“And, last but not least! Sheri?” Jenny announced, unsure.

Sheri looked surprised, but Clay noticed that Tyler had already had his camera trained on her face before her name was called, catching her happily surprised expression. She took the rose, taking a quick glance inside before blushing. She looked straight at Tyler, head tilted to the side.

“Alright already, enough wasting time, out with you,” their teacher said, hustling the three out of the classroom. He looked down again at his rose, still gripping the heart-shaped card. It was all going to be alright he told himself.
Chapter Summary

Tony tells Clay everything that's been going on - and someone gets kidnapped!

Tony

They were driving out of town, taking the most round-about way he could think of. He felt bad for his partner, taking a quick peak over his shoulder into the backseat where Clay was stuffed under a blanket. But he had to be sure they weren’t being followed. He checked the rearview mirror again.

“What is all of this about? Are you kidnapping me?” he heard Clay ask, his voice muffled by the thick Mexican blanket.

“How can it be kidnapping? You willingly got into the car,” he replied, finally convinced they weren’t being followed. He took the next turn, heading for the park where he had taken Clay rock climbing.

Clay stared at him with wide eyes, clearly still processing the information. His partner having yet to say a word during the entire time he was explaining the events of the past week and a half. They were sitting on top of the rocks, in the same spot as where he had told Clay about his connection to Hannah’s suicide.

“So, they’re just like, coming after you?” Clay asked, confused.

“We were supposed to meet with them Saturday, like I told you,” he said, shaking his head and reaching up to touch one of the cuts there. “But we got ambushed.”

“Jesus, Tony.”

“Yeah.”

“Can’t you, like, go to the cops or something?” Clay asked, looking like he was at a loss for ideas.

He shook his head, looking out over the trees before saying, “And tell them what, Mi Corazon? That this is all over smuggling illegal shit?” He turned back, finally allowing his exhaustion to take over. For it had been truly exhausting hiding all of this from his beloved and he felt like now he could finally breathe again.

He didn’t have to explain his exhaustion to Clay, who, by the looks of the bags underneath his eyes, hadn’t been sleeping either.

He reached towards him, putting his arm around Clay’s shoulders and gently pulling him back to lay looking up at the clouds. Immediately his partner turned onto his side, snuggling deeper into his embrace, wrapping an arm around his waist. He smiled, sighing deeply and happily, using his
other hand to trace up and down Clay’s arm where it lay across him.

“I love you,” Clay said.

“I love you too.”

“Just promise me you’ll stay indoors, don’t do anything stupid!” he warned, not wanting to let his beloved out of his sight.

Clay was standing outside of the mustang, leaning through the passenger window. “I still have to go to work, ya know?” he said with a teasing smile, turning to make his way up the stairs to his house.

He took a moment to look around, then jumped out of the car, running around the hood to join Clay on the stairs. It earned him a look that read, ‘Really?’, raised eyebrows and all.

“What? I just want to make sure you make it inside safely…” he countered, watching the smile spread across his partner’s face.

Clay opened the front door, stepping aside to let him slide in. As soon as he heard the door click shut, he grabbed Clay by the hips. He turned his partner to face him as he pressed him up against the back of the door, enveloping him in kisses.

He felt one of Clay’s hands rub its way down his lower back and onto his butt as they kissed. The other hand gripped the hair on the back of his head, angling his neck so that he could insert his tongue, deepening their kiss.

He let his hands wander from his partner’s hips to cup his ass while he used a knee to create an opening between Clay’s knees. As he fell into the space he had created, he lifted Clay by his handhold, securing him to the door with his hips and his mouth. He smiled as Clay wrapped his legs around his shorter frame, feeling his partner laugh as he tried to maintain their kiss.

“Having fun?” he asked as Clay wound both arms around his neck, loving how well this position allowed him to feel the effect he was having on his partner.

“Mmmhmm,” was the only muffled response he got as Clay pressed him for more, sucking on his lower lip. He felt a shiver shoot straight down his spine and into his pelvis. Clay knew how much he enjoyed it when he did that. Ooh he was going to get it, he thought as he got a firmer hold on his slender frame.

He picked Clay up, moving away from the door to make his way to where he hoped the stairs were located, instead knocking into the table in the front hall.

Clay threw his head back, laughing as his feet found the floor again. He saw at a quick glance he hadn’t knocked anything over, so he pulled his partner in again, continuing their make-out session.

“Oh, hey boys, I thought I heard someone come in,” he heard Mr. Jensen’s voice. They broke apart quickly, surprised. He hadn’t even thought to check if anyone else was home.

Clay cleared his throat. “Hey dad, didn’t know you were home,” he said, ruffling a hand through his short hair.

“Made it out of the office a little early today, don’t mind me, I’ll just be in the living room,” Mr.
Jensen said as he made his way into said room. He peaked his head back into the hall to add, “Don’t forget to use a condom! I left some in your room, son.”

He saw Clay turn a shade of red he had never seen before. “DAD?!” he exclaimed, horrified. He tried to hold back a laugh, biting his lip in amusement.

“What? I’m a parent, not an idiot. I was young once…”

“Ah, actually Mr. Jensen, I was just dropping Clay off. I’ve got to be getting home,” he said, trying to save his partner from further embarrassment.

“You sure you don’t want to stay for dinner?” Mr. Jensen asked politely. He really did enjoy his partner’s family, he thought as he appreciated Mr. Jensen’s offer.

“Thank you, but no, my family expects me home soon.”

“Alright, well you know you’re welcome anytime,” Mr. Jensen said with a smile before retreating into the living room.

“You have to go already?” Clay asked him as he made his way to the door.

“Yes, stay safe ok Mi Corazon?” he stated as he cupped the side of Clay’s face, pulling him in for one last kiss.

“You too Mi Amor.”

He grinned like a schoolboy. “You’ve never called me that before?” he said as he pulled Clay down into another, deeper kiss. Affectionately he began making his way in kisses across Clay’s jawline and down to where he could feel the pulse in his neck.

“You like it when I call you that?” he heard his partner ask as his tongue darted out, moistening a small patch of skin.

“Mmmm,” he mumbled into Clay’s neck as he sucked on where his pulse lay beating fast.

He heard his partner moan in pleasure, encouraging him to suck harder. He bit down gently, then let go as he traced his nose up to the hollow behind Clay’s ear. He licked his way around the outer edge of his partner’s sensitive ear, feeling him shudder under his attentive mouth. He smiled as he continued to kiss his way back across Clay’s cheek to his lips. He held him in a chaste kiss for as long as he could bear, finally releasing him.

“I’ll text you later, ok?” he asked, watching in amusement as Clay tried to gather his thoughts.

Clay nodded, reaching for his arm for one last gentle squeeze before he headed out the door.

“Where have you been?” Alejandro asked as he came through the door, still smiling as he tasted Clay on his lips.

“Out. I have to show up at school sometime,” he answered. It came out harsher than he meant it. He sighed, his brother didn’t deserve that, they all had been under a lot of stress lately. “Lo siento, it’s just been a long day,” he added before turning to make his way to the kitchen.

Out of nowhere, he heard the screech of tires on the street. He looked at his brother on the couch, pausing for a split second before they both ran towards the door. He heard a female voice call out
in surprise as he yanked open the door and sped outside.

He was just in time to see Mara slug a long-haired Hispanic man in the face as another attempted to lift her into an awaiting car at the end of the block. He ran into the driveway towards them and into the street, his brother close behind.

She elbowed the other man in the gut and turned sharply, holding his head down as she kneed him in the face. He ran full tilt towards them, watching helplessly as the long-haired one knocked her on the back head with the butt of a gun, shoving her unconscious body into the car. The driver squealed his tires again as he pulled away leaving the other man bleeding in the street next to Mara’s forgotten grocery bag.

He heard a gunshot from behind him, seeing the back window of the car shatter.

“Stop, stop, Mara’s in there!” he yelled at his brother, who was now aiming the gun at the man on the street. “He knows where they’re taking her,” he added with his arm out, stopping his brother’s hasty footsteps as he bent to haul the man up roughly.

Once they had the man in the garage, they tied him securely to a chair.

“Call dad,” Alejandro ordered, the gun still trained at the stranger.

“What the hell did you guys do to him?” his father asked, not fifteen minutes later. He grabbed the man by his hair and pulled his head back for closer inspection. “Looks like his face exploded,” he added, clearly disgusted as he released his grip and stood upright.

“Mara got in a few shots before they got her,” he said, poking at the man’s ribs. By the sound of the pained grunt he hoped she had broken a rib or two to go along with the broken nose.

The look on his father’s face turned from one of disgust to one of pride. “That’s my girl,” he said with a nod, making his way to the workbench, picking through the tools there.

He watched with trepidation as his father returned wielding a bolt cutter. He pulled up a chair opposite the now wide-eyed stranger and took a seat. He felt nauseous as he watched his father turn the tool over in his hands. He glanced at his brother with raised eyebrows, seeing a similarly sickened look on his face.

“Now are we going to do this the easy way, or the hard way?” his father finally asked, breaking the silence.

“They’re at the docks, warehouse D,” the man cried out.

He let out a shaky breath he didn’t know he’d been holding.

“You better not be lying to me, puto,” he heard his father growl as he rose to stand, towering over the now whimpering man.

“It wasn’t my idea to take the girl, she has nothing to do with this! Please…” his father cut him off with a sharp rap to the back of the head with the handle of the bolt cutters, knocking him out.

He watched his father toss the tool back on the bench. He turned to them, saying steely, “You heard him boys, let’s go.”
Chapter Summary

Clay receives a text from Mara and races over...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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He was standing in the kitchen, munching on popcorn as he stared out the window above the sink. He hadn’t moved from his position since Tony left. He watched as the sky darkened quickly, the streetlights outside beginning to turn on.

How could this have happened? It wasn’t fair that Tony was being held responsible for his brother’s actions. But it was understandable now how he had reacted. Tony was just trying to protect him in his cryptic, Tony-ish, unhelpful yoda kind of way. The notion made him smile, warming his heart. He was going to have to break his boyfriend of that, he thought as he chewed another piece of the salty snack.

Tony just had this righteous warrior side to him, which he loved. But now that they were a couple, Tony was going to have to learn that they were in on things together. He smiled to himself, remembering the more than favorable response he had gotten from calling his boyfriend, ‘Mi Amor’. He was going to have to do that more often, just not when his dad was in the house…

He heard his phone beep on the counter, letting him know of an incoming text. He rushed to open it, reading a message from Mara:

**TONY NEED YOU. COME TO HOUSE**

He was a bit startled, it wasn’t how she normally typed a message? She could be an English teacher with the amount of detail she normally put into her texts. It must be serious, he thought as he typed back:

**BE RIGHT THERE**

He grabbed his keys from his backpack, yelling a quick ‘good-bye’ to his dad as he rushed out the door. He hopped on his bike, peddling furiously as a feeling of dread came over him, pushing him to take every shortcut he knew of.

Something stopped him as he reached the end of Tony’s street. Something was wrong, off. He looked around, squinting his eyes. The lights! He couldn’t see because the lights on the street were all out, moonlight the only thing illuminating his path. He could barely see across to Tony’s a few houses down, but he could tell there was no sign of the red mustang. He dismounted his bike, propping it up against a picket fence, still uneasy about crossing to Tony’s house.

He tried to slow his breathing, looking for any other signs of disturbance. Damn, he should have
brought a flashlight! He pulled his phone out of his pocket, turning on the flashlight app. The dim light enabling him to see a short distance ahead of him as he began to cross the street.

He stopped mid-way, crouching over an odd dark splotch on the pavement. He touched it, drawing his hand back in disgust at the wet, sticky feeling. He looked at his fingers under the light from his phone.

Blood.

He looked around sharply before scurrying back to hide alongside a parked car at the curb. He didn’t feel as exposed as he had standing in the middle of the road. He looked at his fingers again, shivering as he wiped them on his pantleg. He turned off the flashlight on his phone and stashed it back in his jacket pocket. He peeked over the hood of the car, trying desperately to see across the street and into the Padilla’s yard.

He felt silly as he snuck his way from car to car along the street, stopping to listen for any signs his hiding spot had been given away. It was probably nothing. He was probably just being paranoid…but he couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong.

Finally, he reached a position from which he could see that the garage door of Tony’s house was open. He waited, listening intently before he got an idea. He opened Mara’s message on his phone, hitting the ‘call’ button. He held his breath as it dialed, hearing the blip of a ring coming from the direction of the garage. He looked up, seeing the faint light from a phone screen coming from within.

He heard a hoarse grumble, then watched as the phone’s light traveled, someone obviously picking it up to see who was calling. He exhaled sharply as the screen dimly lit the face of a hostile-looking stranger for a split second.

The man threw the phone down, speaking in a low voice to someone else inside the garage. He felt a twinge of fear as he wondered if they would hit redial. It would give away his hiding place for sure. He stayed low, scurrying his way towards Mara’s house.

He was jerked to his feet suddenly, and roughly, startling a squeak out of him. He spun to see an angry Hispanic man with a broken nose and bloody beard pointing a gun at him. He raised his arms up like he had seen done in cop shows.

He heard the rumble of a classic muscle car’s engine before he saw it. Tony!

He saw the man’s attention turn towards the other end of the street and kicked him as hard as he could in the groin, taking off running to the other side of the street. He didn’t stop to see if his kick landed, adrenaline keeping his legs pumping as he dove over the hood of a car on the opposite side of the street, hearing gunshots and bullets hitting the vehicle. Once, twice, three times.

He could see the headlights of Tony’s mustang, now lighting part of the Padilla driveway.

“Tony!” he yelled from his hiding place, “Be careful, they have guns!!” his heart was racing, he had no idea how he could help his boyfriend.

“We’ve got your boy, and the girl,” a frightening voice hollered from Tony’s garage. He watched in horror as a long-haired man dragged a woman from the garage and down the driveway, another gun in hand.

When they reached the glow of the headlights, he saw that it was Mara. She was gagged, hands bound in front of her. He tore his eyes off of her long enough to look into the street for Tony. He saw Tony, his father and one of the brothers standing to the side of the mustang, using it as a
“There’s no reason to hurt anyone, let’s just talk this out,” he heard his boyfriend say, his hands outstretched in a surrender position.

Suddenly he felt something slam against his ribs, forcing him to the pavement. “Fuck you, ya little asshole,” he heard, damn it, he’d forgotten about the man with the gun.

He looked up to see Mara begin to struggle with her captor, his predicament having at least diverted the man’s attention. He scrambled on all fours, trying to get to the street and his boyfriend. He heard a shot ring out in the darkness and he hit the deck, rolling towards a nearby car.

He saw Tony running in his direction. “No,” he screamed, startling his boyfriend into changing tactics, tucking and rolling to his side as the man fired in his direction. “Clay,” he said, pulling him up and hurling him to hide between the trunk of one car and the hood of another in an attempt to avoid his pursuer.

He let Tony track the man, desperately looking back to watch Mara disarm the man guarding her, then kick him into the street. Another man came rushing from the garage, shooting a round, keeping Tony’s dad and brother at bay.

“Alejandro!” the man called, attempting to grab the struggling Mara. “This is between me and you, come out and we can let these nice people go.”

“Fuck you!” he heard Mara scream, obviously having relieved herself of her gag. He watched as she kicked at his knee, tearing at the arm he held her with, “LEWIS!”

He heard the shatter of glass, ducking instinctively as Tony pulled him around the car and into the street. He thought someone has fired off another shot, hitting a window, but then he heard a huge ‘thump’ followed by an angry howl. He listened to the sound of heavy paws hitting the pavement as Lewis tore by them, but he couldn’t see the black dog in the darkness.

Another gunshot hit the pavement beside him, chunks of concrete hitting his leg and spurring him into action. He leapt up, hearing an inhuman growl followed by a scream coming from down the street. But there was no time to think about that. He looked to his side for Tony, but he was still lying on the ground, clutching at his leg.

“Tony!” he yelled. His heart dropped and he felt faint as he dropped to his knees, first aid training kicking in as he ripped his belt off, securing it tightly around his boyfriend’s thigh.

“It’s alright Clay, it’s just a scratch.”

“It is not,” he said as he ripped off the bottom of his shirt, pressing it tightly against the wound on Tony’s inner thigh, right above his knee. He couldn’t see very well, but he could feel the shirt becoming sticky and hot. He pressed down harder, swearing under his breath and praying Tony would be alright.

“CLAY…” Tony started, causing him to lift his gaze, staring straight into the eyes of the massive snarling animal.

“OH SHIT!” he heard from behind him. He tucked his body down over Tony’s as Lewis leapt over them. He heard more gunshots ring out, then a huge crash as Lewis and the gunman smashed into a vehicle.

“Clay! Tony! He heard Mara call as she rushed towards them, almost tripping over them in her
haste to see if they were alright.

“He’s been shot! My phone’s in my jacket pocket,” he said, not wanting to take pressure off
Tony’s wound. She rummaged through his pockets, quickly finding his phone and dialing 911.
He heard a deep growl followed by a choking sound and turned to look, but Mara’s hands
stopped him.

“Don’t look,” she said in between giving out the address for the ambulance. “Or you’ll never want
to come over to my house again,” she grimaced as she hung up. “They’ll be here soon, you’re
going to be fine Tony, hang in there hun!” she soothed, stroking a hand through Tony’s hair. She
reached her bound hands up to his shoulder, saying. “You’re doing great, Clay, just keep pressure
on it!”

He nodded, his vision tunneling as he stared into his boyfriend’s eyes. Tony reached for him,
trying to force a smile. “Thanks Mi Corazon,” he grunted out, his jaw clenched tightly.

He walked into the hospital room, his own minor scrapes and bruises clearing him to visit his
boyfriend.

He stared at Tony, his complexion standing out against the white sheets. He still looked
devastatingly handsome, even in the hospital gown. The thought made him smile as he watched
his boyfriend sleep from the doorway. Lewis was curled alongside him with his huge head by his
boyfriend’s feet, taking up what looked like most of the bed. His owner was curled up in a chair
on the far side of the room, taking a well-deserved nap herself.

Mara looked as though she had her own fair share of bruises. He felt his brow furrow as his eyes
tried to make sense of where her tattoos ended and the bruises began. They were all lucky to be
alive, he thought for the umpteenth time.

He heard the gentle ‘thump, thump’ of Lewis’ tail as he approached the bed, grateful the dog had
been there to save them. He seemed unharmed save for a few minor scratches alongside his chest.
He reached out and put a hand on his back leg, earning him a happy grunt.

“He’s going to need a lot of butt rubbing after all that,” Mara said, startling him.

“He’s amazing,” he said with feeling.

“You’re amazing,” he heard his boyfriend croak out softly from his position on the bed.

He smiled at Tony, who was just now waking up. He pulled up a chair and poured him some
water from the glass on the table.

“Thanks,” Tony said appreciatively, holding his hand and pulling him in for a soft kiss.

“Well now that you’re awake, Lewis and I are going home. Your mother threatened that if I didn’t
stay to see you when you woke up, she wouldn’t let me back in. To my own house!??” she
exclaimed as she threw up her hands.

“My mother?” Tony said, confused. “You know where she is?”

“Yeah, she and your sister have been staying at my place.”

“What?! Dad told us he sent them away somewhere safe?” Tony said, clearly appalled.
“There’s nowhere safer than with this one,” she said, pointing to the dog. “Once you come in my house, you’re his. If he accepts you as family, then he’ll protect you with all he’s got. ‘Tao fiel como um fila’,” she said, clapping her hands as she motioned for Lewis to follow her.

When they were gone, Tony pulled him onto the bed.

“Now that there’s room for you…,” his boyfriend said. He curled onto his side, putting his head on his favorite spot on Tony’s chest, sighing happily as he felt his strong arm curl around his shoulders.

“Tony…”

“Yes, Mi Amor?” Tony whispered into his hair.

“Can we get a dog?” he asked.

“Of course. We have to have a dog.”

He smiled into Tony’s chest, elated at the response. He repositioned his head so that he could look into Tony’s eyes, forcing him to share the pillow.

“So, is this mess all over with?” he asked.

“I hope so,” Tony replied with feeling. “My father and brother went to the police station with Santos’ goons.”

“What about Santos?!” he asked, fear slicing through his gut.

“I think he’s here too.”

“What, why?” he frowned, squinting his eyes as he tried to read his boyfriend’s face.

Tony looked towards his feet, raising a hand to trace his lips, thinking. “He ah, well he…” Tony stuttered.

“He what?”

“Well, let’s just say Lewis didn’t take very kindly to the way he was treating his mother…and she didn’t either,” he said, now looking at him. He decided not to press for details, reading the pained look in Tony’s face.

“Well, as long as he can’t hurt you anymore,” he said, nuzzling into his boyfriend’s neck. “You better be able to dance on that leg come prom time, or I’m going to have to take Skye!” He teased, kissing Tony’s neck lightly.

“Hey! Don’t joke about that, you’re not going with anyone else but me!” his boyfriend fired back, tickling his ribs. He let out an involuntary ‘umph’, being sore from the kick he received in the back. “Lo siento Mi Corazon, estas bien?”

“I’m fine, Mi Amor, just sore,” he sighed. They settled back down into the bed, relaxing comfortably until they both fell asleep.

He gradually became aware of the gentle murmur of voices around him. He nestled his head lower on Tony’s chest, rewarded with the familiar thump of his heartbeat. He smiled and gently began to blink his eyes open.
He was surprised to find the entire room was full. His parents were sitting and talking with Tony’s mom and sister by the door, Tony’s three brothers and his father were standing on the edges of the room, looking uncomfortable.

“Clay!” he heard Tony’s dad exclaim, reaching forward to touch the side of his head.

He felt Tony stir, waking up at the sound of his dad’s voice.

“Mmm, what time is it?” he asked as everyone surged forward, crowding around the small hospital bed.

“It’s morning, honey. We didn’t want to wake you, you both needed your rest,” his mom said. She made her way to stand beside him, her hand gripping his shoulder as she pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

“Now that they’re awake, will someone please tell us what happened?” his dad said as he patted his ankle.

He looked over at Tony’s dad quickly, then up at Tony. He sat up so he could look into his boyfriend’s eyes, unsure of how to respond.

Tony’s dad read his confusion, starting the story at the beginning for his parents – but leaving the part about the illegal items out. He referred to the men only as ‘the bad men’, which sounded accurate to him.

“When we searched the warehouse, we found no one. We figured they must have taken Mara with them when they came back to get their amigo. We raced back to the house as fast as we could,” Mr. Padilla paused, looking towards them on the bed. “What I can’t figure out is why you were sneaking around our house?” clearly addressing Clay.

“I got a text from Mara’s phone. It said Tony was in trouble and to come to your house,” he answered, feeling silly. “When I got to the end of your street it was all dark and something felt off,” he said with a shrug. “Oh, and I noticed there was blood in the middle of the street,” he added with a nod.

He saw Tony’s dad nod, reaching up to cuff his son in the back of the head. “And you! Running into the middle of the street! You could have been killed Mi Hijo! You’ll be lucky if I don’t kill you!”

Tony’s mother cut him off with a tsk, waving her hands as she butted him out of the way. She reached down, embracing her son, cooing lovingly, “We’re just happy you’re alright,” she glared in Alejandro’s direction, “no thanks to some of my other sons!”

“Oh my! What a crowd!” a voice said, from the direction of the door. A man in a doctor’s uniform pushed his way into the room. “Hello, I’m Abram, your doctor. Your tests check out fine, you can be on your way home today. Stitches will come out next week!”

The room became loud with sounds of cheering, an excited mix of English and Spanish. He laughed, enjoying the happy chaos.

He turned his attention back to the man in the bed next to him, taking his hand and kissing it. “How are you feeling? How’s your leg?”

“It’s feeling like it might need you to kiss it all better,” Tony replied with a twinkle in his dark eyes.
Chapter End Notes

Although this was a suspenseful chapter, I tried to end it on a happy note! (and I see a puppy for clay and tony in the future...)
Tony persuades Clay to go on a camping trip, and they acquire some uninvited guests

Tony

“Come on, please Mi Corazon!” he tried to persuade. He and Clay were standing by Clay’s locker before school. “It’s been a few weeks; my leg is almost completely healed! And, it’s going to be opening weekend of fishing season!”

He could care less about fishing season, what he really wanted to do was sweep his partner away for a romantic weekend. Well, maybe his version of romantic, he thought as he watched Clay’s reaction to roughing it in a tent all weekend.

His partner looked confused, raising an eyebrow at him. “Fishing? Since when do you like fishing?”

“Ok, so maybe I really just want a quiet weekend away,” he relented, tilting his head to look up at Clay. “Just you and me in the woods, looking up at the stars…,” he pulled Clay in closer, lowering his voice so that his partner would have to lean in to hear.

“Ooh, why didn’t you just say that?” his partner stated, shaking his head and giving him a soft kiss. Clay rested his forehead against his, looking into his eyes as he continued, “That sounds great…except for the potential of rain, cold, dirt, bugs, wild animals…”

“Alright, alright, I get it! It’s outdoors!” he laughed, rubbing Clay’s arm reassuringly. “But, you do have the week to get used to the idea,” he added quickly, turning to head for first period before Clay could reply.

He was still smiling as he joined his partner at their usual table for lunch. He rested his elbows on the table as he watched him. Clay had a determined look on his face as he sat his sandwich on the table in front of them.

“So, you’re telling me that it’s romantic to go out into the woods – where there’s no running water, or heat, with who knows what kind of animals?”

“There’s a river, that’s running water. And I’m warm…” he replied, grinning as he tapped Clay’s knee with his own. “Besides, this year has been crazy! Don’t you just want to get away, snuggle up with no one else around?”

He saw his partner’s face begin to soften at the thought. “Mmm, that does sound nice…” Clay said as he stared off into the distance. He took the opportunity to stare at his handsome profile, reaching his hand up to stroke his partner’s cheek. He let his fingers drift gently around Clay’s ear as he turned to look back at him, now smiling.
“Are you trying to recreate our first camping trip?” his partner asked, clearly trying not to laugh.

“I should have never told you about that!” he shook his head as they both enjoyed a laugh. “Are you going to get scared and snuggle up next to me when we tell ghost stories around the campfire like you did when we were kids?” he countered with a wink.

“Ah! I did no such thing! I’m not afraid of ghosts…” Clay answered not meeting his gaze, his fingers tapping on the lunch table.

“Mmmhmm, so you didn’t refuse to pee in the woods at night without me?” he teased, picking up one of his partner’s busy hands. He brought Clay’s hand to his mouth slowly, softly kissing one finger at a time until he saw his partner’s other hand quiet it’s nervous tapping. He watched as Clay stared at his mouth, loving the way he could so easily distract him.

“What are you two talking about?” a voice beside them teased. He turned as Jessica sat herself down next to him, Zach and a few other boys from the basketball team in tow.

“Uh, ya know I dunno, uh, camping trip I think is where we started…” Clay answered as he frowned slightly, cutely tugging at their clasped hands to turn his attention back to him.

“Ooh, fun. We should have a party in the woods!” Zach said, turning towards the other members of the team. Justin had been missing since the trial, leaving Zach to fill the position of captain. Not wanting to disappoint their captain, the boys nodded enthusiastically.

“That sounds great! I need a break from this place!” Jessica stated. She turned towards him asking, “When are we going?”

“Oh, uh, we were uh, just going to get away for the weekend…” he started.

“Yay, this weekend?! We’re in!” Jessica interrupted.

“…just, ah, just the two of us,” he continued, now drowned out by the sound of cheers from the group.

“This is going to be so much fun!” Jessica said as she hopped up, bending to give him a quick kiss on his cheek before grabbing Zach by the hand and leading him and his followers away.


“I think our weekend just got hijacked?” Clay answered, his mouth hanging slightly open as they turned to look at each other. “We don’t have to camp next to them, right?” he continued, fear in his eyes.

“Hell no! Fuck that, we’re getting a campsite as far away from theirs as possible! Like far away,” he said, looking in the direction they had left with an annoyed glare.

“Maybe it won’t be so bad,” his partner tried to reason, backtracking as he tilted his head and raised an eyebrow at him, “ok, ok, it’s going to be terrible having to listening to them party all night. But my dad was just telling me how there’s been strange reports from the park rangers up there lately.”

“Really? Like what, ghost sightings?” he asked with raised eyebrows, earning him a flirtatious whack on the arm.

“No, things like, getting taken from campsites and from the ranger station, stuff like that.”
“That’s normal though, Mi Corazon. Stuff gets stolen all the time, or people get drunk and misplace things,” he rested his hand on Clay’s shoulder reassuringly. “We’ll be fine, I’ll take a gun for protection, and as long as we stay away from those idiots we should be in for a great weekend.”

That Thursday they were standing around the island in Clay’s kitchen, chatting with Clay’s dad as they prepped sandwiches and snacks for their trip.

“ Sounds like fun, I never thought so many kids at your school would be interested in fishing?” Mr. Jensen commented as he stole a handful of chips.

“Yeah, well, it’s been kind of a crazy year, dad, I think most of them are going for a partying weekend before we have to study for finals,” Clay said, sloppily spreading jam over the slice of bread he held. “I’m sure they won’t even be bringing fishing equipment!”

“Well they can’t have our fish if they forget to bring enough food!” he chimed in emphatically, waving the peanut butter knife in his partner’s direction.

“You boys bringing any sort of protection? We’ve got some pepper spray around here somewhere if you need it?”

“Uh, yeah, that’s a good idea, thanks dad. We should probably take that just in case,” Clay said with a nod, sealing another sandwich in a Ziploc bag.

“I was just talking with one of the rangers, strange stuff just keeps happening up there,” Mr. Jensen said, taking another handful of chips. “Can’t be too careful, ya know! When are you guys heading up there?” he asked.

“Tomorrow after school, that way we can get an early start on Saturday morning, when the fish are biting,” he answered as he finished the last sandwich. “What strange things have been happening?” he asked, now curious.

“Well, ya know, some of the usual. Things getting stolen from the stations, and random things reported missing by other campers. But then last weekend they had someone come in really freaked out,” Mr. Jensen paused, looking between the two of them. “He said that he had seen a shadowy figure lurking around their campsite, but when he had called out no one responded, and when they around with the flashlight, no sign of anyone. Not even footprints.”

“I hate you right now,” Clay stated, shaking his head as he began cleaning up the mess in the kitchen.

“I’m not trying to scare you! That’s just what he said!” Mr. Jensen exclaimed, throwing his hands up. “All I’m saying is just be careful out there,” he said as he retreated from the kitchen.

He tried not to laugh as Clay threw the peanut butter and jelly knives into the sink, clearly disturbed at his father’s words. He made his way around the kitchen island, placing his hands around his partner’s slender waist. Holding him close, he leaned in and whispered, “You know he’s full of shit, right?”

Clay continued to wash their dishes, leaning back slightly into his embrace. “I know,” he said stubbornly, still refusing to look him in the eye.

He smiled to himself as he rubbed his nose along the back of Clay’s neck. “I’ll keep you safe,” he whispered, hugging his partner tighter.
“Are you sure you’re not going to be too busy?” Clay asked, turning in his arms to face him. He raised an eyebrow, giving him a crooked smile, “I won’t be too much of a distraction?”

He grinned, rubbing his hands up and down Clay’s back. “I can do both!” he assured as he leaned in for a kiss.

“Mmm…” he heard Clay moan happily as he let his tongue caress his partner’s lips. He sighed as he felt Clay open to him, pushing closer so that they were pressed up against the counter. As they kissed he felt Clay’s hands slip below his shirt, hands exploring along his ticklish sides and up towards his chest…

“Good evening boys!” Mrs. Jensen said cheerfully as she entered the kitchen. They broke their kiss, but he couldn’t bring himself to let Clay move away from the counter, keeping his hips pressed against him tightly.

“Hey mom.”

“Hello Mrs. Jensen.”

“I heard you boys were going camping with some friends from school this weekend, that sounds nice,” she replied, getting herself some juice from the fridge. She leaned against the island in the kitchen. Much to his annoyance it looked as though she wasn’t leaving anytime soon. He sighed as he stepped back from his Clay, releasing him from his hold.

“Yup,” was all the response Clay could muster. He shot a glance in his partner’s direction, man they really needed a weekend away, he thought.

“Well just be careful, don’t forget the first aid kit, and plenty of food. Just in case,” she said. “You never know, you kids could get stuck out there!” she exclaimed. He could see her train of thought begin to derail into countless scenarios.

“We’ll have multiple cars, lots of cell phones. And the rangers know we’re coming, it will be just fine Mrs. Jensen,” he said, trying to sound reassuring.

“Ok, well you just be careful,” she said as she straightened, pouting at them as she made her way towards the living room.

“I thought she’d never leave…” Clay said, pushing him against the island. “Now, where were we?” he mumbled into his ear seductively as his hands found their way back underneath his shirt.

They were waiting in line at Monet’s before heading out on their camping trip. He still couldn’t believe they had what seemed like half of the fucking basketball team in tow. He sighed as he looked over at his partner, it was all worth it though.

Clay turned to him, giving him a frown and then a smile, “What are you thinking about?”

“Nothing,” he said, pulling Clay in closer, lowering his voice so only he could hear, “just that I’d still want to go camping with you, even if we had to take the whole basketball team along.”

“And looks like Tyler and Sheri, and more cheerleaders too,” Clay said with raised eyebrows as he looked behind them.

“No,” he said with a frown, turning to look too. Sure enough, it looked as though they were going
to be joined by quite a rowdy crowd.

“We can always disappear off on a hike or something,” his partner said, leaning in to give him a kiss on the cheek before turning to order.

“So, what, you thought to invite the whole pep squad and not me?” said an irritated looking Skye behind the counter.

“No, we didn’t invite any of them…” Clay started quickly, before he was interrupted by her laughter.

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t resist,” she said through her laughter. “You two look so miserable, I’m sorry they’re ruining your vacation,” she continued as she wiped a tear from her eye.

“If it was a vacation, we’d be staying in a hotel,” Clay said, leaning on the counter while glaring at him.

He threw his hands up. “Alright, alright,” he relented, “next time, we’ll go to a hotel like normal, boring people.” He leaned forward, giving Clay a kiss on the tip of his nose. He watched his partner’s face light up and thought a night in a hotel together wasn’t the worst idea.

“I think a camping trip is romantic,” Skye said as she handed them their coffees. “It’s adventurous, out of the box, and surrounded by jocks,” she declared as she pointed outside.

He turned his attention to where she was pointing, in time to see Zach lift a giggling Jessica onto his shoulders while his groupies cheered him on and Tyler snapped pictures.

He sighed, “Maybe we should just stay here.”

“In Monet’s? Come on, you were so excited for this trip. You begged me to go,” Clay teased, grabbing his arm as he persuaded him to follow him towards the door.

“Mmm, so now you want to go?” he asked, an eyebrow raised.

“I want to spend time with my boyfriend where a parent or sibling isn’t walking in on us every twenty seconds,” Clay countered, leaning down to give him a quick peck. “Not that the mustang isn’t fun…,” he added with a day-dreamy look and a tilt of his head.

He took a second to enjoy staring at his partner’s soft lips before replying, “Okay, okay.”

“Well don’t have too much fun, you guys still have a date with me next Friday,” Skye called after them.

He raised the hand with his coffee cup in response as Clay hollered a goodbye.

They made their way to his brother’s truck they were borrowing for the weekend. He was happy for the loan, but he missed his mustang already. He took one last look in the bed of the truck to make sure their gear was secure before getting in.

“Well, off we go!” he yelled as he turned out of the parking lot, band of misfits in tow.
15 - Clay

Chapter Summary

Clay and Tony set up camp, and attempt to have some alone time...

Clay

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The drive had only taken them a few hours, but it was already starting to get dark by the time they began setting up their tents. His boyfriend has chosen a site with a centralized fire pit surrounded by sturdy logs for sitting on. The truck sat on the right-hand side in its designated gravel spot, making it easy to grab things from the bed and head straight over to their camp.

He could hear the muffled shouts and laughter from the other campsite as he helped Tony secure the sides of their little tent down.

“The trees don’t do much to drown out the sound, do they?” he stated as they heard a chant of ‘drink, drink!’ He looked over at his boyfriend, who was now retrieving some of their fishing gear from the back of the truck. He was happy to see that Tony looked completely at ease, even happy despite their uninvited guests.

“Ah, let ‘em have their fun,” Tony replied, setting the tackle box down next to one of the logs around the fire pit. He reached over, playfully pulling him into a hug. “Besides, they’ll be passed out soon enough and we’ll be able to enjoy a quiet evening and then a peaceful morning of fishing.”

“Seriously? You’re still on that fishing thing?” he asked with a smile, leaning in to kiss his boyfriend on the forehead. He frowned as he stared into the back of the packed truck, saying sarcastically, “Are you sure we have enough stuff for that?”

“You’ll be grateful for all blankets and towels once you fall in that cold water,” Tony laughed, slapping him gently on the butt before he turned to continue unpacking.

He found himself laughing as well, “Why, are you gonna push me in?” he asked, playfully shoving him. He watched as Tony lifted himself to sit on the edge of the bed of the truck, motioning him to join. Instead, he remained standing, coming close enough to nestle between Tony’s knees as he wrapped his long arms around his boyfriend’s waist.

He smiled up at Tony, enjoying his vantage point even in the ever-growing darkness surrounding them. Tony pulled him closer, kissing the top of his head. He grinned wider, closing his eyes as he let Tony slowly kiss his way down around his forehead. Impatient, he stopped his boyfriend’s slow decent by lifting onto his tiptoes and kissing him full on the mouth.

He felt joy as Tony smiled under his lips, enjoying the feeling as their kiss intensified. He loved exploring his boyfriend’s sumptuous mouth from this angle.

“Oh, hey guys!” he heard from the front of their campsite.
He gave Tony one last, reluctant peck on the cheek before looking in the direction of Tyler’s voice.

“Uh, hi, can we help you?” he asked, seeing that Tyler was not alone, his hand entwined with a grinning Sheri.

“Are you guys going to come join us for dinner?” she asked.

He looked up at Tony, who gave him a shrug. He knew that meant it was up to him. “I guess we could stop by to eat, but we’ve got to finish unpacking here first,” he said, eager to get back to the fun new position he had his boyfriend in.

Unfortunately, Tyler and Sheri made no move to leave. Instead they made their way deeper into the campsite, taking a seat on the log next to the tackle box.

“Did you guys happen to bring any fire-starters?” Tyler asked, surveying the contents of the box.

He heard Tony sigh and start to wiggle out of his grip. He tightened his hold and frowned stubbornly, earning him a look of surprise and a smile.

“Ya, we brought plenty,” his boyfriend said before leaning down for another long kiss.

Once his toll was satisfied, he released his hold on Tony’s hips, smiling as he watched his boyfriend stand up in the back of the truck. Tony began grabbing bags of supplies and handing them down.

“You guys are so cute,” Sheri said, giggling. She had obviously been drinking already, he thought as she pawed at Tyler’s arm. He laughed at the surprised look on Tyler’s face as she grabbed his head and placed a sloppy kiss on his cheek. “Aren’t they the cutest?” she asked happily.

Tony laughed, hopping down from the truck with the last of their supplies. “Sounds like we need to get some food in you!” he said as he stuffed their bags into the tent and zipped it shut. He grabbed a flashlight and the paper bag with their fire starters and motioned for them to follow him to the other campsite.

“That wasn’t so bad,” he said as they made their way back to their campsite hand in hand. He wasn’t sure what time it was, but he could feel tiredness wash over him as they picked their way carefully by flashlight.

“Naw, they weren’t that bad,” Tony replied as they rounded the corner, lighting the hood of the truck with the light.

“I didn’t know about Zach and Jessica, ya know…” he started, pausing as he didn’t know how to finish his sentence.

“That they’re a couple now?”

“Yeah, or something?” he said uncertainly as they unzipped the tent flap and began to sort through the mounds of blankets. He watched Tony remove his jacket and sit to unlace his shoes, leaving them outside the tent so as not to track in dirt. He backtracked quickly, wiping at the floor of the tent as his boyfriend laughed.

“You’re fine, I’m sure we’ll end up tracking in a lot of dirt over the course of the weekend,” Tony assured, kneeling behind him and massaging his shoulders as he deposited his shoes and zipped
“You sure they won’t get stolen?” he asked, enjoying the feeling of Tony’s hands on his shoulders. He stripped off his jacket and shirt, relishing the skin to skin contact.

He heard his partner laugh softly. “I’m sure our shoes will be there in the morning,” he whispered as he leaned down to kiss the top of his shoulder. “Why don’t you lay down, I’ll rub your back,” he added, reaching over to lay a blanket over the floor of their tent.

“Mmm, sounds nice,” he said, smiling as he grabbed a pillow and laid down. He groaned as Tony began to massage a sore spot in his upper back. “How do you do that?” he asked.

“Do what Mi Corazon?”

“Make me melt, even on the cold ground?” he replied, enjoying the warmth from his boyfriend’s hands.

“Are you cold?” Tony asked, stopping his massage to grab another blanket.

“Nothing you can’t fix…” he responded, turning onto his back. He hooked a finger in the front pocket of his boyfriend’s jeans, tugging for him to join him on the ground. He smiled as he watched the hungry look in Tony’s eyes as he crawled over, pulling the blanket over the two of them and turning off the flashlight.

He giggled as the light trail of Tony’s kisses made their way from his belly all the way across his chest and up to his lips. He groaned appreciatively into their kiss as his cold hands found Tony’s warm back. He began to lift his boyfriend’s shirt slowly under the blanket, making sure to concentrate on every curve of his strong muscles.

When he finally reached Tony’s arms, he tugged at the shirt. He felt his boyfriend lift away from him, sitting up to remove the shirt from over his arms and head. He let his hands trail down Tony’s torso, outlining his abs until he found where the top of his jeans hit. He traced his fingers along the waistband, enjoying listening to Tony’s sharp intake of breath.

He unbuttoned and unzipped the jeans, tugging them lower on his boyfriend’s hips. Tony leaned back over him, continuing to make out as he helped him out of the restrictive denim. Once they were finally off, he threw them dismissively to the other side of the tent.

“Hmm, someone’s impatient tonight,” Tony laughed as he kissed his way down his neck, stopping to nibble on his collarbone. He breathed deeply, trying to raise his chest higher to meet his boyfriend’s attentive mouth. Tony knew just how to drive him crazy with his slow, languid movements.

“I just know what I want,” he answered, grabbing the hair on the back of Tony’s head and raising him back up to kiss him harder. He used his other hand to tease at the waistband of Tony’s boxer briefs, sneaking his fingers one by one so he could rake his nails along his glutes. Tony’s responding growl shook him to the core, giving him goosebumps. He felt his boyfriend’s arm push under him, angling his hips higher so he could grind him roughly into the ground. The movement tipped his mind over the edge. No longer thinking about making the moment last, he used both hands to try and remove the briefs from his hot boyfriend as quickly as he could.

He heard as much as felt the throaty laughter coming from Tony as he attempted to untangle his legs from the undergarment.

“Having fun?” Tony whispered into his ear, not being helpful at all. He could tell his boyfriend
was enjoying his struggle and decided to even out the sense of urgency.

He stopped fumbling with the briefs, grabbing his now exposed partner as he turned his head to bite his lip. He was rewarded with an ‘Ah!’ of surprise. He smiled as he continued to stroke him, even as Tony’s hands moved hastily to undo his jeans.

He released his grip as Tony moved to remove his briefs and the jeans. He listened with happiness at the rapid pace of his boyfriend’s breathing, echoed in his own heartbeat. He felt Tony’s bangs on his forehead as he laid back on top of him, kissing him deeply.

He let himself enjoy making out in this position, trying to force his mind to stop wondering when Tony would take his boxers off. However fast his mind was racing, he felt his body relax under Tony’s as he continued to explore his mouth fully.

He let his hands wander over Tony’s broad shoulders as his boyfriend began to kiss his way down his neck, stopping again to nibble along his collarbone.

“Tony!” he gasped as Tony’s mouth found his nipple, biting down for a second before continuing lower.

“Mmmm,” was the only response he got as Tony licked and kissed his way down one side of his abs and down to where his hipbone peaked out from above his boxers. He closed his eyes in enjoyment as Tony paused, attentively marking his hipbone with a hickey.

He let his fingers grip the only handhold he could reach, his boyfriend’s long hair. “Mi Amor!” he cried out as Tony bit down on his hip against the hickey, the strong touch nearly sending him over the edge…

“TONY! CLAY!” came a yell from outside their campsite. “HELP! Where are you?” the female voice continued to yell, getting louder as she got closer to their tent.

“I’m going to fucking murder them,” Tony growled at the sound of the zipper to their tent being fumbled with, “every fucking one of them.” The soft glow of flashlights becoming more apparent on the outside of their tent. “OCCUPIED!” he yelled as he sat down next to him angrily, pulling the blanket over their laps.

He couldn’t bring himself to sit up yet, trying to slow his breathing as Jessica’s head appeared at the front of their tent.

“What the fuck?!” he yelled before she could say anything.

“Guys, you have to come quick, there was someone sneaking around our campsite!” she said rapidly.

“There’s like fifteen people over there! Tell them!” Tony said, clearly annoyed at the interruption.

“Oh, were you two…oh geez, I’m sorry!”

“What? Are they in there?” said another female voice, opening the tent flap wider.

“Sheri? Zach?! What the hell are you all doing over here?” Tony yelled.

“And me,” Tyler said, popping his head in behind Zach’s.

“Oh my gosh, this tent isn’t even big enough for all of you,” he said as he finally sat up, waving his hands for emphasis, “even if we wanted to share!”
Zach tried apologizing, “Sorry, we can wait for you guys to finish. We’ll be right out here,” he said as he dropped his side of the tent flap and backed towards the fire pit with Tyler.

He saw Tony raise his eyebrows at the two girls when they didn’t leave.

“Someone came into our camp and stole water and some of our food!” Jessica said obstinately. “Tyler has pictures!”

“Alright, well they’re gone now! What do you want me to do about it? Search the woods in my birthday suit?!” Tony exclaimed with a shrug of his bare shoulders.

“Ah, no, uh, you…you should put pants on,” she said with a blush, dropping the rest of the tent flap and rushing away with Sheri.

He looked over to where his boyfriend sat steaming in anger. “I mean, a few minutes isn’t going to make a difference, right?” he asked, reaching over to zip the tent back up. He saw Tony give him a crooked smile before pulling him back onto their blanket.

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They sat around their fire pit with the others, a fire now burning brightly.

“So, um, like we said, uh, Tyler has, uh, he has pictures of the…” Zach stuttered, avoiding eye contact with him and Tony. He cleared his throat, finally looking in their direction. “…pictures of the intruder,” he finished.

“Are you alright?” he felt compelled to ask as they waited for Tyler to fish out his digital camera.

“I just, ah, I guess I didn’t expect that you two were actually, uh…”

“Going to have sex?” Tony asked abruptly from his seat at his feet, earning himself a glare from Zach. “What? You offered to wait? It wasn’t like it was going to make any difference to your ‘emergency’,” he continued, still clearly annoyed.

He started giggling, the annoyed look from his boyfriend sending him into full blown laughter.

“What?” Tony asked.

“I’ve just never seen you so mad you resorted to using bunny ears,” he laughed as he imitated the hand gesture his boyfriend had used with the word ‘emergency’. He was happy to see the set of Tony’s shoulders relax as he began to laugh as well. He leaned over, giving him a soft peck on the cheek before saying, “You look just like your dad when you’re angry.”

“No digas eso, Mi Corazon,” Tony said with a pained look and a shake of his head. He watched lovingly as his boyfriend rubbed a hand across his face as if trying to wipe away the resemblance.

“I guess I just never knew how close you were,” Zach said.

He turned back towards him, surprised at the soft look now on his face.

“I guess I just thought after Hannah, I dunno, maybe you would be slow to let someone in again,” Zach continued, looking down at the ground.

“Well, we’ve all been through a lot,” Tony said as he reached up to hold his hand. He looked down into his boyfriend’s soft gaze as he kissed their hands. He smiled and squeezed their hands tighter with both of his.
“I’m happy for you guys,” Zach said, drawing his attention from Tony and back to the group. He no longer looked embarrassed as he smiled at them, reaching over to take Jessica’s hand.

“Not to break up the love-fest, or anything, but I’ve got the pictures ready…” Tyler interrupted, receiving a smack on the shoulder from Sheri. “What?!” he asked her.

“We’ve been through a lot, hun, we should take all the love-fest moments we can get!” she said, grinning as she leaned in to kiss his forehead.

Tony raised his free hand and beckoned to Tyler. “Alright brother, let’s see these pictures that were so important you couldn’t knock,” he said with a smile.

“I would’ve knocked, but Jessica beat me over here. I think she secretly wants to watch you two…” Tyler mumbled, sitting next to Tony.

“Hey! I can hear you!” Jessica piped up, sticking out her tongue at Tyler.

He found himself wondering when they had all become close enough to joke around like this. He found it oddly comforting, taking the time to smile around at all of them before he looked down over his boyfriend’s shoulder at the camera screen.
16- Tony

Chapter Summary

Tony takes Clay fishing

Tony

“What the hell am I looking at?” he asked, peering at the dark screen.

Tyler huffed as he used the zoom button on his camera. “There, right there!” he exclaimed, pointing.

“Using the zoom isn’t going to make a difference, the whole screen is dark!” he exclaimed, still unsure if he could make out any shapes at all.

Zach got up, standing behind them to shine the flashlight down. “Right there, don’t you see the guy in the woods?!”

“I’m the most gullible person here, and even I don’t see anything?” Clay piped up, raising his hand.

“They were right there, right in the campsite! I got up to pee and when I looked over I saw someone!” Jessica said impatiently.

“And you four were the only ones to notice this guy?” he asked, raising his eyebrows in question.

“Everybody else had already ran down to the river to go skinny dipping,” Sheri explained.

“Skinny dipping?! It’s freezing!” Clay exclaimed. He tried to hold in a laugh at the look of shock on his partner’s face.

“They’re all drunk and horny, cold water doesn’t faze them,” Zach countered, using the flashlight to turn his attention back to the camera. “And besides,” he continued, “whether the pictures are good or not, there’s still the missing food and water.”

“And you’re sure it wasn’t just one of other drunk, horny teenagers?” he asked, ready for this conversation to be over so he could snuggle Clay up inside their tent.

The group fell silent, contemplating. After a few moments, Clay said, “Alright then, so why don’t we make some s’mores since we have the fire going, and then all go to bed?”

“That’s a great idea,” he happily agreed, glad his partner had sense enough not to press the matter further.

The others agreed with varying degrees of enthusiasm, Jessica still looking somber.

“I’m glad they’re gone,” Clay whispered from his position, tucked happily away underneath his
arm. They were alone in their tent, spooning for warmth underneath a pile of blankets.

“Me too Mi Corazon,” he replied, placing a kiss on the back of his neck before snuggling his head down. He could still smell the smoke from the campfire in his partner’s hair.

“They really freaked me out, though. What if they’re right and some crazy person is out there stealing food and water?”

He sighed, squeezing his partner tight. “Then he must need the supplies more than we do Mi Amor. I’m sure he’ll leave us alone now that he has what he needs,” he tried to coax.

“You’re right, it’s probably just some hungry camper.”

“Mmmhmm,” he mumbled as he began to drift off.

“Goodnight, Tony. Te amo,” his partner whispered.

He smiled. “I love you, too.”

He grinned to himself as he took in Clay’s rumpled appearance in the light of dawn. Still handsome as ever, he thought as he handed his partner the thermos of coffee. Clay really did look cute in his waiters, he thought. He gave him a quick kiss before grabbing their fishing poles and tackle box.

“Why are we doing this so early again?” Clay asked as they made their way to the river.

“That’s when the fish are biting Mi Corazon,” he replied with a smile. “Besides, this way we won’t be bothered by the pep squad,” he added as they passed the other campsite. He noted the abundance of empty beer bottles, laughing at the few who hadn’t quite made it into their tents the night before.

Clay noticed his laughter and glanced over, joining in and shaking his head. “I’ll take fishing with you over waking up on the forest floor any day!” he said as they took the short path down to the river.

“I think I caught one! Get the net!” Clay yelled excitedly from the middle of the river. He smiled to himself, happy that his partner was having fun. He propped up his pole and made his way over with the net.

Clay had indeed caught a fish, and was successfully reeling it in as fast as he could. He scooped up the fish in the net and they high-fived enthusiastically. He splashed his partner teasingly as they made their way back to the shore.

“You’re doing remarkably well for someone who didn’t want to come,” he said proudly as he deposited the squirming fish in their bucket of water along with Clay’s other two catches.

Clay laughed as he stood behind him and wrapped his arms around his waist. “Well I wouldn’t be able to catch anything if you didn’t cast for me,” his partner said as he kissed the curve where his shoulder met his neck.

“Why don’t you try the next one?” he asked, reaching his hand up to tousle Clay’s hair. He was more than happy to wrap his arms around his partner to teach him how to cast.
“Alright, show me!” Clay replied.

They spent the next few minutes laughing and practicing how to cast a line.

“Ok, try the next one yourself. Nice and easy, it’s not a wide river…” he said, his hands resting on Clay’s hips.

He burst into laughter as Clay way overshot and got his hook caught in a tree limb on the far bank.

“That’s okay Mi Amor, it’s easy enough to reach,” he laughed as he gave his partner a kiss on the cheek. “Just reel it in slowly, keep the line taught so it doesn’t tangle,” he continued as they began to wade to the other side of the river. Luckily for them it wasn’t very deep in this section and they made it easily.

He succeeded in retrieving the hook without trouble, turning to notice Clay was no longer standing behind him.

“Clay?” he called.

“Over here!” his partner called from behind a boulder. Clay stuck his head out from behind the rock, “Come here, I found something!”

He obliged, walking over to follow his partner to what looked like a camp had been set up.

“I walked behind this rock to take a piss, and I found all this stuff,” Clay said as he picked up an empty water bottle from a dirty blanket. “Isn’t this the same brand Zach and the others brought?” he asked, looking up at him with a quizzical look.

“Yeah it is. Fuck. I wonder if one of them got lost last night?”

“I dunno, Tony? It looks like some of this stuff has been here for a long time,” his partner said, gesturing to a mound of ash from what looked like many fires.

“We should go back, make sure all of them made it back to camp last night,” he said, turning and making his way back across the river with Clay.

He was happy to see that the others were beginning to stir when they made it back. Zach was trying to start a fire as Jessica and Sheri sat nearby, drinking water and talking amongst themselves.

“Hey Zach, is everyone accounted for?” he asked as he sat down their gear next to the girls and searched his pockets for a lighter.

“Um, yeah, I think so,” Zach grunted, sitting up to look at him. “Why do you ask?”

“Clay came across a camp across the river when we were fishing this morning,” he answered as he pointed towards his partner. He grinned as Clay tried to proudly show off his fish.

“There was an empty water bottle, same brand as you guys brought,” Clay spoke up, “we thought maybe someone got drunk and stumbled over there?”

Zach looked around, “I’m pretty sure everyone’s here? They were definitely all here last night, I checked before we went to bed. Do you think it was that creeper we saw?”

“I knew it! I knew there was somebody sneaking around, I told you!” Jessica exclaimed as she
jumped up. She crossed her arms, “I don’t feel safe with a weirdo running around.”

“Now, now, we don’t know who this person is. Why don’t I come with you guys, you can show me the camp and we can report it to the rangers if there’s drugs or anything dangerous over there,” Zach said with authority, standing for effect.

“Can you start the fire first, big shot?” Sheri asked sarcastically, instantly causing his puffed-out chest to deflate.

“I got it,” he said, leaning over to stack their kindling properly and lit it with his lighter.

“I swear it was right here!” Clay exclaimed as he ran around the empty patch of ground. “See, there’s some of the ashes right there!”

Zach did not look convinced, his eyebrows making their way up and down his forehead rapidly as he searched his brain for a response. “Well…maybe whoever was here moved on? Or maybe you scared him off?” he finally said, shrugging his shoulders. “Are you sure this is the spot?”

“Yeah, we came straight across the river from the path,” he assured, scratching the back of his head. He wondered if the person had been spying on them and decided to move. He looked back across the river again, it had only taken them a few minutes to get here, he thought. “We did have to cross on that log because you didn’t have waiters,” he mused, “maybe that gave him enough time to move to higher ground?”

“You believe us, right? There was somebody here, and they had been here for a while!” Clay asked, looking up at Zach.

“Sure, I mean, there’s no reason to make something like that up!” Zach replied, holding his arms out in surrender. “But what are we going to do about it?”

He sighed, looking at his partner’s frowning face. “I guess nothing. He doesn’t seem dangerous, just hungry,” he said with a shrug.

They made their way back to their camp with their fish and gear. They had left Zach back at the other campsite explaining what they had found to the others. He sat down on one of the logs around the fire pit, motioning for Clay to join him.

He watched as his partner sat down the bucket with his fish. Clay stared down at them for a second before looking up at him. “I kind of like them, do we have to eat them?” he asked with his puppy dog eyes out in full force.

He couldn’t deny his partner anything when he looked at him that way. He stood up, pulling Clay into a hug. “We don’t have to do anything you don’t want to Mi Corazon,” he said before kissing him.

He felt Clay smile as he brought his arms up to reciprocate his embrace.

“Maybe we just release them then?” he asked, drawing back from their kiss just far enough to search his eyes.

He smiled at his partner. “Of course, Mi Amor, anything you want,” he whispered before drawing him in closer. He loved that sweet innocent side of his partner almost as much as he loved the side
that seemed to want to strip him at any given moment. The thought made him want to get his partner out of the waiters and back into their tent…

He heard the thunder of running feet before he saw anyone. He and Clay both sighed as they looked at each other.

“Is this what it feels like to have kids? Not a moment to yourself?” Clay asked tiredly.

He laughed as he released his hold on his partner. He sat back down on the log as he watched Zach crash into their campsite with Jessica, Tyler, and Sheri close behind.

“Can we not get two seconds alone?” Clay asked, before any of them could speak.

“Clay…” Zach started.

“No, I don’t want to hear it! Figure out how to start a fire by yourself!”

“CLAY,” Zach said louder, pointing behind him.

“What? Why do you keep saying my name if who you want is Tony?”

He heard footsteps behind him, and felt the cold barrel of a gun on the back of his head before he could turn around. “Clay…,” he warned as he raised his hands above his head.

“What?” his partner asked as he turned to him quickly. A look of shock instantly took over the anger in his face.

“Justin?!?”
17- Clay

Chapter Summary

Justin drama! And then Clay and Tony get a moment alone...

Chapter Notes

One note: Clay and Tony do finally get an intimate moment (disclaimer, it's in the middle of the chapter if you do not wish to read it)...to everyone who does read it, this is my first shot at this type of writing and I hope you enjoy!

(On a humorous note: I'm sure Google is now convinced I'm trying to impress a Spanish gentleman with as much sexy talk I tried to translate...but it's so worth it)

Clay

He took in the scene with a mixture of shock and terror. A dirty-looking Justin was standing in what remained of his blue and white letterman jacket, his curly hair tumbling into his face. And he was pointing a gun straight at Tony.

“What the hell are you doing?” he yelled.

“Just give me the keys to the truck and I’ll get out of here, no one gets hurt,” Justin said, his voice hoarse.

“They’re in the truck, brother,” Tony said, a level of calm in his deep voice that he marveled at. How was his boyfriend so calm?

“It’s locked, I already checked! And I’m not your brother!” Justin said, his voice rising to a shout.

“Justin, don’t do this!” Jessica yelled as she stepped out from behind Zach.

Justin began to lower the gun as he looked at her. “This doesn’t concern you. I have to get out of here,” he said, shaking his head.

“The keys are in the truck, man. Take it,” Tony repeated.

“I told you, it’s locked!” Justin yelled, yanking the gun up again to point it at his boyfriend.

“Hey!” he yelled, mad now. “He’s still healing from the last time he got shot! Point that thing at me instead, I’m the one who locked the truck!” he continued as he took a step closer to the two of them.

“You locked the truck? We’re in the middle of the fucking woods?” Tony asked, raising a hand to
stop his approach as Justin raised the gun to him instead.

“Well how was I supposed to know you just leave the keys in there?”

“Because it’s a Ford! It takes, like, a minute to hotwire the thing,” his boyfriend stated. He watched as Tony began to move stealthily from his seat into more of a crouched position, ready to spring at Justin.

He saw Justin begin to turn his attention towards Tony, so he waved his arms and yelled, “So you’re telling me we’re stuck out here?!”

It seemed to distract Justin enough. He saw Tony leap for his gun arm and he dropped to the ground for cover. He would take a bullet for his boyfriend any day, but it still didn’t mean he wanted to get shot. Tony kicked Justin in the knee, causing him to yelp and distracting him enough so that Tony could disarm him. Justin scrambled away and took off running into the woods.

Zach started to run after him, but Tony stopped him with an arm, “No man, let him go. He could have another gun, or a knife. It’s not safe to go after him.”

After he saw Zach nod in agreement, Tony offered him a hand up.

“Thanks babe,” he said, gratefully kissing him on the cheek.

Tony emptied the clip from the gun, double checking that the chamber was empty before replying, “Nice acting back there by the way.” He tucked the clip in his pocket and handed the empty gun to Zach.

“That was only half an act, really,” he said as he ruffled his hair nervously. “I really did lock the truck…”

“That’s okay. The keys aren’t in there,” his boyfriend said with a coy smile as he drew him in for a kiss.

By now the others were all gathered around.

“Yeah, they’re in the tackle box,” Tyler stated. He shot him a curious glance, causing Tyler to turn slightly red, “I saw them in there yesterday.”

“Tyler was taking some pictures in the woods, he saw Justin making his way through the woods heading your direction. That’s why we came running over here,” Sheri explained, taking Tyler by the arm.

“Well don’t I feel like an ass?” he said, embarrassed at his outburst. His boyfriend tried to comfort him by running a hand through his hair and down the back of his neck.

“It’s fine, it’s been kind of a crazy weekend,” Zach said. He tucked the empty gun in the back of his pants, adding, “You guys should probably move camp to be next to us tonight though.”

“We’re staying another night?!” Jessica piped up.

He looked from between her and Zach, feeling the tension rising. He looked at his boyfriend, hugging him tighter in his arms.

“He might come back, he obviously needs help,” Tony tried to reason, squeezing him back.
“So, what, we wait for him to show up again?” Jessica asked, her anger now directed in Tony’s direction.

“That’s actually not such a bad idea,” Sheri tried to soothe. She rubbed Jessica’s crossed arms and tried to reason, “We don’t know what’s going on with him. He left town for a reason, we should try and help if we can.”

He watched as Jessica turned the idea over in her head. Finally, she nodded, causing Zach to let out a big sigh of relief.

“Alright, let’s get you guys settled. Then we can come up with a plan for tonight,” Zach said with a clap of his hands.

They were packing up the last of the bags and the tent in the truck to drive down to the other campsite when Tyler spoke up, “Wait a sec, Clay. Did you say that Tony got shot recently?”

He stopped, his backpack midway into the truck. “Uh, um…,” he stuttered, looking at Tony for help.

“I’m fine, it’s a long story,” Tony answered.

“What?! We have to hear it!” Sheri yelled, “That’s a total campfire story!”

“Let’s just get settled and figure out what we’re going to do about Justin first,” Tony said, hopping into the driver’s seat.

“Do we have to go out there?” he asked his boyfriend, laying back onto the blanket in the tent. They were all settled into their new camping spot next to their loud peers.

Tony smiled and settled down on his side next to him. “It’s only lunchtime, we could stay here a while longer…” he said, using his hand to trace circles on his hip.

He smiled, turning to face his handsome boyfriend. He snuck his bottom arm underneath Tony’s head and scooted his body closer, enjoying the careful way Tony watched his movements.

“I know this isn’t the camping trip I promised…” Tony started to say.

He cut his boyfriend off with a kiss, lifting his head to get a better angle. He took his time, the way Tony normally did, growing the kiss from a light touch to a deep exploration. He used one arm to cushion his boyfriend’s head while the other one pushed him onto his back.

He rolled so that he was on top of Tony, kissing him rougher now. He felt Tony’s hands on his hips, pressing him down harder as he nipped at his bottom lip. He sat up, reclaiming his arm, and began to pull his boyfriend’s long-sleeve shirt off. When all that was left were the arms, he pinned them above Tony’s head and dove in for another kiss.

He felt a slight thrill at the thought of having Tony’s hands trapped in the shirt while he kissed him. His boyfriend was usually the one to take charge, and as much as he loved it, he was happy to switch it up. After the threat of losing him, all he wanted was to take in as much of his boyfriend as he could get.

He licked Tony’s upper lip and rubbed noses with him before looking him in the eye. “It’s perfect,” he said, and he meant it. “I love getting to spend time with you, and love how you just come alive when you’re out here.”
“Te amo Mi Corazon,” Tony whispered, a soft smile on his face.

“I love you too,” he replied, kissing his boyfriend’s cheek. “And that’s why you’re going to stay just like this…” he continued as he began to kiss his way down Tony’s neck. He could already feel his boyfriend begin to squirm. He knew how badly Tony wanted to touch him, but he had other plans…

“Stay like what?” Tony asked breathily. He could feel the pulse under his mouth speed up and it made him smile.

He continued to slowly work on marking Tony’s neck with a hickey, stopping only as Tony’s hips ground up into him. “With your arms up there,” he replied as he looked up at him, his head now on his boyfriend’s well-muscled chest. He let his hands travel down Tony’s arms, stopping when he felt him trying to raise up.

“Uh uh,” he teased, pressing his boyfriend’s arms down above his head again. “You never just relax and enjoy,” he said with a smile, turning back to kiss his chest again.

Tony laughed, wrapping his legs around him. “So, I’m not allowed to use my hands?”

He took a nipple lightly between his teeth and shook his head no. He could feel Tony’s laughter turn into a growl and smiled again. He snuggled his body between his boyfriend’s legs, watching his face as he began to kiss down his abdomen.

“And when am I allowed up?” Tony asked throatily, observing his decent with a look of desire.

“When I’m done,” he said coyly, kisses traveling across one set of obliques as he undid his boyfriend’s jeans. He pulled the jeans down slowly, slower than he wanted, as he let his tongue play at the waist of Tony’s briefs.

“Clay…”

“Mmm, busy,” he said as he blew softly on where his tongue had been, sending a wave of shivers over his boyfriend. He meticulously kissed his way over Tony’s other side, tugging the briefs down simultaneously.

“Mi Corazon…tus besos me enloquecen,” Tony begged, squirming as if to move his arms.

“Nope, if you move your arms, I’ll stop…” he threatened with a smile. “And I don’t think you want me to stop…” he continued as he trailed his fingertips up one of Tony’s well-toned thighs. He kissed his boyfriend’s hip bone passionately, marking it with another hickey.

“Mi Amor!” he heard his partner whisper when he finally finished and made his way to where he really wanted to be sucking…

In the minutes to come, he fully enjoyed his lover’s reaction to his touch, taking in Tony’s sweating, wriggling body with a smile. He quickened his pace and continued to watch as Tony climaxed, barely having time to swallow before his naked boyfriend sat up and pulled him back down to him into an aggressive kiss.

He let Tony rip his shirt off and roll him over to the ground, switching their positions. He savored the weight of his boyfriend on top of him, taking the opportunity to grab a hold of his ass with both hands.

“Quiero arrancarte toda la ropa,” Tony whispered in his ear.
It made him smile from ear to ear and sent a shiver down his spine when his boyfriend talked dirty in Spanish. “Te deseo,” he replied, nibbling on Tony’s earlobe.

“Quiero besar todas las partes de tu cuerpo.”

“Mmm, I think I just did that to you…” he laughed.

Tony growled in response, kissing the space above his heart. “You’re Spanish is getting better Mi Corazon,” he complimented before he licked his way up his neck to his lips.

“Tony! Clay?” he heard Sheri call from outside the tent.

“Just a minute!” he yelled back, sighing into Tony as their mouths met again. He pulled back from their kiss after a moment, “We should probably get out there…”

“We’re definitely continuing this later,” Tony said decisively as he placed another kiss on the side of his lips. “Mmm, you taste like me…”

The six of them were sitting, watching the river as they finalized their plan to catch Justin that evening.

“So, we just post up at three different locations around camp and wait?” Tyler asked as he tossed pebbles into the river.

“We’ll make a big bonfire for everyone else to gather around and then leave food or water out around the outskirts of camp. As long as we’re all watching from our positions, we’ll be sure to spot him,” Zach said with authority. He began drawing a rough sketch in the sand with a stick.

He watched as his boyfriend stood up, stretched, and made his way over to inspect the outline, marveling at the fluidity of his movements. He smiled to himself. He was sure he was imagining it, but he could swear Tony had seemed to shed the stress he had been carrying since Justin had come out of the woods with the gun. And he would happily take credit for this new, lighter attitude his boyfriend seemed to have.

As if he knew what he was thinking, Tony glanced over at him from his crouched position next to Zach. He watched intently as his boyfriend’s thumb traced around his lips. It was amazing how mesmerizing that one small movement of his was…

“Clay!” he heard Jessica say as she tapped him on the shoulder.

“Huh?” he replied, tearing his eyes away from Tony.

“Are you even listening?” she asked with one eyebrow raised.

“Sure…”

“You are not. You’re staring at Tony,” she countered.

“Then why ask?” he laughed, playfully shoving her knee.

“I was asking if you thought Justin would really show up again?”

“Do you want him to?” he asked, curious why she wanted to know his opinion.
“I don’t know Clay. He just left after the tapes came out! I had to go through it all without him, I hated him! But when I saw him today, all I could think about was if he was ok or not,” she exclaimed, tears now forming in her eyes.

“Oh, hey,” he said, startled at the outburst. He didn’t know what to do, so he put his arm around her shoulders. She turned into his shoulder and continued to cry, leaving him feeling awkward and uncomfortable. “You can’t help the way you feel about someone,” he tried to soothe, “he tried to protect you from the truth the only way he knew how.”

“But why don’t I hate him?”

He could barely hear her from the cover of his shoulder. He looked over at Tony again, watching his smile as he poked fun at Zach’s drawing. He turned back to her, saying softly, “Because that’s not how love works.”
Chapter Summary

The group sets out to catch Justin, and Tony and Clay enjoy an intimate moment.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tony

He noticed the saddened look on his partner’s face as he tried to console Jessica. He wanted nothing more than to run over and wipe the sadness away, but he knew Jessica needed a moment so he stayed where he was.

Zach noticed him staring and looked over towards Jessica and Clay. “I sure didn’t expect to see Justin up here this weekend,” he said with a sigh, turning back to look him in the eye.

“It’s got to be a lot for her. Do you think she’s okay?” he asked, concern taking hold as Jessica continued to cry into his partner’s shoulder.

“Would you be?”

“Naw, brother. I don’t know how she’s made it through. She’s a strong woman,” he answered, shaking his head at the thought.

“Yes, she is,” Zach replied as he looked down at their map again.

“So, when did you two start seeing each other?” he asked, ready to change the subject.

“Oh, we’re not, like, dating or anything. After the tapes came out and Justin took off, Jess just needed a friend. Someone to make her feel safe and keep all the other high school boys away.”

“That’s a very nice thing to do, Zach,” he responded. He found that he was surprised at the effort Zach was putting into his friendship with Jessica. “So…how long have you been in love with her?” he finally asked.

Zach’s head shot up at the question, stopping when he saw the look on his face. “It doesn’t matter,” he said with a shake of his head. “She just needs a friend right now. She’s definitely not ready to be in another relationship,” Zach added, fidgeting with his drawing stick.

He clapped the bigger man on the back, knowing the pain of loving someone you didn’t know would ever love you back. He stared over at Clay again, feeling a warmth in his heart. “You’re doing the right thing,” he told Zach, looking into his eyes, “take it slow. It’s worth the wait.”

He watched as Zach looked him over, contemplating his words before answering, “Thanks man.”
“We’ve been watching a bunch of high schooler’s get drunk in the dark for the past hour, I feel like we’re in some sort of creepy documentary,” Clay stated from their post in the woods across from the campsite.

He laughed, lovingly pulling his partner into a kiss. “Only you would think this is like a documentary,” he teased, rubbing his hands along Clay’s back.

“Do you think he’ll even come back here? I mean, we have his gun, and he knows we all saw him…”

“Hmm, that’s a good point,” he told his partner as he began to maneuver them deeper into the woods. He leaned in to nuzzle Clay’s neck, noticing it was slightly cold to the touch. “I think we should take a break and warm you up a little…” he said as he grabbed his partner’s shapely butt and continued to press them farther back under cover of the forest.

He heard Clay’s flicker of a laugh as they crashed into a tree. He should really watch where he was going, he thought as a branch swiped him in the face.

Using his handhold on his partner, he lifted him and pinned him against the tree, kissing him all the while. He felt Clay’s hands trace underneath his jacket, the memory of his mouth on him earlier sending his pulse racing.

He set his partner down carefully and moved to unbutton his jeans, feeling Clay speed to do the same.

“Aren’t we supposed to be watching something? If Zach catches us…” Clay started to say between kisses. But he cut him off by shoving his tongue down his throat and his hand down into his boxers.

“If Zach catches us, he can learn a thing or two,” he whispered playfully, spinning his partner around to face the tree. He kissed the side of Clay’s neck as he pulled his hips tight against him. Clay’s moan of approval spurred him on and he bit down gently on a mouthful of his partner’s shoulder, moving his hands to lower his boxers. He let one of his hands grab his partner’s ass as the other moved to cup him from the front. He began kissing and sucking at Clay’s neck again as he ground his own erection into him and stroked him firmly.

“Mi Amor…” Clay said, voice cracking.

“Yes, my love?” he asked, slowing his pace slightly.

“Quiero que estes dentro demi,” his partner replied breathily.

His heart skipped a beat at the request and he used the hand gripping Clay’s ass to turn his head towards him for a kiss. “Yes sir,” he mumbled in his partner’s ear as he reached into his inside jacket pocket for a condom. He pulled his briefs down and quickly slid the condom on, using his own spit to add a little more lubricant.

He bent Clay’s upper body closer to the tree as he tilted his hips up, running a thumb along the space between his cheeks. He let his thumb tease his partner for a moment as he reached to stroke him again.

“Please, Tony!” his partner called, breathing heavily now. He knew he was driving Clay crazy because he had reverted back to English. He smiled widely, carefully sliding himself into the tightness of his partner.
The pressure made him gasp for air and he fought to pace himself, wanting Clay to enjoy himself too. He paused, leaning forward to brace his forearm against the tree, giving his partner somewhere to lean his head. He licked Clay’s neck as he used his free hand to grip his hipbone to press deeper into him.

“Oh god, Tony,” Clay whimpered, “don’t stop!”

Complying, he released Clay’s hip to caress his hard-on. His partner’s pleasure turned him on and he growled into his neck as he began thrusting into him. He heard Clay cry out and felt pride well in his chest.

He paused, whispering in his ear, “Bite down on my arm Mi Corazon.” Clay obeyed immediately, lifting his forehead from his arm and biting down just above his wrist. The pain was almost enough to finish him and he bit down on his partner’s shoulder to keep from shouting.

He continued slower now, trying to calm himself enough to enjoy the feel of his partner beneath him. He felt Clay nod into his arm and quickened their pace, a few more thrusts all it taking before he felt himself release. He was rewarded a second later by his partner’s groan as he reached completion as well.

Releasing Clay’s shoulder from his bite, he slowly pulled out of him and dropped the condom to the forest floor, vowing to throw it in their trash bag in a minute. He spun his partner back around to face him, looking into his Clay’s glassy eyes as he reached his hand up to lick his partner’s spilled come from his fingers.

He saw Clay grin before he pulled him into a sloppy kiss. They melted into the tree, still shaky from their rendezvous.

“Wow,” he heard from behind him. “That was, just, wow.”

He turned his head, confused. “Ryan?! What the fuck?” he said, scrambling to redress.

“Oh, don’t hurry on my account! I saw enough to tell you there’s nothing either of you have left to hide from me,” Ryan laughed as he fanned himself with his hand. “And I have to say, Brava!”

“What the fuck are you doing out here?” Clay asked, hastily pulling his own jeans back up. He continued standing in front of his partner, trying to give him some semblance of privacy.

When Clay was dressed, he turned back to Ryan. Noticing the backpack and bottle of water sitting next to him, he asked, “Are those for Justin?”

“Oh, so you know about that?” Ryan asked, looking down at the provisions. “I can’t believe you didn’t see me, you two just appeared suddenly and started going at it like bunnies!”

Just then they heard rustling in the bushes. Zack, Jessica, Tyler, and Sheri came crashing through a moment later.

“We heard shouts,” Tyler explained, frowning as he noticed Ryan. “Ryan?” he asked.

“The shouting was happening a few minutes ago, before they muffled it,” Ryan said with raised eyebrows as he took in Tyler and Sheri’s mussed appearance, twigs and leaves sticking out of Sheri’s hair. “And it looks like you two at least were involved in a similar type situation, although not as hot I’m sure,” he continued with a shake of his head.

“Come on, Ryan, tell us how you knew Justin was hiding out here,” he stated, leaning his back against his partner with a sigh. Clay wrapped his arms around him, holding onto his crossed arms
as he leaned his long neck to rest his head on his shoulder.

“You knew Justin was here? For how long?” Jessica yelled with her hands on her hips.

“Since Valentine’s Day,” Ryan replied with a shrug, “he stole one of the hearts from a cheerleader and sent me a message.”

“What the fuck, man?” Zach spat out.

“That’s what we said,” Clay mumbled from his shoulder.

“You okay Clay, your shoulder is bleeding?” Sheri asked, looking their direction for the first time.

He looked over his shoulder at his partner, who gave a thumbs-up accompanied by the biggest shit-eating grin he had ever seen. The site warmed his heart and made him smile. Reaching back to ruffle a hand through Clay’s hair, he lovingly thought again of how lucky he was. His partner closed his eyes at his touch, bending his head to rest their foreheads together.

“Oh, he’s more than okay,” Ryan piped up. He was too happy to care, unable to even bring himself to pretend to be bothered by his ex’s commentary. “Were all of you out for a little tête-à-tête?” he asked, searching Zach and Jessica for signs of intimacy.

“No, we were going to try and catch Justin!” Zach explained.

“Maybe you were…,” Tyler mumbled under his breath, looking sideways at Sheri who blushed. Ryan shrugged, glancing at his watch. “Well he usually comes by here to pick up his supplies soon, so you all better hide better if you want to catch him,” he said with a heavy sigh.

He looked back around at the others. “What are we going to do? Ambush him?” he asked.

“Sure, I guess?” Zach said with a shrug. “He obviously needs help, he held a gun to your head man.”

“He did what!?” Ryan exclaimed, turning his direction.

“Let’s just hide and see if he even shows before we get ahead of ourselves. Clay and I will go back the way we came,” he stated, turning and wrapping an arm around his partner.

“Fine, I’ll just wait here,” Ryan called sarcastically.

“Give us a sign if you see him,” he heard Zach say before they disappeared from view.

“Do you think he was really watching the whole time?” his partner asked, turning his head to look at him. They were sitting on the forest floor, his back against a tree and Clay snuggled in front of him in his arms.

He squeezed Clay tighter to him and leaned in to give him a gentle kiss as he thought about how to answer. He should have been paying more attention, but his partner had the ability to make him forget about such things.

“Because he could have said something any time!” Clay went on with a wave of his hand. He nodded in agreement, but wondered if it would have stopped them.

“Not that I would have told you to stop, but it’s a little strange to know you’ve had an
audience…” his partner continued, a look of concentration on his face. “Would you have stopped if you knew he was there?” Clay asked slyly, looking back at him.

He felt his eyes squint and his brow crease as he tried to think of a way to say ‘No’ without sounding completely perverted. He bit his lip and looked at his partner. “Do you really want to know?” he asked tentatively, raising one eyebrow.

Clay laughed, “I think that’s a pretty clear answer!”

He smiled at his partner. “Well you just said you wouldn’t have told me to stop…”

Clay pulled him down into another kiss, giggling into his mouth. His partner’s laughter was one of his favorite things, and he continued to kiss him despite the fact they were supposed to be watching for Justin.

“We should go away for the weekend more often,” Clay whispered, brushing his arm gently.

“We should,” he agreed, giving him another squeeze, “just not with all these people around.”

“You’ve got that right!” his partner laughed, kissing him again.

“Get him Tony!” he heard Zach yell through the forest. He and Clay leapt up, but he couldn’t see who Zach was talking about. He took a few steps into the path, but still couldn’t make out a figure.

“I don’t hear anyone…Ah!” Clay yelled from behind him. He whipped around as Justin and Clay crashed into the ground.

“Mi Corazon!” he yelled, racing over to try and untangle them. He scuffled with Justin, eventually pinning him to the ground. “Estas bien?” he asked his partner.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine!” Clay replied as the others came running up to them.

“Justin?” Jessica yelled, dropping to her knees beside him. “What the fuck?!?” she continued, raising a hand as if to smack him across the face.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa there!” he said as he caught her arm, turning his attention from holding Justin down to controlling her.

Justin threw him off and scrambled up, attempting to make a break for it. But he was stopped by Zach.

“Dude, what’s the matter with you?” Zach asked.

Justin looked around at them, realizing he was trapped. He sunk to the ground and bowed his head. “How did you even find me?” he asked forlornly.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoy this chapter! It took me longer to write than I thought it would - but I wanted to try and give our boys a sweet, but sexy moment. Although our boys have obvious physical attraction to each other, I see their relationship as far more than that and I hope I conveyed a feeling of love and respect throughout
As always, thank you so much for reading! <3
19- Clay - Jessica - Clay

Chapter Summary

Justin finds a home, Jessica discovers something, and Clay asks Tony an important question...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Clay

He stared down at a forlorn looking Justin, feeling like they were trying for an intervention but failing.

“We didn’t know you were here,” he told him as he bent down to put a hand on Justin’s shoulder. “But we want to help,” he continued, looking up at his boyfriend for support.

“That’s right, Justin. We’re here for you, brother,” Tony chimed in with a terse nod. He was still standing slightly in front of Jessica, just in case she decided to try and hit Justin again.

He could see Justin’s back rise as he sighed heavily and he felt helpless.

“You don’t understand. I can’t go home, my mom’s boyfriend will kill me,” Justin finally said, looking up at them.

Zach extended his arm to help Justin up and pulled him into a hug. “Let’s go sit by the fire and talk about it, man. There’s got to be a better option than freezing your ass off in the woods,” he said.

“I’ll grab the stuff Ryan brought,” Tony added as the rest of the group moved towards the campsite. He always marveled at how his boyfriend could remember such things.

“I’ll help,” he called, jogging over to the path where Tony was standing. His boyfriend paused to wait for him, smiling as he hooked his strong arm around his waist.

“I’m coming too,” he heard Ryan say behind them, tip-toeing around a fallen log like a deer.

“What?” he asked as he surveyed their faces, “I already know why Justin’s out here. You two are far more interesting.” He pushed past them to lead the way back to the clearing where he had left the supplies.

“So, how come you didn’t tell anyone? About Justin?” Tony asked.

“He didn’t want me to. I dunno, he’s a big boy, I figured he could make his own decisions,” Ryan answered, looking back their direction. “It wasn’t supposed to be for this long. He was supposed to get an apartment by now,” he added as they came across the supplies.

Tony gave him one last squeeze and a kiss on the cheek before bending to pick up the water. Ryan picked up the backpack and they began making their way to the campsite again.
“Couldn’t he have just stayed with a friend?” he asked, wondering if he would opt for roughing it in the woods if he couldn’t go home.

“Which friend?” Ryan asked rhetorically. “His best friend raped his girlfriend, who he believes hates him. And the last time he needed a place to stay, everyone he texted ignored him except Alex,” Ryan said with another sigh.

They walked the rest of the way back to camp in silence, all lost in their own thoughts.

He could see that the rest of the rowdy crowd had noticed Justin’s return and were still drunkenly greeting him. Ryan threw down the backpack and began to rummage through its contents.

He pulled out a pack of baby wipes and a stick of deodorant and held them out to Justin. “Do us all a favor, sunshine. You reek,” he stated before settling himself on an open tree stump close to the fire.

He watched as Justin smiled for the first time that weekend and he thought to himself it was all going to be ok.

His boyfriend must have noticed his expression because he pulled him close and whispered, “We’ll take care of him,” in his ear. He felt a tightness in his shoulders he didn’t know was there release, and he allowed himself to soften into Tony’s embrace.

They joined the others around the fire and listened while Justin recounted how he had taken his mom’s gun and stash of cash and made a break for it. He had planned on finding an apartment, but he still had another month until he turned 18. He had slept in the abandoned ranger station until camping season had started up again, surviving on the supplies Ryan brought to him weekly.

“We’ll find you a place to stay,” Zach said with determination. He frowned, wondering why Zach didn’t offer for Justin to stay with him, but he kept his mouth shut.

“You can stay with me,” Tyler piped up, earning him a hug from Jessica and a kiss from Sheri.

“Oh no, man, I couldn’t impose…,” Justin tried to say, but Tyler interrupted him.

“Just for now, until you get on your feet. My parents would be thrilled a jock even knows my name.”

“Alright, thanks Tyler!” Justin said, smiling again.

“Alright, well that’s settled. We’re going to head off to bed,” Tony stated, wrapping his arm around his shoulders and kissing him on the forehead. “I think this one’s nodding off already, and I don’t want to have to carry him to the tent,” he teased with a wink.

He laughed at his boyfriend’s antics, although he really was tired. Grateful for the chance to duck out of the reunion he stood and said goodnight to everyone.

Once in their tent, he snuggled deep into Tony’s arms. “I’m glad we found him,” he said softly, enjoying the feeling of his boyfriend’s breath on his neck.

“Me too Mi Corazon,” Tony replied, snaking an arm underneath his head. He wiggled, turning to kiss his boyfriend’s bicep before settling in. Tony now had both arms wrapped around him and he felt like nothing in the world could harm him. He wished he could fall asleep like this every night, the thought making him feel sad the weekend was almost over.

“Buenos noches, Mi Amor,” he whispered, “Te amo.”
Te amo Clay.”

He was dreaming of a beach, him and Tony the only ones in sight. He listened as the waves crashed around them and he dug his toes in the sand. It was such a happy and relaxing feeling to look over and see his love basking in the sun next to him.

Dream Tony reached over to cup his face in his hand, bringing him in for a kiss. The kiss was everything he loved about Tony; soft yet hard, gentle but rough in all the right places…

“Mmm, Tony,” he purred as the kiss began sending waves of pleasure farther down south…

“Si Mi Amor?” he heard a muffled response from somewhere outside his dream. The sound began to pull him from the beach, yet he still had the same good feeling in the lower half of his body.

“Mmm…feels good,” he mumbled as he realized his boyfriend was waking him up in an incredibly pleasant way. He moaned, trying to reach for Tony’s hair to pull him up into a kiss, but found a blanket in the way. No wonder he was so warm and cozy, he thought as he blinked and found himself under a mound of thick Mexican blankets.

Lifting the blankets to gaze at his partner, he moaned again. ‘How did Tony do that?’ he thought. He hoped it felt as good for his boyfriend when he was on the receiving end.

“Mmm, c’mere,” he murmured as he grazed Tony’s cheek with his fingertips.

Tony took a moment to look into his eyes, pausing from what he was doing long enough to give him a piercing smile. “I’ll be up in a minute,” he said coyly, “right now I’m busy…”

He gave a bark of laughter as his boyfriend enthusiastically went back to what he was doing. “But I want you inside me,” he tried bargaining, squirming as Tony’s tongue teased him. He imagined it was the same movement that happened inside his boyfriend’s mouth when he rolled his ‘r’s’.

He felt Tony laugh around him and looked down again.

“You’re not too sore?” his boyfriend asked.

He thought for a second, but shook his head ‘no’ anyway.

Tony laughed again. “Liar!” he said, wetting a thumb and brushing against his opening.

The movement made his breath come out in a hiss, and Tony backed off a little.

“See?” his boyfriend said with a raise of his eyebrows. “Just relax and let me take care of you,” he continued in a loving tone, returning to his task without waiting for a response.

He pushed the blankets back so he could watch his boyfriend, but he was making it difficult to keep his eyes open. Between Tony’s mouth and a wiggle of his thumb, he didn’t last much longer.

Breathing heavily, he pulled his boyfriend up and into a kiss. He let himself explore Tony fully, not worried about being walked in on by a parent or sibling. It was refreshing and he thought again about how much he wanted this every day.

“That’s my favorite way to wake up,” he said when he finally let Tony up for air, continuing to kiss down his neck.
“Haha, good,” his boyfriend answered, gazing into his eyes. “I’ll go make us some coffee,” Tony said with a smile and one last kiss before he turned to go.

He groaned happily and snuggled down again into the warmth of the blankets, breathing in his boyfriend’s musky scent.

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Jessica

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She watched Tony as he emerged from the tent across the campsite and stretched. He was smiling widely.

“He’s noisy, isn’t he?” she hollered over with a grin.

He raised the coffee pot to her with a tilt of his head in response. She laughed. His happiness was contagious, she thought as she watched him start a fire.

“Jess?” she heard Zach ask. She was sitting on the ground in front of him, ignoring her breakfast.

Looking up at him she felt sad again. She knew he was just concerned for her, but she didn’t feel ready to talk yet. She looked back down at her food and continued to push the contents around on her plate.

“Can I do anything for you?” Zach asked, his hands nervously fidgeting. The movement irritated her for some reason she couldn’t explain and she snapped at him.

“I’m fine, can we just get going already?”

“Sure, Jess, I’ll start getting people up.”

She felt bad and reached for his hands as he began to stand, keeping him where he was. “Sorry,” she said with her head still down.

“Hey, there’s nothing to be sorry for,” Zach cooed, stroking her hair. “You just tell me what you need,” he continued, placing his hands back onto his knees.

She gave him a smile and a nod and went back to watching Tony. He was greeting a sleepy-looking Clay as he emerged from their tent. She watched as they embraced and stood chatting in each other’s arms.

“I want that,” she stated suddenly, making Zach jump a little.

“What?” he asked, trying to follow her gaze. “Do you want me to see if they can make you some coffee too?”

“No, silly,” she said, slapping his knee and sticking her tongue out at him. She gestured to where Tony and Clay were now lightly roughhousing. “I want what they have,” she said with a sigh.

Zach took a moment before he said anything, observing the couple as Tony picked up a giggling Clay and planted a kiss on his mouth. “You’ll get there,” he said softly, causing her to turn and look at him. “When you’re ready, you’ll let someone in who will love you like that every day. And for every day after,” he said with feeling.
She had to look away from the intense look in his eyes, wondering for the first time if he felt something more than friendship towards her. She cleared her throat, standing to gather their garbage. “Come on, let’s get going. I’m sure everyone could use a shower by now,” she said.

Clay

He sighed as Tony parked the pickup in front of his house.

“Do we have to go back so soon?” he whined, looking over at his handsome boyfriend with a pout.

Laughing, Tony replied, “I’m sure you’ll say that after every vacation, no matter how long. Let me walk you up.”

He took a quick look around the street, saying slyly, “You know…I don’t see my parent’s car…”

“Yes, and…?” Tony asked, pausing halfway out of the truck.

“Well, if you needed a shower, you could join me…” he offered, smiling at his boyfriend’s devilish grin. “You know, to conserve water,” he added with a nod.

“Sure, to save water,” Tony replied, hopping out of the truck and grabbing their backpacks from the bed of the truck. He giggled as his boyfriend ran around the truck to pick him up and carry him up the stairs.

“Mom…Dad?” he called as they entered the house, depositing their shoes at the door.

Hearing no response, he smiled at Tony and began to kiss him as they made their way to the stairs.

They continued to make out as Tony guided them into the upstairs bathroom. He would always let him lead the way when they were kissing. Whenever he tried, they ended up crashing into walls and desks, knocking over everything in their path until he would just give up and make out in a heap on the floor. He remembered the last time his mom had found them in the hallway and the thought made him pause.

“You okay?” Tony asked.

“Yeah, just wondering what my mom’s gonna say if she walks in on us…” he thought out loud.

His boyfriend gave a knowing smile, reaching back to lock the door.

“Clay, honey, are you home?” he heard his mom call from downstairs. He and Tony were sitting on his bed, massaging each other’s feet. He could still see the water from their shower dripping from Tony’s hair and down his chiseled cheek.

Smiling to himself as he stared at his boyfriend he shouted, “Upstairs!”

He heard his parents climb up the stairs, stopping at his bedroom door.

“No closed doors!” he heard his mom say as she burst in, taking obvious relief at the site of them.
“Sorry,” he replied with raised eyebrows, he couldn’t believe his mom was still going on about that. He grinned as he saw his dad give him a tilt of his head while raising his hands and shrugging as if to say, ‘What are you gonna do?’.

“How was camping, honey?” his mom asked.

He looked over at his boyfriend, deciding to skip the details. “We had a great time, I caught three fish,” he said.

“That’s great! You boys hungry? I’m about to heat up some leftovers?” his mom said with a big smile.

“Sure, that’d be great, thanks mom!” he answered.

As his parents retreated down the stairs, he looked over tiredly at his boyfriend. His fingers beginning to tap nervous.

Tony looked from his fingers to his face, noticing his mood shift. “What are you thinking about?” his boyfriend asked with a concerned look.

He licked his lips, thinking. “Do you ever think about moving out on your own?” he asked, looking down at their entwined legs.

“Sure.”

“Really?” he asked, looking up hopefully.

“Yeah, it’s pretty crowded in my house,” Tony answered truthfully.

“Do you think it’s hard to find a place? I mean, Justin wasn’t able to do it…”

Tony laughed, interrupting his train of thought. “I’m sure it would be easy enough to find a room to rent. Justin doesn’t have a job, no place is going to rent to someone who can’t pay,” his boyfriend continued, giving his foot a squeeze.

“That’s true,” he said with a nod.

“Have you thought about it?” Tony asked.

“What?”

“Moving out,” his boyfriend said with raised eyebrows.

“Yeah, maybe…” he started to say.

“Out of here? Mi Corazon, you’ve got a room to yourself already! Don’t you want to save money for a car or something?”

“You have a car,” he countered, stubbornly shaking his boyfriends foot.

“I do. But I don’t know a place that would rent to a high school boy who works for his father,” Tony reasoned.

“What about Mara?” he asked, studying his boyfriend’s face.

Tony laughed at the thought. “Move in with a woman? My dad would be expecting babies if I did
“What if I was there too?” he blurted out, causing his boyfriend to stop laughing and give him one of his piercing gazes.

“Clay, are you asking me to move in with you?” he asked carefully.

He looked down again, then across the room as he answered. “I mean, like, someday… it would, ah, it would be nice to wake up next to you every morning…” he mumbled as he felt himself start to blush. He looked down again, cursing himself for saying anything. He felt stupid for even thinking that’s what Tony would want…

His boyfriend tugged him closer by his leg, derailing his train of thought. He looked at Tony, unable to read his expression as he lifted him into his lap.

“I shouldn’t have said anything…” he began to say, but his boyfriend’s kiss interrupted him.

Tony kissed him like he was the only good thing in the world and he felt like he could stay in the moment forever. He wrapped his arms around his boyfriend, running a hand through his damp hair.

After a few moments, he felt Tony begin to sit back and he opened his eyes to look at him. His boyfriend rested his forehead against his and looked deep into his eyes.

“I would love to live with you Mi Amor.”

Chapter End Notes

Awe, clony feels *sigh*, I feel like it’s about time for our boys to get some time and space to themselves...
Tony and Clay enjoy a date night, and meet a questionable stranger...

Tony

He and Clay were grabbing their usual morning coffee before school at Monet’s that Wednesday. He found himself staring at his partner as he ordered from Skye. He hadn’t been able to stop thinking about what Clay had asked him a few days ago…

“What are you looking at?” his partner asked, nervously reaching his hand up to touch the scar on his forehead.

“Just you,” he said with a smile, tilting his head as he reached to pull Clay closer to him. He continued, “And thinking how nice it would be to have our own place.”

Clay smiled at the thought, leaning forward to kiss him enthusiastically.

“So…you’ll ask Mara?” Clay asked when he pulled away, an eager look in his eyes.

“Ask Mara what?” Skye interrupted, handing over their coffees. “She’s coming Friday too, right? I want you all to meet my new squeeze,” she said, pointing a finger at them as if to dare them not to come.

“Don’t worry, we’ll all be there for your…art…thing,” Clay responded, squinting as he tried to remember what they were giving up date night for.

Skye rolled her eyes. “It’s a graffiti art class. And there’s going to be wine, it’ll be fun,” she demanded.

He smiled at her spunky attitude. She could put up quite a cold front, but on the inside, he knew her to be quite a caring and loyal individual.

“I’ll pick you up around 7?” he asked as he took his coffee from the bar.

“K,” she responded with a nod before walking back to help the next customer.

As they took a seat at an empty table, Clay leaned in close enough he could smell his shampoo and whispered, “There’s an art to graffiti?!”

He couldn’t help but laugh at his adorable partner. He would never get tired of Clay’s innocent side he thought as he gave him a peck on the cheek. “Have you ever tried to spray paint anything?” he asked.

“No,” his partner said with a confused look and a shake of his head. “Wait…have you?”

His eyebrows shot up and he hesitated, looking his partner up and down.
“Really?” Clay asked.

His partner was obviously getting better at reading him, he thought with a grin. “I may have vandalized some things with my brothers when I was younger…” he admitted, trying to hide his smile behind his coffee cup.

“There’s just so much I don’t know about little troublemaking Tony,” Clay teased, brushing his fingertips across the stubble along his jaw. He turned his head into his partner’s hand, closing his eyes at the welcomed contact.

“You two are just too damn cute,” he heard Skye mumble from right next to his ear. She had the uncanny ability to sneak up on him, but he was used to it by now.

“Ready for school bruja?” he asked, keeping his eyes closed.

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” she sighed from above them, waiting as Clay leaned in for one more kiss.

He didn’t mind being designated driver, speeding down the highway in his mustang with his partner at his side and Mara and Skye in the backseat. He had missed his car the past weekend when he had to drive his brother’s truck to go camping. He lovingly caressed the steering wheel with his thumb, wondering if it was time for an oil change.

“Turn’s coming up,” Skye piped up, jerking him out of his head and back to the present moment. He still wasn’t quite sure why he and Clay had agreed to give up their Friday movie night for this.

Turning into the parking lot of the warehouse he asked, “My car’s safe here, right?”

“If you were worried about that, why didn’t you have me bring Lewis?” Mara asked.

“And get dog droll on the seats?!”

“Alright, settle down, your precious baby is safe here,” Skye replied condescendingly.

He shot her a glare as they got out of the car, earning him a laugh and roll of the eyes from her.

“Tell me something Tony, if you had to choose between saving your mustang, or saving your actual baby, what would you choose?” she asked evilly.

“What kind of horrible scenario is this? Isn’t this supposed to be a fun evening?” he teased, walking around his car to hold his partner’s hand.

“Come on, let’s go inside, I’m dying to meet this mystery guy Skye’s been hiding!” Mara called, already halfway to the door. He was glad she rescued him from having to answer the absurd hypothetical question.

Skye ran up to meet her and they locked arms in a fit of laughter as he and Clay meandered behind them.

“So…” Clay started, watching his face closely.

“What?”

“Which would you choose?”
“Really Mi Corazon? The baby. Of course,” he spat out, not believing he had to even say it.

“Okay, just making sure,” his partner answered with a sly grin.

“Making sure you’re not dating a psychopath?” he asked with a laugh as he opened the door for Clay.

“No. Just making sure our future children won’t have to wonder if their dad loves them or the car more,” Clay stated, darting in for a kiss before running inside. He stood at the door for a second, looking after his partner with amusement.

He joined Clay and the girls at a sign-in desk, startling his partner with a hug from behind and a kiss on the back of the neck. He smiled up at him as he pulled away, rubbing his hands along Clay’s arms.

He watched Clay smile knowingly back at him and couldn’t remember feeling so secure and happy in a relationship before.

Their private moment was cut short by Skye thrusting pairs of coveralls and goggles at all of them.

“What the hell did we get ourselves into?” Clay mumbled softly.

Mara shrugged in response, stepping into the protective layer and zipping it up. She slung the goggles on next, striking a pose and declaring that she felt ready to be inducted into the ghost-busters.

They entered the room designated for the art class giggling and making fun of one another in the outfits. He looked around the paper-covered walls and wondered what HAD they gotten themselves into?

Skye spotted someone across the room and waved. “There he is, be nice,” she whispered as she looked back at them.

“When are we not nice?” his partner asked, a confused look on his handsome face.

“Hello, love,” a tall, slender man called as he made his way over to them. He was also dressed in coveralls and goggles, his neck tattoo and gauges the only things distinguishing him from the other thirty some people in the room.

When he arrived at their group, he pulled Skye in for a one-armed hug and a kiss on the top of her head. “You all must be the friends Skye keeps going on and on about,” he said, looking up with a smile. “Nice to meet you all, I’m Shadow!”

They introduced themselves and conversed lightly for a while before a man in jeans and a sweatshirt addressed them from the center of the room. They went through basic techniques, a small demonstration, and questions before being set loose to create art.

He and Clay chose a small patch of paper by the door, trying to replicate a few of the patterns with much laughter, but not much success. Finally, he looked around and spotted Mara not far from them and motioned for Clay to follow him over to her.

“Whoa, how are you doing that, sister?” he asked with a shake of his head. He stared as she created a palm tree silhouette over her sunset of colors.

“Yeah, I didn’t know you were artistic? Tony’s and my work looks like a five-year old did it,” his partner pouted.
Mara laughed, picking up a can of paint. “You just kind of have to go for it,” she said, handing the can over to Clay. “What do you want to convey?” she asked with a tilt of her head.

Clay thought about it, turning over the can in his hand. “Love,” he finally said, looking up at her.

“Okay. So, what does love look like to you?”

“What do you mean?” his partner asked with a confused look.

“Well, is it messy? Is it pure? All over the place, or in a confined space?” she said with many hand gestures. “What you want it to look like will determine what technique you’ll want to use.”

Clay nodded and looked for an empty space on the wall. “How do you do that splatter one?” he asked.

He enjoyed watching his partner for a moment before Mara tossed him his own can of paint and set him to work.

“That was really fun!” Clay exclaimed as they waited for their milkshakes at Roxy’s. The five of them had crammed into a booth at the popular restaurant after the class for a snack.

“You don’t have to sound so surprised,” Skye said with a glare from the opposite side of the booth.

“If you enjoyed that, you should come to my gallery opening tomorrow night,” Shadow offered. He had his arm around Skye and he could see the paint flecks that covered his arm.

He glanced at Clay, who was already looking at him. He gave a shrug, not caring either way. As long as he got to spend time with his partner, it didn’t matter to him what they did. Clay took his shrug in with a nod and turned to look at Mara on his other side.

“What?” she asked him.

“Do you want to go?”

“Sure, I’ll take my own car though, I’ve got to work later,” she replied.

Clay looked back at the couple and said, “Okay, I’ve never been to a gallery before…” he paused as the waitress brought their shakes. “Uh, what kind of art do you do?”

Skye laughed. “You’ll see,” she teased as she stole a sip from her boyfriend’s milkshake.

“So…you three are, like, together then? You like to share?” Shadow asked curiously, looking between the three of them.

“Oh, no,” his partner replied, blushing as he quickly scooted closer to him. “Tony’s my boyfriend,” he added, sliding his hand over his thigh and leaning in to ask for a kiss.

He smiled, Clay was so cute when he was embarrassed. He put his arm around his partner’s shoulders and leaned in for his kiss.

Mara giggled, she added, “I’m a little old to be seeing high schoolers.”

“You two are like, the same age,” Skye argued, looking between her and Shadow with a frown.
Mara raised her eyebrows, but concentrated on her shake instead of replying.

He tried to keep from laughing, staring down at his milkshake instead as Clay tapped his fingers nervously on his thigh. He looked over as his partner sipped on their shake and squeezed his shoulders. It earned him a smile and a look, which turned into Clay staring at his lips.

He smiled and brought their spoon to his mouth, licking it suggestively. He watched his partner’s mouth part slightly, now unconcerned with the tension going on at the rest of the table. He continued to grin, thinking about how if they left now they could enjoy some alone time at the bluff...

“That’s hot,” he heard Shadow say. He frowned and looked over, startled to see that the man was staring intently at him.

He dropped his spoon back in the shake and looked over at Clay and Mara again. “Uh, you ready to head home?” he said, trying to shake off the sudden creepy feeling he had.

“Yes!” Mara exclaimed, jumping at the opportunity. “I just got this new book, I’ve been dying to crack it open,” she explained as she began to shove Clay out of the booth.

They said their goodbyes quickly and left to pay at the counter, Skye calling that she would text them the address for the gallery tomorrow.

The three of them had barely settled in the car when he turned to his two passengers and asked, “Okay, so did either of you get a weird vibe from that guy?”

“Yes! He was playing footsie with me the whole time, it was so uncomfortable!” Mara exclaimed, adding, “Let’s get out of here before they come out.”

He complied, revving the engine of the mustang before pulling out of the parking lot.

“I thought he was nice, just a little forward. I didn’t like the way he was staring at you,” Clay stated as they soared down the road. “You know,” he continued, gently rubbing a hand on his shoulder, “it’s still early, we could still snuggle down for a movie?”

He felt the tension begin to leave him at the thought of having Clay in his arms. “That sounds perfect Mi Corazon,” he replied, reaching for his partner’s knee.

“You two can watch a movie at my place, I’ve just got to grab my work clothes and then I’ll be out,” Mara offered from the backseat.

“Thank you! But I thought you were going to read a book?” Clay asked, a confused look on his face as he turned to look at her.

“Well, I didn’t want them to know I was working tonight. They met at the club and I just wanted to get away, not have them follow me.”

“Oh, okay. You know, you could have said, ‘No’, to going to the gallery tomorrow?” his partner said.

“I didn’t want to be rude, and plus we should be okay if we stick together. You guys can give me a ride if you want, that way you’ll have an excuse to leave early?” she asked.

He nodded, saying, “I think that’s a good idea.” They pulled onto their street and parked in Mara’s driveway next to her car.
Frowning, he looked over at her Corolla. “Are there still bullet holes in your car?” he asked as they climbed out of the mustang.

Mara sighed. “Yes, it’s just not worth getting it fixed. It’s just lucky those shots missed the gas tank. That’s the last time I park on the street,” she said as they made their way towards the house.

“So, uh, Mara? Do you ever think about, oh, I dunno, having roommates ever?” Clay asked hesitantly.

Mara unlocked the door and he braced himself for Lewis’s hearty greeting, smiling at the sound of his happy little grunts.

“Not really, I mean, Lewis and I do alright,” she said as they filed into the house.

“What if it was someone you knew?” Clay pressed, nervously scanning the ground. He reached over and gave his hand a squeeze, hoping his partner wasn’t getting his hopes up about living here. It was a nice thought, but Mara was extremely independent and he was sure they could find their own apartment when they turned 18.

“Oh, are you two thinking about moving out together?” she asked, looking between them with a huge smile on her face.

“Well, ya know, we’re not finished with high school yet, but…” he started, only to be cut off by a giant hug from the now-squealing Mara.

“Oh, I’m so excited for you,” she said, cupping their faces with each one of her hands. “Have you talked to your parents about this?” she asked, suddenly frowning.

“Uh, no, we were just talking about it this past weekend. It seemed like it was really hard for Justin to find a place…” Clay said, trailing off at the end of the sentence.

“Well, I’m sure both of your parents would feel better about you moving out if you were here,” she stated, turning to head down the hall. She turned quickly, holding up a finger before saying, “But you have to talk to them first, I’ll have no angry parents over here blaming me for taking their babies away!”

He smiled, pulling Clay back for a long kiss before following her into the kitchen. “So, how old is that guy, by the way?” he asked her as she poured a glass of water and got her dinner together for her shift. Something was still bugging him about the man who called himself ‘Shadow’.

She frowned, feeding a piece of chicken to Lewis. “I’m not sure, but he’s older than I am,” she said with concern.

“How old are you?” Clay asked.

“Mi Amor, you never ask a woman her age!”

“Oh, sorry!” his partner said, turning a brilliant shade of red as he looked between him and Mara.

She threw her head back and laughed, causing the huge dog to howl and wag his tail furiously. “It’s alright,” she said as she calmed, scratching Lewis behind the ear, “I’m not that old, I’m only 25.”

“Wow, and that guy is older than you?” Clay asked, clearly surprised at Skye’s choice of partners.

Mara shrugged, “At her age I went for older guys too. And he’s an artist, got his own place and a car…it’s any young girl’s dream. I’ve got to be off though, you two have a nice evening!”
She came around the counter, giving each of them a hug and a kiss on the cheek before patting Lewis and departing.

He drew his partner in for a hug in the quiet calm of the kitchen, sighing happily. “This could really happen, we could really have a place to call our own,” he whispered, nuzzling his nose along his partner’s cheek.

He felt Clay smile before he answered. “I can’t wait,” he said, holding him tight.
They go to a gallery opening where Skye gets a surprise, and they meet someone from Mara's past...

Clay

He felt a hot rush of air on his forehead. Snuggling deeper into his boyfriend’s chest, he inhaled the scent of Tony’s aftershave. The events of the past evening began fluttering back to him as he felt Tony’s strong arms squeeze him tighter and he smiled.

They had enjoyed a wonderfully intimate evening that started by ignoring their movie and ended with falling asleep wrapped in a blanket on the couch. He smiled happily as he ran his nose along his boyfriend’s bare chest, remembering how he had licked his way down it just a few hours earlier…

He felt another hot exhale on his forehead, ruffling his hair. He frowned and opened his eyes slightly, jerking his head back as he was confronted with a huge black muzzle an inch from his face.

He heard Lewis’s tail thump against the coffee table as Tony’s chest rumbled with a hearty laugh.

“I never imagined I’d be sharing your chest with a dog…” he mumbled, turning to hide his face under his boyfriend’s arm to avoid Lewis’s tongue.

“Mmm, you don’t have to share me,” Tony whispered as he kissed the top of his head.

He enjoyed the feeling of his boyfriend’s hands as they rubbed his back and he scooted up so he could reach Tony’s lips for a kiss, making Lewis whine. He giggled as he felt the big dog’s cold nose poke him in the neck, trying to use the blanket to shield himself.

“You know you’re in his spot, right?” he heard Mara call from the kitchen, her laughter causing Lewis’s tail to thump even harder.

He looked up from kissing Tony, startled at her presence. “Sorry, we, uh, we must have fallen asleep,” he said as he looked around frantically for his clothes.

“Don’t say sorry to me, it’s his couch! I’m making breakfast, you guys should go clean up,” she said as she turned on the coffee pot.

“Here Mi Amor,” his boyfriend said as he handed over his boxers.

“Where did you pull those from?” he asked, leaning in for another kiss as he ran his hand along Tony’s side.

“Okay, okay! Save it for the shower!” Mara hollered from the kitchen. They laughed and gathered their clothes, leaving the couch to Lewis.
“Mmm, this is nice,” he murmured into the back of Tony’s shoulder as they waited for the hot water. He was standing behind him, snuggled into his back for warmth.

His boyfriend turned his head, flicking water at him playfully before leading the way into the shower.

“I could get used to waking up like this,” Tony said as he wrapped his arms around him and pulled him into a kiss under the stream of warm water.

He laughed when he came up for air. “What? Trying to drown me in the morning?” he asked as he reached up and ran his fingers through his boyfriend’s hair. He loved Tony’s hair, he thought as his boyfriend closed his eyes and tilted his head in enjoyment.

Leaning around the water, he began kissing his way around Tony’s ear and down his neck. His hot boyfriend in the shower first thing in the morning was definitely on his list of favorite things…

“Are you sure this is the address?” Tony asked.

The three of them were sitting in the still-running car staring down a dark street. After their shower and breakfast, he and Tony had gone to work while Mara headed to bed. And now they were driving around looking for the address Skye had texted them.

“I’ll call her,” Mara offered from the backseat. After a few seconds, she sighed and hung up. “Straight to voicemail, maybe we should just go?” she said, clearly annoyed.

“Wait, I think I see people on the other side?” he said while he pointed towards the nearest warehouse.

“Oh, yeah, I see people walking around. But where did they park?” his boyfriend asked as he turned down the street.

They continued to drive through the maze of streets, finally coming across a lot where thirty or forty other cars were parked already. Tony carefully parked near the end, next to a dark SUV-type vehicle.

“Nice ride,” he heard a man’s deep voice say from behind him as they got out of the mustang. He looked around in the darkness for the source of the voice. They really needed some lights out here, he thought.

“Thanks,” Tony replied, taking his hand and leading him in the direction of the warehouse.

“Have a nice night,” the voice said again as they passed, lighting a cigarette. In the glow of the flame, he could finally see the outline of the man’s face. It startled him, and he fought not to stare at the scars in the darkness. His stomach seemed to drop and he swallowed unconsciously as the man spoke again, “Prazer em te ver de novo gatinha.”

“Catar coquinho na ladeira!” Mara spat out as she propelled them forward and away from the man.

He looked behind him to see if the man was following them, but only saw the end of the freshly lit cigarette lying on the ground. Confused, he asked Tony, “What did they say?”

“I’m not sure, but I think they know each other,” he replied, looking over his shoulder to Mara.
“It’s nothing,” Mara insisted, still shoving them towards the warehouse.

“If it’s nothing, then who is he?” he asked, confused by her sudden secrecy. She was normally very open and, he thought, honest, about her life. “No one.”

“Alright, alright. Slow down,” Tony said as he pulled the warehouse door open for them. Mara looked over her shoulder once more before heading inside.

He looked at his boyfriend and asked again, “Do you know what she said?”

Tony shrugged as he followed him into the warehouse. “It wasn’t Spanish,” he said as they walked through the black curtains after Mara.

He was shocked to find himself confronted with a canvas with a man’s naked torso printed on it. He found himself blushing as he moved farther into the room, for the man in the photo had quite a nice set of abs.

“Well!” he exclaimed as they got closer to the canvas and he realized it was actually a painting. He looked at his boyfriend who was reading the small notecard taped up next to the canvas. “I thought this was a picture!”

“I did too,” Tony replied, looking at him with raised eyebrows.

“Mara, Clay, Tony!” he heard Skye call. He let Tony lead them around the canvas and into the more spacious warehouse to where Skye and Shadow were standing.

“What do you guys think?” she asked with a raised eyebrow when they reached her.

He looked around, realizing that there were more sculptures and paintings of the human form strewn all about the rest of the warehouse.

“Amazing detail,” Mara complemented, saving him the embarrassment of having to reply. It wasn’t really his type of art, he thought as he glanced at some of the more lude sculptures.

“The note by the first painting said that each work of art had a hidden message?” Tony asked, placing a hand on the small of his back. He turned his attention to his boyfriend, wishing he hadn’t been so distracted he forgot to read the card. It was just like Tony to notice the small details.

“Ah, yes, a little something extra in each one,” Shadow said with a wink. “Take this for example,” he said as he led them towards an ink drawing of a man and a woman.

The woman was lying down with her back towards them, taking up most of the horizontal space in the frame. Her only clothing a torn pair of jeans that barely covered her, leaving the rest up to imagination, while the man was sitting in the background, his face and bare torso visible.

“So…what’s the hidden message here? She needs a new pair of jeans?” he asked, trying to lighten the mood. The dark space was beginning to wear on him, and the encounter with the scarred man outside didn’t help his mood.

Shadow laughed and said, “Look closer.”

He followed Tony and Mara as they shuffled closer to the drawing. He stayed farther back as they leaned in to peer at the drawing for a few minutes. Both of them finally shook their heads, and Tony asked if the man’s shoulder tattoo had a meaning.
Shadow denied this and he could feel his gaze shift over to him. He squirmed uncomfortably at the scrutiny as he stared at the drawing, stopping suddenly as he looked down the rest of the woman’s legs.

“By George, I think he’s got it!” Shadow exclaimed with a grin, continuing to stare at him.

He shifted his weight from foot to foot, nervously guessing, “I think the rips in her jeans spell out something?”

“What?!” Tony asked, stepping closer to him to stare at the drawing again.

“Aha, that they do pretty boy,” Shadow said with a salute of his champagne glass and a clap on the shoulder.

“Mi Corazon, what does it say?”

“It says, ‘carpe noctem’,” he replied, pointing out the letters. “It’s Latin for, ‘seize the night’, right?” he asked the smiling artist.

“Correct! Very good!”

“Excuse me, can I get a picture?” a woman asked.

“Of course!” Shadow answered, ushering them around the drawing. “Let’s get everyone in, the first one’s of the evening to solve this one’s riddle!”

They huddled around, smiling as the woman snapped a few pictures and moved on.

“Well, now that you know the game, go have fun! I’m unveiling my new piece in half an hour,” Shadow said as he departed, arm around a glowing Skye.

“Well, she seems happy,” he said as he watched them leave.

“Yeah, it’s good to see her smile,” Tony replied, leaning in to kiss his cheek. “Come on, Mi Amor, let’s use that brain of yours to solve a few of these,” he continued, looking around the room for a place to start.

“How about that one?” Mara asked, pointing to the far wall at a painting all in shades of blue.

They spent the next thirty minutes wandering around, laughing and arguing amongst themselves and other guests over hidden messages and meanings. When it came time for the unveiling, he found himself in a much better mood than when they had first come in.

Shadow made a short speech thanking everyone for being there, and thanking his new muse Skye. He clapped along with everyone else as he gave her a peck on the cheek and tore the sheet from the canvas.

His applause stopped abruptly at the scene. It was huge, larger than life, and he didn’t know where to look. It wasn’t the fact that his friend’s nearly naked body was portrayed over the bottom half of the canvas, it was that she didn’t look alive.

He had to turn away, looking at Tony’s shocked face instead. He heard Mara gasp beside him and he turned to look at her, asking, “You okay?”

She turned to him slowly, her mouth partly open and nodded. “I know the hidden message,” she said before abruptly slipping through the crowd.
He frowned at an equally confused Tony and glanced again at the painting. He noticed that, in the painting, Skye lay on a bed of white roses, but it gave him no clue as to what the hidden meaning was.

Grabbing his boyfriend’s hand, he led the way to where Mara was hugging Skye.

“What’s going on?” he asked the two ladies as they hopped up and down. He was very conflicted as he found the painting to be horrifying and possibly a reason to get a restraining order.

“‘Till death do us part!”’ Mara squealed.

“What?” he asked as Tony said, “Ooh!”

“What?! Why are you so excited about some psycho depicting Skye’s death?” he asked more urgently.

“No, silly, he’s asking her to marry him!” Mara said with a shake of her head as she shoved him playfully in the shoulder.

He squinted his eyes as he tried to picture how the painting was in any way romantic. Now that he was closer he could see the detail in the painting, from her tattoos down to the thin, red scars on her arms. He shuddered as he noticed that some of the roses had drops of blood on them, sliding closer to Tony as if he could wipe the painting from his memory.

They stayed for a little while longer, congratulating the happy couple before Tony asked him if he was ready to go.

“Yeah, yeah, I think I am,” he said, keeping his head down to avoid looking at the painting.

Once they were outside with Mara, he asked, “So am I the only one who’s still creeped out by this guy?”

“I think you’re being a good friend. You’re protective, and sweet, and wonderful…” his boyfriend said, sweeping him into a hug and pinning him against the trunk of the mustang. He found himself smiling despite everything, and let himself sink into Tony’s kiss.

“Guys, hey guys…GUYS!” Mara yelled from her spot next to them.

“Sorry,” Tony said as he stepped away from the car.

He paused, still leaning against the trunk. Mara was staring behind him, close enough he could see the look of horror on her face.

He turned quickly in Tony’s arms, jumping at the sight of a machete pinning a rat to the back of the car.
Tony

“Jesus!” he yelled at the sight on the back of his car, already pushing his partner farther back from the mustang. He glanced at Mara before taking a handkerchief from his pocket and picking up the machete.

It moved easily and he breathed a sigh of relief that it wasn’t lodged in his precious mustang. He angled the blade so the rat wouldn’t slide off and dropped it in the bushes in front of the car. He didn’t say a word as he wiped of the back of his vehicle meticulously, but he didn’t need to as Clay was asking questions faster than Mara could answer them.

“Let’s get away from here,” he said after checking all around his car for any other signs of tampering.

“I mean, what the actual fuck?!” Clay said for the tenth time as they drove down the road. He looked in his rearview mirror at Mara, but she was staring straight ahead.

“You know we got your back, right? Me and my brothers can take care of this, whatever it is,” he told her as they pulled up to her house. He turned to look her in the eye and saw her eyes soften at his words.

She put a hand on his shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Thank you, Tony, but this isn’t something you can fix,” she said before getting out of the mustang. He waited until he saw her enter the house safely before driving away.

He paused in front of his house before pulling into the driveway. “I think we should tell my dad,” he said, looking over at his partner.

“I think that’s a good idea,” Clay replied with a nod.

“So, you didn’t keep the machete?” his dad asked as he tinkered with their toaster on the kitchen table.

“No,” he answered with a frown and a shake of his head. He was leaning against the counter, too wound up to sit down.

“Shame,” his dad replied, looking up at him from the table, “there’s some blackberries out back that could really use a hacking.”

“Did you not hear the rest of the story?!” his partner chimed in, clearly upset by the high pitch of his voice. Clay was sitting at the table with his dad, fingers nervously tapping.

His dad sighed, looking back down at the appliance. “How do you know this guy isn’t a spurned ex-lover or something?”

“He has scars all down his face!” Clay exclaimed with a wave of his hand for emphasis.
“Mara doesn’t strike me as the type that would be bothered by appearances,” his dad said while staring at his partner. He watched as Clay’s face scrunched up in a frown, squirming miserably under his father’s intense gaze.

“Still, though, pop, a rat? Isn’t that a little…,” he paused, looking for the right word.

“Grotesque? Yes, but I’d be more worried if it was a bigger animal, like a cat,” his dad answered, adding, “A rat is like a warning, but it’s not someone’s pet or an animal that says he was trying to put a curse on her or something. She’s a big girl, we’ll keep an eye on her, but if she doesn’t want help there’s nothing we can do.”

He bit at his bottom lip as his dad picked up the screwdriver and began prying inside the toaster. “Yeah, I just wish there was something we could do,” he said, making his way to the table to take a seat next to his partner.

“You could stop moping and get your dad a sandwich…”

He rolled his eyes as he got back up from the chair. “You hungry?” he asked his partner.

Clay shook his head, still looking upset. He leaned over and gave him a kiss on the forehead, ruffling a hand through his hair before going to the fridge.

Clay continued to watch his dad fix the toaster in silence as he made a few sandwiches. He couldn’t help but feel the man they met that night wasn’t a spurned lover and vowed to keep a closer eye on Mara’s place.

He yawned, annoyed that it was Monday morning already. He had spent most of the previous two nights stalking Mara’s place with Clay and he was tired. He leaned against the counter as Clay placed their usual coffee order before school.

“Hey, are you okay?” he heard his partner ask. He turned to answer, but saw that Clay was talking to Skye.

She looked annoyed and tired, but that wasn’t out of the ordinary. He frowned as she told Clay to mind his own business before stomping off.

“What was that about?” he asked, concern creeping over him. What was wrong with the ladies in his life lately?

“She’s wearing a scarf, but I thought I saw a bruise on her neck?” his partner answered, frowning in the direction she had taken.

“You sure it wasn’t her tattoo?”

“Yes, maybe?” Clay answered with a shrug. “But then, why would she get all pissy with me?”

“Maybe because you weren’t exactly excited about her new engagement?” he said cautiously, raising his eyebrows.

His partner turned to him with a confused look. “What do you mean? I was nice! I just didn’t like the painting is all…it was creepy,” Clay said with a shudder, the memory still clearly haunting him. The other barista set their coffees down and they made their way outside to the mustang.

“I’m sure she’ll be fine Mi Corazon. Maybe, just remember to congratulate her next time you see
her?” he said with a shrug as he opened the car down for his partner.

Clay gave him a small smile and nodded his head, kissing him quickly before getting into the car.

.

They were sitting at their usual table at lunch when Clay jumped up suddenly.

“I see Skye, be right back!” his partner yelled as he ran off in the direction of the cafeteria.

He waved at his partner’s cute backside, continuing to enjoy his sandwich. Before he could take another bite, he heard an argument start behind him.

Turning, he saw Justin and Zach standing chest to chest. Their voices steadily getting louder and louder as a frantic-looking Jessica tried to insert herself between them. He sighed, setting down his lunch.

“She’s not your girlfriend anymore!” Zach was yelling.

“Yeah, well she’s not yours either! You can’t tell me how much time I can spend with her!” Justin yelled back, standing on his tiptoes to reach the taller man.

“Guys, guys! Come on! Jess has been through enough, stop this!” he stated calmly, resting a hand on both of their shoulders.

Zach brushed his hand off, but took a step back.

“Now, what seems to be the problem?” he asked, looking from one to the other and then over at Jessica.

“They’ve been fighting all weekend because of me!” she said, before bursting into angry tears.

Both Zach and Justin rushed to her side, apologizing profusely.

“No, Jess, he just needs to give you space!” Zach was saying as he patted her shoulder.

“She doesn’t want space, she wants me!” Justin replied angrily.

“Okay, guys, why don’t we stop trying to speak for Jessica and ask her what she needs?” he tried to reason.

Jessica sniffed and looked between the two men. “I love you both, but I’m not ready to have a boyfriend right now. I need you both to just be my friend!” she cried out, rushing at him and burying her head in his shoulder.

He was taken aback, but he put his arms around her and tried to pat her back comfortingly.

“This is all your fault, now she’s upset!” Justin said, shoving Zach in the chest.

“What are you talking about, man? This is all your fault!” Zach yelled as he shoved back.

He quickly deposited Jessica at his lunch table before turning back to the shoving match. “Alright, clearly you two have too much testosterone built up. Let’s just settle down…” he had started to say when the shoving match turned more physical.

Zach and Justin tumbled to the ground, punching and grabbing at each other’s clothing.
“Okay, guys, you’ve gotta stop or you’ll both be suspended,” he said as he pulled Justin up and away from Zach’s grip. Justin kept his hold on Zach’s shirt, pulling until it was stuck over his head. Justin squirmed out of his grasp, standing to the side as he helped Zach up.

Zach tugged his shirt back down and took a menacing step towards Justin, stopping as he thrust an arm out between them.

“Hey! Guys! Chill out, you’re upsetting Jess!” he yelled, causing both of them to look sheepishly down at the ground.

“Well, he started it,” Justin mumbled, scuffing his toe on the concrete. The gesture made him look like he was five.

“You’re just around all the time. It’s like you don’t trust me with Jess,” Zach muttered back as the crowd around them began to dissipate, disappointed that there wasn’t going to be a fight after all.

“Why don’t we all just sit down and talk about this?” he sighed, looking back to where Jessica was eating the rest of Clay’s chips.

“It’s not just about Jessica,” Justin said, looking off into the distance.

“Obviously. You two were ripping at each other’s clothes like dogs in heat,” he said in a low voice, raising his eyebrows at them when they both shot him a glare. “Don’t shoot the messenger!” he said, raising his hands in defeat, “All I’m saying is, you both like her, she’s not in a headspace to have a boyfriend, and you two are going at each other after just a week.”

Zach and Justin made eye contact briefly before both turning and looking away awkwardly. Zach pretended to straighten his shirt while Justin combed a hand through his hair.

He gave them a one-sided smile. “Come on, join us for lunch. Let’s just sit and enjoy some good company,” he said as he gestured to the table, clapping Justin on the back as he made his way towards Jessica.

He noticed his partner was walking back from the cafeteria in a huff and said, “I’ll join you in a minute.” Walking over to meet Clay, he asked, “What’s wrong Mi Amor?”

“She does have bruises,” his partner spat out angrily. “She said it was none of my business, and she yelled at me when I asked if it was her fiancé!” Clay continued as he paced in front of him nervously.

“Whoa, whoa, did she say it was him?”

“No! She said it had nothing to do with him and it was nothing! But she’s clearly upset, and she won’t talk to me about it!” Clay said, his voice getting louder.

“Hey love, calm down. I’m sure it’s nothing!” he soothed as he took his partner’s face in his hands. Rubbing his thumbs along Clay’s jawline he added, “Text Mara and have her talk to Skye, she may feel more comfortable talking to another woman.”

Clay sighed as he looked into his eyes, finally calming. His partner raised his hands and put them over his as he said, “You’re so smart, how did I get so lucky?”

“I’m the lucky one!” he said with a laugh as he leaned in for a kiss, much to the delight of Jessica who hollered at them to add some tongue action.

“What’s gotten into her?” Clay asked, wrinkling his forehead.
“Oh, well Zach and Justin are fighting over her, but they won’t admit they have feelings for each other too…so, I invited them to have lunch with us…”

“Alright, sounds like a typical Monday,” his partner stated sarcastically, taking his hand as they made their way to join the trio. “Hey, did you eat my chips?”

“Sorry,” Jessica said with a pout, “I haven’t been feeling like eating much lately.”

“It’s okay, are you gonna finish your sandwich?” his partner asked him.

“Naw, go ahead Mi Corazon.”

“Thanks!”

He was just glad his partner was eating more than just chips or candy for lunch, it was hard enough to get Clay to eat a real meal during the day.

“So…are you guys going to be okay?” Clay asked, looking towards Zach and Justin.

The two glanced at each other, then at Jessica.

“We’re going to try and make it work…,” Zach started to say, dropping off and looking down at the table.

“I’m just not ready to date. I’m finally beginning to make some progress in therapy, and I don’t want to mess that up. But I don’t want to give up either of them,” Jessica explained, wiping invisible crumbs from the table.

“And we don’t want to date anyone else,” Justin inserted.

“I’m sure that makes for a lot of pent-up feelings,” he tried to rationalize.

“Yes,” Zach said, looking up. “Which we’ve been taking out on each other…,” he added, glancing over at Justin, “I’m sorry, man.”

“I’m sorry too. I just wasn’t able to take care of her, and then seeing you with her made me go a little crazy,” Justin tried to explain, turning his body to Zach.

“I get it, I didn’t need to be such a jerk about it. I just have been spending a lot of time with Jess since you left, and I’ve grown very fond of her. I just don’t want her to get hurt again.”

“Kiss, kiss, kiss…” Jessica chanted softly.

All four of them looked at her and she raised her eyebrows as she shrugged. “What?! A girl can dream, can’t she? Just because I’m not ready for a physical relationship yet, it doesn’t mean I don’t want to see some PDA between hot guys! Tony and Clay kiss all the time, and it makes me believe that someday I’ll be able to have that again too.”

Zach looked back at Justin through the hair that had fallen in front of his face. He raised an eyebrow as if to ask if Justin wanted to try. Justin replied with a nervous cough and a one-shouldered shrug before turning to him and his partner.

“Oh, no, we don’t want to participate,” he said clearly, waving one hand while the other pulled Clay in to his side.

“No, but we’ll watch,” Clay added, asking, “What?!” when he smacked him in the shoulder.
“I mean, well, how would we, uh, go about something like that?” Justin asked, gaze darting around at all of them around the table.

“Like what?” his partner asked.

“Like, kissing each other,” Zach mumbled.

“You just kiss,” he said with a shrug.

Justin and Zach looked at one another, clearly uncomfortable.

“Well, maybe not in a crowd. That’s a little weird for any first kiss,” he said, sensing the tension.

“Shhh…,” Jessica shushed as the two started to lean closer to each other. “I’m anxious to see who takes the lead,” she whispered, excitedly grabbing Clay’s hand on the table.

Justin rolled his eyes at her and dashed in to peck Zach on the lips. “There, happy?” he asked as the warning bell sounded.

She giggled furiously as Zach laughed, taken aback at his boldness.

“See, that wasn’t so difficult,” he said with a wink at them before he leaned in to give his partner a kiss on the cheek.

“It wasn’t so bad,” Zach admitted, “this might just work.”
Clay enlists Mara's help in talking with Skye, Clay and Tony enjoy some private time...

Chapter Notes

Sorry this chapter has taken me so long! I had strep throat, but I'm feeling better now! Hopefully I'll be able to post another chapter tonight as well...

Clay

“Mara hasn’t texted me back yet,” he said, checking his phone for the twentieth time since lunch. It was after school and his boyfriend was sliding into the mustang beside him. Tony always looked so graceful getting into the car that he took a second to admire him before continuing, “Maybe we should drive by her place, just to see if she’s okay?”

“She’s probably sleeping. I think she works tonight,” Tony replied, a slight smile spreading across his face. “But we can drive by just to check,” he relented.

Smiling to himself, he leaned over to kiss his boyfriend on the cheek as he started up the car. Tony reached over to give his knee a squeeze in response and they were off.

He enjoyed the warmth of the sun as he let his arm dangle out the window, trying to distract himself from thinking about Skye.

“So, Justin and Zach huh?”

“And Jessica,” his boyfriend reminded him.

“And Jessica,” he admitted. “How does that even work?” he asked, his face scrunching up as he tried to work it out in his mind.

“Why, are you interested in something like that?” Tony asked him, glancing his way.

“No, definitely not!” he exclaimed. “That seems way too messy and complicated for me. Besides…,” he added as he scooted closer to his boyfriend, running a hand up Tony’s thigh, “I’m very happy with what I have.”

He smiled as Tony growled his response, feeling him grow hard through his jeans. He nibbled at his ear, kissing his way down his boyfriend’s sumptuous neck as he gripped him harder.

“You know, we could take a detour…” Tony suggested.
“I thought you’d never ask,” he said as he unbuttoned the top of his boyfriend’s jeans.

“You know I’m still driving, right?”

“Well, you better hurry up then!” he exclaimed, smiling as Tony stepped on the gas.

He continued to tease his boyfriend as they made their way up to the bluff overlooking the city. As soon as the car was in park, Tony grabbed him by the hip and pulled him closer and into a kiss.

They continued to make out as they made their way to the back seat, relieving each other of some clothing along the way. He paused their kiss long just long enough to rip Tony’s shirt off, allowing himself to be pushed onto his back by the force at which his boyfriend started kissing him again.

He let his hands wander along Tony’s back, finally pushing his pants down far enough so he could grip his ass.

“I want to try it from this angle,” he blurted out, wanting to see the look in his boyfriend’s eyes when he slipped inside him.

Tony’s face lit up and he leaned in to whisper, “Then we’re going to need to get these pants off.”

He laughed with pleasure, enjoying the fervor with which his boyfriend disposed of his pants and boxers. Pulling Tony in for more kisses, he helped push his boyfriend’s pants to the floor of the mustang as well.

The feel of Tony against him took his breath away, and he fought to slow his pace down so he could appreciate the moment. As if he could read his mind, Tony grabbed for his hands, intertwining their fingers as he raised them above his head.

Hands now against the car door, he moaned as his boyfriend ground his hips into him slowly while marking his neck with a hickey. He gripped his lover’s hands harder as he began to kiss and bite his way down his chest.

Tony released his hands and used one of them to hold both of his wrists down underneath his head, giving him a pillow of sorts. Using his free hand, his boyfriend tickled his way down his side towards his hipbone. When Tony’s hand reached his thigh, he sat up. Pushing his leg up, Tony tucked his shoulder underneath his knee, changing the position of his hips for a better angle.

Tony took a moment to stare down at him with a hungry look in his eye, his gaze raking down his body and coming to rest where their hips met. Licking his lips, Tony gripped him and began stroking up and down, eliciting another groan.

“Mi Amor! Por favor…” he cried out as he felt his mind slipping away from him.

“Please what?” his boyfriend teased, biting his lower lip in a suggestive manner.

“Dámelo duro!” he said, his mouth dry. He took big gulps of air as he watched Tony grab for a condom, smiling as his boyfriend ripped the package open with his teeth.

He felt Tony raise his hips up and slide his leg underneath him and he struggled to help, settling back down only when his boyfriend told him to relax. He watched with anticipation as Tony placed the condom on with one hand, letting out an involuntary huff of impatience.

His boyfriend looked up at the noise, grinning devilishly as he leaned over to kiss him again.
Whining into the kiss, he ground his hips up, causing his lover to let out a deep bark of a laugh. He bit Tony’s lip, sucking it between his teeth as he tried to spur him on. He felt his boyfriend’s strong hand grip his ass as he sat back up, letting his own hips fall back as he angled himself towards his opening.

He didn’t know how Tony could make him want him so badly, he thought as he clutched at his boyfriend’s hand behind his head. He groaned as Tony began to slowly enter him, pausing only to use his spit for more lubricant.

Remembering that he had wanted to watch Tony’s face, he struggled to hold his gaze. But the newness of the position made his back arch and his eyes flutter shut despite his wish and he gave in to the sensations, calling out his boyfriend’s name as Tony pressed deeper inside of him.

“Is this okay?” he heard his boyfriend ask in response to a particularly loud scream he emitted.

He nodded, looking up at Tony. Knowing he wasn’t going to last much longer, he pleaded in Spanish for him to go harder, faster. Tony complied willingly, smiling to himself as he watched him come underneath him.

Still breathing heavily, he felt his body melt at his release, allowing Tony to slide in a touch further. He gasped again at the sensation, liking how this position allowed for his boyfriend to fit fully inside him. He watched on as his lover enjoyed it too, noticing he was biting his lip hard enough to draw blood.

“Come for me,” he said, his voice gravely from yelling.

“Yes sir,” his boyfriend said with a smile, kissing his knee where it sat on his shoulder before sliding back and thrusting into him again.

He found himself staring up at his love, adoring the way his face contorted as he finished inside of him. Tony’s shoulder’s slumped and he slid his body from underneath his leg, letting go of his wrists.

Using his newly-freed hands, he reached up to pull his boyfriend down and into a kiss. He savored the kiss, not rushed by urgency or need, but fueled by love. He felt himself sigh as Tony made to break their connection, curling his leg around his boyfriend’s hips in an attempt to keep him where he was for a moment more.

“Haha, you really do like having me inside you, don’t you?” Tony laughed.

He nodded in response, earning him another deep kiss. They continued like that for a while longer before he finally gave in to releasing his boyfriend so they could clean up and get dressed.

“Oh, we should take detours more often,” he murmured as Tony turned the car around and began to head back down the hill.

His boyfriend smiled, reaching a hand over to drape on his thigh. He let his hand come to rest on top of Tony’s, his thumb tracing soft circles around the ring that sat there.

They sat in comfortable silence the rest of the way to Mara’s, not even bothering to turn the radio on. He found himself sad that the drive wasn’t farther as they pulled into Mara’s driveway. His legs still felt like noodles and he was reluctant to break the spell of happiness that had overcome him.

Looking over at his boyfriend, he was about to say something embarrassingly cute when he spied Mara and Lewis coming around the corner of the house and frowned instead. Noticing his sudden
shift, Tony turned his head as well.

“What the hell?” his boyfriend asked, shooting him another look before getting out of the car.

He sighed, wondering what Mara was up to with the barbed-wire she was carrying. Getting out of the mustang, he called out to her and waved.

Lewis barked once, wagging his tail as he ran down to the fence.

“Hey boys, what are you doing here?” Mara asked as she opened the gate to let them in, giving them each a hug as Lewis sniffed them thoroughly.

“I, uh, texted earlier. Have you been busy with your scary metal project?” he asked, pointing to the barbed-wire she had left by the front door.

“Yeah, I just have one window left. Want to tell me what’s up while you hold it in place for me?” she asked as she made her way towards the house.

He told her about Skye while he and Tony held up the wire so she could secure it in place.

“And you didn’t consider that it was from something consensual?” she asked, causing Tony to give a one-sided smile.

He frowned and shook his head. “No, why would I think that?” he asked.

She raised her eyebrows at him, then looked pointedly at his boyfriend.

“No, we haven’t done that.” Tony said with a shake of his head, stepping back into the yard as Mara finished securing the wire.

“Why would someone do that?” he asked, shaking his head as if to clear the image.

“How do you know if you’ve never tried? Still, bruising is a bit much. I’ll invite her out to the club tonight for some girl talk.”

“Thanks,” he said, still thinking about what she had said about it possibly being consensual.

“Hey, is your sister still doing hair?” Mara asked Tony as she led the way to the gate, clearly indicating that it was time for them to leave.

“Yeah, she works at the salon. But I’m sure she’d give you a cut at the house, just give her a call.”

“Great!” she replied, holding on to Lewis as she opened the gate. “And I wouldn’t worry about Skye, she’s a tough girl,” she added as they filed out.

“Thanks, bye!” his boyfriend called, walking to his mustang.

He followed him slowly, resting his butt against the driver’s door so Tony couldn’t open it. His boyfriend gave him a concerned look, leaning his body into him and placing his hands on his hips.

“You ok Mi Corazon?”

“Is that something you want to do?” he asked, scared but curious.

“What Mi Amor?”

“You know, the, uh, the…” he said as he tried to make a hand gesture around his neck.
“Choking during sex?” Tony asked bluntly, now smiling at his charades.

“Yeah, or, ya know, other stuff?” he answered with a shrug.

He watched as his boyfriend seemed to mull it over. “There are things I want to do with you, but I’ve been enjoying exploring them with you. Like today, you wanted to try a new position. It’s not something we have to do every time, but it can fun to try new things,” Tony said before he leaned in for a kiss.

Enjoying the gentle way his boyfriend kissed him, he remained silent, opening his mouth to deepen their kiss. When he felt Tony finally pull away, he sighed, licking his lips.

“I like trying new things with you, too,” he murmured, opening his eyes so he could at his boyfriend. He added, “But you’ll tell me if there’s something you want to try?”

“I promise Mi Corazon,” Tony swore, dipping back in for another kiss, this time with more force and passion.

“Are you guys going to do it right here in the driveway?” he heard Mara call to them. He laughed into Tony’s mouth, placing his hand on the back of his head so that his boyfriend couldn’t pull away. “Alright, well, have fun! I called Skye, I’m meeting her later. Want to meet at Monet’s before school tomorrow?” she asked as he heard her car door open.

Tony pulled away for a few seconds, calling out, “Sounds good, see you then!”

He waved a goodbye as his boyfriend snuggled him closer, holding him up against the car. Tony rubbed his nose down his neck, sending shivers throughout his body.

“Want to go for round two?” he asked his horny boyfriend, elated at the positive response he received.
Chapter Summary

Skye is absent for school so Tony and Clay track her down...

Waking up with his partner’s head on his chest had quickly become one of his favorite things, and this morning was no exception. After dinner with Clay’s family, he and his partner has settled in to watch a movie on the Jensen’s couch.

He ran his fingers through Clay’s hair and rubbed his stubbly chin against his forehead. His partner was draped over his body like a big cat, head resting on his chest. As he began to wake, Clay nuzzled into his chest and let out a small sigh.

He felt his partner’s slender hand rub across his chest and he caught it, bringing it to his lips for a kiss. At Clay’s happy groan of approval, he continued kissing down each of his fingers until his partner stretched his head up to gaze into his eyes.


“Buenos dias Mi Amor,” he replied, letting go of his partner’s hand so he could pull him into a hug.

“Mmm, I love waking up with you,” Clay whispered in his ear, kissing it softly.

He groaned his agreement, rubbing his hands along his partner’s back. Enjoying the feel of Clay’s muscles underneath his fingertips, he didn’t notice that Mrs. Jensen had come into the room.

“Good morning, boys. Do you want some breakfast before school?” she asked, startling him.

Clay stopped kissing his neck long enough to look up at her and ask what time it was. He sighed, remembering that they had agreed to meet Mara before school. They declined Mrs. Jensen’s breakfast offer and began to get ready.

He closed his eyes, inhaling the scent of his americano before diving in. Clay was sitting in the chair next to him, tapping his fingers nervously against his coffee cup as he stared at Mara in the booth seat across from them.

“So…what did you find out?” Clay finally asked, ignoring his cup of coffee. He placed his hand on the back of his partner’s chair, rubbing his thumb between Clay’s shoulder blades. He could feel the tension loosen as his partner sighed and gave him an appreciative look.

Mara reached into her purse and pulled out a file. Setting her coffee to the side, she opened it and began reading, “Um, let’s see here…the man we know as Shadow was born Argus Rossi on August 28th, 1990 to parents Richard and Dina. He legally changed his name in college after
changing his major from Art History to Fine Arts. Has one misdemeanor charge in 2010 for graffiti, other than that no trouble with the law…”

“Where did you even get that information?” he asked, frowning as he shook his head.

She looked up from the file and answered, “Don’t worry about it.”

“You and Tony are two peas in a pod,” Clay said wryly, finally taking a sip of his coffee. He glanced at his partner, feeling a smile creep onto his face.

“Well, bottom line is he seems like a fairly normal guy. No complaints of domestic abuse or anger issues from any past lover, and Skye says the bruises aren’t from him. Something’s going on with her, but she wouldn’t talk about it.”

“Well, you never know what’s going on in someone else’s life. All we can do is be supportive and make sure she knows we care about her,” he said, ready to lay the matter to rest. Although, he was curious as to where Mara got her information from, and on such short notice…

“Isn’t she supposed to be working today?” his partner asked, looking around Monet’s as Mara shoved the file back in her purse.

“We were out late last night, maybe you’ll see her at school?” she said, finishing the rest of her coffee. “Speaking of which, shouldn’t you two be heading off before you’re late?”

“Oh, yeah,” Clay sighed, pushing his coffee cup around on the table.

He stood up, squeezing his partner’s shoulder, “Come on, Mi Corazon, let’s see if Skye is alright. See you later Mara!”

“See ya! I’ll be by later; your sister is giving me a haircut.”

He nodded in her direction, following Clay as he waved goodbye and made his way towards the door.

“I haven’t seen her all day!” his partner stated, clearly agitated. “And she’s not answering her phone,” he added, feet thumping angrily on the pavement.

They were walking out of the cafeteria at lunch, making a b-line for their usual table.

“Maybe she just skipped a few classes?” he mused, adding, “Why don’t we ask them?” He pointed to where Jessica, Zach, and Justin were sitting enjoying lunch.

Clay nodded, switching directions. They waved and exchanged hellos with the trio, receiving a negative response when they asked if any of them had seen Skye at school that day.

He was happy to see that the three of them seemed to be getting along. Zach even had his arm around Jessica, his hand resting on Justin’s thigh on her other side.

“Why don’t you text Mara, ask her for Shadow’s address and we’ll stop by after school?” he offered.

“That’s a good idea, thanks Mi Amor,” Clay responded, leaning in to give him a kiss on the cheek. He smiled, wrapping his arm around his adorable partner and drawing him in close.

“You two are just so cute!” Jessica sighed, “Almost as cute as my two guys!”
“So, everything’s working out then?” his partner asked, smiling at her.

He looked over at them, Jessica was nodding away happily while Zach and Justin glanced at each other over her head.

“I think we’re all happy,” Justin replied, grabbing hold of Zach’s hand where it rested on his thigh and giving it a squeeze.

Zach smiled back at Justin and nodded, glancing back over at him before asking, “It’s still pretty new… we might have some questions?”

“Anytime man, you have my number,” he answered, giving Clay a one-armed hug as he texted Mara.

“Just about, ya know, some of the, uh, physical, ah, logistics?” Justin added, waving a free hand and blushing.

He nodded. “I gotcha,” he said with a nod as his partner tried to hide a smile and a giggle.

“It’s just all about love,” Clay said, giving his knee a squeeze as he gazed into his eyes. He was so lucky, he thought as he leaned in to rub noses with his partner.

“Why don’t we stop by Skye’s first?” Clay suggested as they walked out of school.

“Sure,” he replied, unlocking the mustang.

“I’m not crazy, right?” his partner asked him as they settled in.

He looked him up and down, taking in his lanky form before replying, “Well, I dunno… you are dating me…”

That made Clay laugh, and his partner scooted over in the seat so he could kiss him enthusiastically. “Then I must be the sanest person ever,” Clay whispered, giving him one last peck before sitting back and buckling his seatbelt.

He smirked to himself the whole ride over to Skye’s place, his hand intertwined with Clay’s as they whisked down the road. But when they turned into Skye’s driveway, his smile began to disappear.

The lawn was a mess, and there were what looked like a week’s worth of newspapers left uncollected on the porch. The mailbox was overflowing, as was the trash can, and a window had been broken and replaced with a cardboard box.

He looked over at Clay, who’s face mirrored his concern. They got out of the car and made their way to the door, knocking several times.

“I think I hear someone… SKYE?” his partner yelled.

There was a crash followed by a woman’s muffled swearing. A few moments later, Skye’s mother cracked open the door and peered out at them. Her hair was a mess and her eyes squinted at the sunlight.

“What do you want?” she growled out to them. The smell of alcohol and body odor overwhelmed
him and he took an involuntary step back.

“Is Skye here?” Clay asked, eyebrows raised.

“Haven’t seen her since yesterday,” her mom said, clearing her throat as she reached in the pocket of her robe for a cigarette.

“Do you know where she is?” he asked, concern for his friend taking over. He had never seen Skye’s mom in such a disheveled state and it made him worry.

“How should I know?” she asked, searching her pockets again and pulling out a lighter. “You might try that boyfriend she’s always going on and on about,” she continued as she lit up, leaning her body against the door frame.

“Okay, thanks,” Clay said uncomfortably, backing off the porch.

“Is everything alright here?” he asked, indicating the disarray.

“Mind your own business!” she yelled at him, slamming the door in his face.

“Have you ever seen her like that?” he asked his partner as they drove to Shadow’s.

“No, never? Not that I remember?” Clay replied, staring out the window. He had his elbow resting on the door, his hand covering his mouth, and his face scrunched up in a concerned frown.

“I’m sure she’s okay,” he tried to reassure, but he pressed down on the gas pedal anyway.

They headed towards the central part of town and turned just a few streets down from the movie theater where Clay worked.

“I think this is it,” he said as he parked his mustang. Looking up at the brick apartment building, he found himself surprised. It was a nice neighborhood and the intricate design of the black metal balconies made him feel out of place.

“How can he afford to live here?” he mused, glancing over at his partner who shrugged in return.

“Mara said number 308,” Clay said, coming to stand close to him.

They made their way through the courtyard and up the steps to the third floor, walking until they found the number. He heard music and he raised his hand to knock on the door.

Before he could knock, the door swung open and he was face to face with Shadow.

“I'd know that red mustang anywhere,” the taller man said, stepping to the side and gesturing for them to enter.

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“Is Skye here?” Clay asked, rushing inside.

He was a little more cautious, taking in the apartment before walking slowly inside.

“She’s outside on the terrace,” Shadow said, pointing to the right side of the room as he closed the door. It was a spacious living area that opened into a large kitchen. There was a metal staircase between the rooms and Shadow walked over to it, pausing on the first step to say, “Help yourself to anything you want, I’ll be upstairs.”

He made eye contact with Clay, who motioned for him to hurry and join him.

They walked to the sliding glass door and walked out onto the balcony, where Skye sat at a small
“Hey. Sorry to drop by unannounced, we stopped by your house and you weren’t there…we were worried,” he said from the doorway.

“I’m fine,” she replied without looking up from the table.

Clay took a few steps closer to her and sat down at the table. “I’m sorry if I’ve been annoying you lately, it’s just that, well, you’re my friend. You’re our friend. We care about you,” his partner stated, reaching to place his hand on top of hers.

“I said I’m fine,” Skye said, clearly irritated as she looked up at them.

“Skye!” he and Clay exclaimed at the sight of the bruising around her eye.

“Who did this to you? Was it him? I’ll kill him!” his partner yelled as he jumped up from his seat, knocking over his chair in the process.

“NO, this has nothing to do with him,” she insisted angrily.

“Who did this to you?” he asked slowly, dreading the answer.

Skye looked back down at the sketchbook, twirling her pencil in one hand.

“Answer the question, Skye,” Clay pleaded, crouching down so he could look up at her.

He moved from his position by the door, righting the overturned chair and sitting down. Skye avoided eye contact for a few moments, chewing on the side of her lip as she debated what to tell them.

“You wouldn’t understand,” she mumbled finally.

“Try us,” he said, trying to sound reassuring. She glanced at him quickly, then back down at the table.

“It’s my mom, okay? She’s sick.”
Chapter Summary

Skye tells Clay and Tony about her mother, and the couple try something new in the bedroom...Justin faces his fears and explores his new relationship

Clay

He stared up at Skye for a moment, glad he was close to the ground because he felt dizzy. How had he not known? He had known Skye his whole life, yet he never had a clue her home life was so bad.

“Is there anything we can do?” he heard Tony ask. His boyfriend’s voice sounded far away and he realized he was holding his breath. He inhaled and sat down, leaning into his boyfriend’s shins as he let it out slowly.

“No. Thank you,” she said with a heavy sigh. “I’ve just been staying here until she levels out.”

“Where’s your dad?” he asked tentatively, looking up at her as he felt Tony’s fingers run their way down his neck. He was grateful for the comforting touch and took another deep breath in.

“He left a long time ago,” Skye scoffed, tugging her jacket closer around her body.

“Are you cold? Should we go inside?” Tony asked. He marveled at how his boyfriend always picked up on little things like that.

Skye shook her head. “I like the fresh air,” she said.

“Do you want my jacket?” his boyfriend offered, already beginning to take it off.

“No, thank you Tony. It’s just hard to talk about.”

He nodded in agreement and rose from his position to take a seat in the chair next to Tony. He tried to put himself in her shoes, but the thought made him shudder. Reaching for his boyfriend’s hand on the table next to him, he fought to ground himself.

“I’m sure it is, sister. Just know that we’re always here for you,” Tony told her, giving his hand a squeeze with one hand while reaching for hers with the other.

She gave him a small smile as Shadow stepped out onto the balcony. He was carrying a tray filled with coffee mugs.

“I thought it was about time for some hot chocolate,” he offered, setting the tray on the table and taking the last empty chair next to his fiancé.

“Thanks babe,” Skye said, leaning towards him for a kiss.

He and Tony took mugs from the tray and sat in silence for a moment as they enjoyed the
comforting drink.

“So, you told them then? I won’t be murdered in my sleep?” Shadow asked, trying to lighten the mood.

“Uh, yeah, sorry about that…” he started to say, stopping as Shadow’s hand shot up.

“No need for apologies, my good sir. I’m just happy Skye has so many people that care about her.”

“It’s just, ya know, right after the gallery she showed up at school with bruises on her neck, and I, uh, just got little protective,” he said, feeling the need to explain himself.

“I get it. My art can be provocative, and I’m sure it was hard to see your friend with someone you barely know,” Shadow admitted, taking a sip of his cocoa.

“Well, I’m just glad you have somewhere to stay,” Tony said to Skye, asking, “Is your mom going to be alright?”

“She’s bipolar,” Skye explained, “which she usually controls with medication. But when she drinks, she stops taking it. And when she drinks, she gets violent. When I got home from the gallery, she had been drinking a lot and she didn’t react well to Shadow’s proposal…”

“Apparently not!” he exclaimed, sputtering into his mug and earning him a slight frown from his boyfriend. However, it made Skye laugh, so he figured his bluntness was worth it.

“Ya, well, you saw her today. How is she doing?”

He glanced at Tony, who cleared his throat. “Uh…,” he stalled.

“Well, she, um, she could use a shower to be honest,” Tony cut in, looking back at Skye. “But I don’t think she was drunk yet,” he added with a shrug.

“That’s an improvement,” she replied, sighing into her hot chocolate.

Her fiancé nodded and they sat in silence for a while longer.

“Do you guys want to see what I’m working on?” Shadow offered, placing his empty cup on the tray.

He looked at Tony who shrugged one shoulder, letting him know it was up to him. “Sure,” he replied, setting his cup down as well.

They got up and made their way inside and up the staircase. The upstairs was one big, open room that served as a bedroom and studio. There were sculptures and paintings everywhere, and he found himself drawn to one that sat alone in the corner.

Before he could investigate it further, Shadow directed them to the rough beginnings of a sculpture in the middle of the room.

“I still haven’t figured it out,” Shadow was saying as he sat down in the stool next it. “Every time I go to work on the details, it just gets fuzzy. Is it male? Is it female? What’s the story, are they alone? Are they waiting on a lover? It’s been driving me crazy…”

“Why can’t it be both?” he asked, backing away from the sculpture and making his way towards the painting in the corner that was haunting him.
“Both what?” Shadow asked.

“Male and female,” he replied, now staring at the work of art in the corner of the room. He could now see why he was drawn to it: it reminded him of Tony. Painted in black and grey tones, hair slicked back and a black jacket hiding most of his features. Except for his lips, they were Tony’s full lips.

He turned back to confront Shadow, but found the man staring at him.

“What?” he asked, blushing at the intensity of his gaze.

“You’re exactly right. I’ve just been looking at it wrong way,” Shadow answered, turning back to the sculpture and beginning to work.

Skye motioned for them to come back down the stairs and he and Tony obeyed, meeting her down in the kitchen.

“He’s been stuck on that piece for weeks,” she whispered, making her way to the door. “It’s best to leave him to it,” she added.

Tony nodded and asked, “What’s his deal? I swear I saw a painting that looked like Clay, and another one with Mara’s features.”

“The one in the corner was you!” he exclaimed softly, nodding his head. “It was really good,” he thought out loud, still unable to get the image out of his head.

“Oh, he’s pansexual,” Skye replied.

He shook his head, not knowing what the term meant.

“No, I mean, what’s his deal with painting us?” his boyfriend specified.

“Ooh, well, I think all artists take inspiration from their surroundings. I think he just really likes you guys, you’re the first friends I’ve introduced him to,” she said shyly, looking at the ground.

Tony nodded and they said their goodbye’s, making Skye promise to keep them up to date and to call anytime if she needed help with her mother.

On the way to the car, he glanced out of the corner of his eye at his boyfriend. “So, um, what’s that term she used? Pan-something?” he asked.

“Pansexual?”

“Yes, that!”

“It means he’s attracted to all people regardless of gender,” Tony answered, opening the car door for him.

He paused before getting in the car, standing close enough to his love he could smell his aftershave. “That sounds a lot like being bi?” he asked, confused.

“It’s a bit more open than that…,” his boyfriend tried to explain. “If you’re bisexual, you’re physically attracted to both male and female sexes, right?” He nodded, that sounded like him. Tony continued, “A pansexual is attracted to all gender identifications, as well as to those who don’t feel they have a gender. Does that make sense?”
“Yeah, that makes sense,” he said as he mulled it over. He leaned in to give his boyfriend a long kiss. “Do you think that’s why we all got a strange vibe from him?”

“No, I’m sure that was just his personality, he’s a little more forward than most people. Besides, we’re all a little protective of Skye.”

He nodded in agreement. “Please don’t ever leave me, the world is a confusing place,” he huffed out, a feeling of anxiety crashing over him.

Tony smiled and pressed him back onto the car, embracing him in his strong arms. “Never, Mi Corazon,” he said softly, kissing him fully and passionately.

They drove from Shadow’s apartment to Tony’s house, brainstorming ways they could help Skye and her mother.

As they walked through the front door, Tony called out a greeting. He received a reply from the direction of the kitchen, so they walked in instead of going right upstairs. He was startled to see Mara sitting in a kitchen chair near the sink while Tony’s sister stood behind her with scissors.

“Are you sure?” Tony’s sister, Ana, was saying, handing Mara a mirror.

“Yes, amiga, I’m sure. Do you want me to tie back the hair not to cut?” Mara asked.

“Yes, let’s do that. Hey Tony, Clay.”

“Hello! Are you guys having fun?” he asked as he sat down at the table while Tony grabbed them a drink from the fridge.

“Yeah, just nervous…she wants a real extreme cut,” Tony’s sister confided, shaking her head.

“It’s not extreme if I’ve had it before, do you want me to make the major cut?” Mara asked, looking back at her.

“No, no. I can do it, if you’re sure?”

“I’m sure.”

Tony sat down next to him as his sister snipped a chunk of hair off the left side of Mara’s long locks. He almost spat out the water his boyfriend had gotten him as Ana continued to cut. She reached for the trimmers and buzzed the hair around Mara’s left ear, unveiling a tattoo that had been hidden underneath.

His eyebrows shot up as she finished, untying the rest of Mara’s long hair and styling it. She took a step back to admire her work and exclaimed, “Oh, that looks so good!”

“Thanks!” Mara said, examining herself in the mirror and smiling. “I feel more like myself now,” she stated, fluffing her side bangs.

“Did that hurt?” he asked, referring to the tattoo on the side of her head. He could tell now that it was two roses of varying sizes, surrounded by leaves.

She gave him a knowing smile. “Anything worth doing is going to hurt in some way,” she said cryptically as she got up from the chair.

“It suits you,” Tony said from beside him.
“Thanks. I have no reason to try and hide it anymore, so I figured I may as well have the haircut I like,” she replied nonchalantly, reaching in her purse and handing some cash to Tony’s sister. “Did you find Skye?” she asked.

“Yes! She’s fine. Well, as fine as you can be I guess?” he answered. He proceeded to fill her in on his and Tony’s after school adventures as Ana cleaned up the kitchen.

“Wow,” Mara finally stated, wide-eyed. “I’m so glad she’s in a safe place, but she’s definitely going to need help with her mother. I doubt that alcohol and that medication react well,” she said with a shake of her head.

“Yeah, we’ll just have to be more on top of it,” his boyfriend said, reaching over to rub his shoulders. He nodded in response, leaning back into his touch.

“Well, you guys look tired, and I’ve got to get back to the house. Why don’t you go take a nap?”

“Mmm, that sounds good,” he admitted, looking hopefully at Tony.

“It does,” his boyfriend replied, standing up from the table.

They made their way upstairs to Tony’s bedroom and he flopped down on the bed while Tony closed the door and removed his jacket.

“It’s been a long day, and it’s not even dinnertime,” he said as his boyfriend crawled into bed beside him, spooning him close to his muscular body.

“Mmmhmm, try and get some rest,” Tony mumbled into his neck.

“Too many clothes for that…” he teased, craving the feel of Tony’s chest on his back. He broke into a huge grin as he felt the bed move under him, happy that his boyfriend was obliging so quickly.

He laughed at Tony’s shirt sailed over him and to the floor and Tony’s hands began to tug at the bottom of his shirt. He let his boyfriend undress him and settle back in before he reached for his thigh and tugged at his jeans.

“I thought you were tired,” his boyfriend asked with a throaty laugh.

“Mph, jeans aren’t comfortable for snuggling,” he argued, already unbuttoning his own.

When they had removed the offending articles of clothing, they settled back in and under the covers. He tried to lay still for a few moments, but couldn’t keep himself from running his fingers along his boyfriend’s arms and finally turned around to face him.

He scooted close enough so that he could make out with his handsome lover, running his hand along his side.

Tony responded by pulling him in closer, wrapping his top leg around him and kissing him harder.

“Why don’t we do something you’ve been wanting to try?” he asked, tugging at his boyfriend’s boxer briefs.

“Hmm…” Tony mumbled, mulling it over as he raised himself to one elbow and stared down at him thoughtfully.
“What?”

“There is something I want to try, and I think you’ll like it…,” his boyfriend said mysteriously, fingertips lightly brushing his chest.

“What is it?” he asked, curious to learn what fantasies his lover was into.

Tony leaned over him and began searching for something alongside the bed. He came back up with the rope they had used for climbing the boulder.

“You want to tie me up?” he asked with a smile, feeling a rush of excited anticipation.

“Maybe a little…nothing too tight,” his boyfriend said as he tickled his stomach with the end of the rope.

“Let’s do it!” he replied, excited.

He saw Tony smile before he dove in for a kiss, grabbing him by the ass and turning him over in one swift motion. He snuggled deeper into the pillow as his boyfriend proceeded to place kisses across his back and up each arm, loosing himself in the sensation of his lips.

Before he knew it, Tony had made a loop around his wrists, securing him to the wooden headboard. He glanced up at his hands, noticing that they were not tied tightly and he could slip out of the loop anytime he wanted. But he didn’t want to, and he gripped at the rope, using it as a handhold as he arched his hips up to meet Tony’s.

His boyfriend’s growl sent shivers up his spine and he gasped as he felt Tony’s teeth on his shoulder. The bite wasn’t very hard; just enough to give him goosebumps and long enough to leave him wanting more.

He felt Tony’s weight shift on top of him as he made his way down his back, licking and biting his way down to where his boxers sat. Squirming out of impatience, he sought not to cry out at the languid way his lover worked his tongue underneath the waistline of the boxers.

He tilted his head to the side and tried to watch as Tony’s hands massaged his back while he pulled his boxers down with his teeth, but the angle wasn’t quite right. He pushed his hips up impatiently, causing his lover to laugh with joy.

When Tony finally relieved him of his undergarment, he laid back down on top of him and gave him a kiss. He could tell that Tony had also removed his briefs and the feel of his boyfriend pressing against him made him crazy with need. He bit and sucked at Tony’s lips, remembering Shadow’s perfect painting of them.

His boyfriend pulled back, kissing his way down his back. He felt an arm around his chest and Tony lifted him slightly, moving the pillow from under his head and situating it underneath his hips. He felt slightly exposed, but relished the way his boyfriend maneuvered him so expertly.

“I’m going to feel bad if I come on your pillow,” he muttered, feeling his boyfriend’s body shake with laughter. Tony reached under the mattress and pulled out a condom, taking his time to place it on him thoroughly before settling him back down.

“How do you feel?” Tony whispered in his ear as he rubbed himself between the curve of his butt cheeks.

He nodded happily, tired of waiting for his boyfriend to enter him. “Please…” he begged.
His boyfriend responded by biting down on one side of his ass while slapping the other side. He let out an ‘Oh!’ of surprise, followed by a groan of need as he felt Tony’s tongue tease his opening.

Not being able to see his lover made it all the more thrilling, and he let himself enjoy the way Tony explored him. Feeling Tony’s hands grip his thighs, he squealed in delight. His boyfriend pushed his legs apart, falling back farther on the bed so he could suck at the sensitive skin behind his balls.

“Tony!” he cried.

“You know my sister’s still in the house, right?” Tony mumbled into the back of his groin.

“I’m going to need something to bite down on, then,” he said honestly, causing his boyfriend to give another throaty laugh.

“You can bite down on me, just give me a moment,” Tony replied, going back to stimulating him with his tongue.

He fought to keep his moans quiet, biting down on his lip and gripping at his handhold when Tony’s tongue slipped inside him. He was almost at his breaking point when Tony pulled away, leaning over him to grab another condom and a bottle of lubricant from under the mattress.

He felt his body pulse with desire as Tony slowly penetrated him. His boyfriend paused and lowered his body enough so that he could place an arm next to his face. Gratefully, he bit down on his well-toned forearm underneath the cross tattoo that sat there.

His lover’s other hand gripped his ass as he sank deeper inside him, breathing heavily now. He snuck a glance up at him and marveled at his self-control. As if he could read his mind, Tony leaned over him for a kiss, gently easing back a bit before thrusting his hips.

He cried out into his lover’s mouth, wanting to run his hands over him and get as much physical contact as he could. Instead, he gripped at the rope harder as he fought to maintain their kiss.

“Do you like that?” Tony asked, slowing the pace of his hips as he nibbled down his neck.

“Oh, god yes, Tony, don’t stop! I love you!”

He was surprised he could still talk the way Tony was driving him crazy, and he bit down on his boyfriend’s arm again as Tony tilted his hips and slid even further inside him. He moaned and turned his forehead to the mattress, biting at the sheets beneath him.

He felt Tony’s sweaty bangs tickle between his shoulder blades as his boyfriend bent to place a kiss there.

“He amo Mi Corazon,” he heard him say as he quickened their rhythm.

Turning his head again he cried, “Mi Amor!” He arched his back even more, trying to encourage his partner to fuck him even harder. He bit down on Tony’s arm again as his lover read his signals and complied with enthusiasm.

All of the teasing and the build-up made him climax harder than he ever thought was possible, and he was glad that his boyfriend’s arm was there to muffle his scream. He released Tony’s arm and began gulping down air, enjoying listening to his boyfriend’s own heavy breathing and subsequent release.
Tony collapsed on top of him and he let his hips sink into the bed as he angled his head up for a sloppy kiss. He couldn’t help but smile at the amount of sweat his boyfriend had worked up, and he tried to lick some it off his lover’s cheek.

Tony laughed and squeezed him tight in his strong arms. “Did you enjoy that?” he mumbled into his ear.

“Very much!” he answered sleepily, slipping his hands out of the rope. “Now I really want a nap…”

“You can have anything you want Mi Corazon!”

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Justin

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He was pacing frantically around Tyler’s room, feeling like a caged animal. Jessica and Zach were going to be there any minute to hang out while Tyler’s parents were out late at a work function and he couldn’t help but feel nervous.

“Dude, you okay?” Tyler asked from the bed where he was packing up a camera to take on his date with Sheri.

“Yeah, no, I’m fine. Why?”

“You just seem anxious,” Tyler replied, looking back down to zip up his camera bag. He stood, slinging the bag over his shoulder.

“It’s just our first time really all together…alone,” he tried to explain. Ever since he had moved into Tyler’s room, he felt like he hadn’t had a moment to himself. As grateful as he was for Tyler’s parents allowing him to crash at their house, they always seemed to be around. But now, as the time came for him to finally have the alone time he had been craving, he was all nerves. He glanced up at Tyler, who was nodding in understanding.

“Just take it slow, man. Nothing wrong with that,” Tyler said as he searched the dresser for his keys. “I’ll text you when I’m on my way home.”

He gave him a nod and followed him out the door into the hall. He jumped as a ring of the doorbell startled him, causing Tyler to shoot him a frown.

Tyler opened the door, standing to the side as Zach and Jessica filed in and greeted them.

“Hey guys, I’ll catch you later, I’ve got to pick Sheri up for our date,” Tyler said, sliding out the door as the three of them called their goodbyes.

“You guys want anything to drink?” he asked as he made his way to the kitchen, trying to avoid any potentially awkward moments in the hallway.

“I’m good, thanks,” Zach said as he followed him.

“Water, please!” Jessica called as she made her way into the living room.

He grabbed two glasses from the cupboard and turned to fill them in the sink, but ran into Zach’s
He grabbed two glasses from the cupboard and turned to fill them in the sink, but ran into Zach’s muscular form.

He looked up, trying to read the look on Zach’s face. He was distracted, however, by the slow way Zach’s tongue licked across his upper lip. Wanting to kiss those lips, he leaned in to the taller man’s body.

His boldness was rewarded as Zach bent his head down to reach his lips, curling a strong arm around his waist to pull him closer. He felt himself relax as Zach took charge, tilting his head so he could deepen their kiss.

After a few moments, Zach came up for air, pressing their foreheads together as he caught his breath.

“That’s a nice way to say hello,” he whispered, laughing softly at himself. How could he have been so nervous, he thought as he gave Zach another peck on the lips. “I’ve been wanting to do that all day,” Zach murmured, continuing to hold him close.

“I could die of thirst at this rate,” Jessica joked as she skipped into the kitchen. She grabbed one of the glasses from his hand and leaned in to give each of them a kiss on the cheek.

He used his now-free hand to pull her into their hug, and he felt Zach release his hold and pull Jessica in as well.

She giggled, leaning her head onto Zach’s chest as she ran her fingers through his hair. Her hand came to rest on the back of his neck and she pulled him towards her for a kiss.

He tried to hide his surprise at her gesture. It was the first time they had kissed since she had found out the secret he had been keeping from her. The thought caused him to pause, a feeling of anxiety washing over him again.

As if she knew what he was thinking, she let her hand drop, allowing him to raise his head. She lowered her gaze and turned away, filling her glass from the facet.

“Who wants to watch a movie?” Zach asked, stepping away and heading towards the living room.

“Let’s watch a comedy!” Jessica said excitedly, looking between them both.

“Sounds great!” he replied, filling up his own glass with water. “Who wants popcorn?”

After making popcorn, he joined them in the living room where they were settling in to watch a Will Ferrell comedy. Zach was stretched out lengthwise on the couch and Jessica sat on the far end near his feet.

He placed the bowl on the coffee table and felt himself being pulled back onto the couch and into Zach’s lap. Immediately, Jessica threw his legs up and snuggled in to his lap. He smiled as he covered her in the throw from the back of the couch, hugging her close with one arm as he laid the other around Zach’s leg beside him.

“Hey, Jess, can you pass me a pillow?” Zach asked, reaching to rub her shoulder. She complied and they settled in deeper onto the couch as the movie started.

He wasn’t sure when it happened, but at some point Jessica fell asleep on his chest. As he looked down at her, he couldn’t help but think how much she looked like an angel. He leaned his head forward, kissing the top of her head before settling back down to rest on Zach’s shoulder.

“She’s going to be alright,” Zach whispered, massaging his arm.
He reached up, tracing Zach’s strong jawline with his fingertips. “I hope so,” he replied as he looked up at him.

Zach shifted slightly on the couch so he could kiss him on the forehead. He closed his eyes as Zach kissed his way down the bridge of his nose and across his cheekbone, raising his head so he could reach his lips.

When they broke apart from their kiss, he asked, “Do I call you my boyfriend now?”

“I don’t know?” Zach replied, thinking it over. “I guess you can call me whatever you like?”

“Do you introduce Jessica as your girlfriend?” he asked, curious.

“I say that she’s my friend, and that you’re my friend. And my parents just assume that you two are dating…”

“Are you going to tell your parents about us?”

He watched as Zach averted his gaze, clearly uncomfortable. Zach bit the inside of his cheek like he always did when he was thinking, chewing pensively for a moment.

Finally, he looked back at him, taking in his features in the dim light. “My parents wouldn’t understand,” Zach said, heaving a sigh.

“Well, they don’t need to understand,” he assured, kissing Zach’s neck possessively. “And I’m going to refer to you as my boyfriend,” he added, smirking.

“I like the sound of that,” his boyfriend replied, nuzzling his ear.

“Will my two boyfriends shut up and make out already?” Jessica mumbled impatiently, glaring up at them from her position on his chest.

They laughed and happily obliged. This could really work out, he thought, savoring the taste of his boyfriend’s lips.
Zach takes Justin out on a date - Tony finds out something about Mara...

Chapter Notes

I had a request to include more about Zach, Justin, and Jessica's relationship in the story - As always, I hope you enjoy!!

Zach

He took his dishes to the kitchen, passing his mother on the way to the sink.

“Thanks for breakfast. I’ve gotta run, I’m picking up Jess on the way to school,” he said after giving her a kiss on the cheek.

“You’ve been spending an awful lot of time with that girl. Can’t her boyfriend drive her to school?” she said with a shake of her head.

“You’re staying at Tyler’s, remember? He gets a ride with Tyler in the morning.”

“I just don’t know how you expect to find a girlfriend when you spend all your time with her… What about Courtney?”

“What about Courtney?” he asked, wary of his mother’s searching gaze. He walked back into the dining room and began shoving his books into his backpack.

“Why don’t you ask her out? She’s nice, intelligent, got a good head on her shoulders…,” his mom listed off, following him into the dining room.

He looked up at her, slinging his backpack over one shoulder. “I don’t think she’s interested,” he said with raised eyebrows.

“How do you know unless you ask?” she persisted, taking a sip of her tea.

“You’re right, mom, I’ll ask her,” he told her, trying not to roll his eyes.

“There’s a good boy,” she said as she patted his cheek, turning to head back into the kitchen.

He sighed heavily, how could he ever explain his relationship to his parents? They would never understand. Walking out of the house, he felt a wave of sadness wash over him.
He took his coffee to a table outside Monet’s. It was after school and he was blowing off basketball practice, needing some time alone to think. He didn’t know how long he sat there, ignoring his beverage as he stared aimlessly across the street.

The tinkle of the door opening at the coffee shop made him turn his head, and he was surprised to see Tony walk out alone, a to-go cup in his hand.

“Tony!” he called, capturing the young Hispanic’s attention.

“Hey brother,” Tony said, walking over to him. “What’s up?”

“Do you have a second? Where’s Clay?”

“He’s working at the theater tonight, you alright?” Tony asked.

“Just thinkin’,” he replied. “Hey, you’re Catholic, right?” he asked, looking up at the man next to him.

“Ya,” Tony replied, taking a seat and setting his cup down. “Why, are you thinking about converting?”

“No, that’s not what I meant…It’s just, is your family like, super traditional about certain things?” he asked, feeling like if there was anyone who could understand his predicament, it was Tony.

Tony pursed his lips and nodded, staring down at the table. “Ah, did you tell your parents about Justin and Jessica?”

“No…my mom tried to get me to ask Courtney out this morning,” he replied with a sigh, shaking his head in disbelief.

Tony laughed. “Seriously?” he asked, continuing, “That’s nothing. My dad cries and won’t look at me for a week every time someone else in the family has a baby. And I have a BIG family.”

“I don’t think that’s what would bother my parents the most. I’m their son, I’m captain of the basketball team, about to go off to college. I’m supposed to follow in their footsteps…get a top job, marry a nice Asian girl, and have little copies of myself running around. Not rock-the-boat,” he vented, unable to control the pitch of his voice.

He put his elbows on the table and leaned his head in his hands. Feeling Tony’s hand on his shoulder, he almost broke down.

“It’s ok man, take a deep breath.”

“I just don’t know what I’m going to tell them, they’re so strict. I’m afraid they’ll pull me out of school, stick me in a boot camp or something,” he said, trying to make a joke. “How did you do it, man?” he asked, looking over at the man sitting next to him. He had always thought of Tony as a strong person, but he never really appreciated until now how strong he must be.

“You have to be comfortable with yourself, first. How do you expect your parents to respect your decisions if you’re not confident in them yourself?” Tony asked, placing his hands on the table around his coffee cup. “Is everything going alright with Justin and Jessica?”

“I don’t know. I care about them both so much. We had a great time last night, cuddling and watching movies, but I don’t know. I just feel like I’m the third party sometimes? They just have so much history…”
“You and Jessica have history too,” Tony reminded him, “You were there for her when she
needed you most. Justin wasn’t. Do you think that Justin could be feeling the same way?”

He thought about it for a moment, surprised that he hadn’t thought about how his relationship with
Jessica could be affecting his boyfriend. He frowned and said, “I don’t know, I’ve never thought
about it?”

“Have you and Justin spent any time alone since the camping trip?”

He shook his head, “The three of us hang out together, or just one on one with Jess.”

Tony glanced at him as he took a sip of his coffee. “Maybe that’s the problem,” he said finally,
causing his brow to wrinkle in confusion. “I mean,” Tony continued, “you entered into a
relationship with both of them. If you only spend alone time with Jess, you’re neglecting half of
your relationship.”

He felt his job drop open, he had never thought about it that way before. It had felt awkward
trying to explore what he and Justin had with Jessica constantly watching, pushing them to make-
out all the time. He loved her support and open-mindedness, but Tony was right, he needed to
spend some time with Justin as well.

“Thanks Tony, that’s really helpful,” he said gratefully.

Tony nodded in response. “Anytime,” he answered, “I’ve got to get to the shop. You gonna be alright?”

“Yeah. I’m going call Justin, see if he wants to hang out tonight.”

“That’s great man, I hope everything works out,” Tony said with sincerity, giving him a wave as
he headed in the direction of his mustang.

He sat in the car outside Tyler’s house, nervously gripping the wheel as he geared himself up to
walk to the door. He glanced in the rearview mirror to check his hair one last time, smiling as he
remembered his conversation with Justin earlier that afternoon.

“…like on a date?” Justin had asked, “Just the two of us?”

“Um, yeah, I mean, ya know, only if you want to…” he had stuttered.

“Yes, definitely!” his boyfriend had answered with enthusiasm, making his heart skip a beat.

“Great! So, I’ll pick you up at 7?” he had asked, receiving a positive response.

Getting out of his Audi, he made his way to the front door. As he mounted the steps, Justin
opened the door and walked out with a huge smile on his face.

“You look great,” he said with feeling, taking in Justin’s dark button up shirt and tight fitting
jeans.

“Thanks, so do you!” his boyfriend said, skipping down the stairs to meet him and planting a kiss
on his lips right there in the front yard.

He felt himself blush, but Justin was already on the way to the car and he rushed to follow.

“Where are we going?” his boyfriend asked.
“Where are we going?” his boyfriend asked.

“I was thinking maybe a movie?” he suggested. “But it’s still early, we could go to the park and just sit and talk for a while?” he asked, hoping Justin would agree.

“That sounds great. Let’s go down to the lake,” Justin suggested as he slid into the passenger seat.

He started the car, driving towards their destination. The sun was setting, orange clouds sprinkling the horizon as they sped down the road.

“So…what’s the occasion?” Justin asked, fiddling with the radio.

“No occasion. Just realized that we haven’t been able to spend any time alone lately,” he replied, trying to sound nonchalant.

Justin looked over at him with a smile. “You mean, since we started dating?”

“Well, yeah,” he said, glancing at Justin’s handsome profile. “I mean, we spend time alone with Jess, or all together. But nothing just the two of us.”

“You’re right about that. It’s kind of awkward to have all of our firsts be scrutinized and commented on…”

“What do you mean?” he asked, confused by his wording.

“You know, the first time we kissed. The first time we kissed with tongues? The first time you took off my shirt…” Justin trailed off, reaching for his hand. “It’s just that sometimes those things don’t always go perfectly. It’s nice to have some private time.”

He smiled at his boyfriend, giving his hand a squeeze.

They listened to the radio quietly the rest of the drive, and he was relieved to find the parking lot at the lake was empty. It was a short walk to the shore, and he took a blanket from the trunk so they wouldn’t have to sit on the dirt.

“This is nice,” he commented as they sat and he surveyed the glassy surface of the lake.

Without warning, Justin grabbed his face with both hands and dove in for a kiss.

“Mph!” he exclaimed, surprised as his boyfriend nipped at his lip. He grabbed Justin around the waist and hoisted him onto his lap, allowing his boyfriend to push him back onto the ground.

He felt Justin’s tongue flicker across his lower lip and he opened his mouth to allow him in, tugging at the bottom of his boyfriend’s shirt in an effort to undress him.

Justin sat up from their kiss, straddling him on the shore. “Did you forget about the buttons?” he asked with a laugh.

“Honestly? Yeah!” he answered, enjoying watching Justin slowly strip off his shirt.

“Hey, we should go skinny-dipping!” his boyfriend suggested, hopping up and walking towards the dock. Justin tossed the shirt to where he still lay on the blanket, and he watched as he unbuttoned his jeans.

“Whoa, wait a sec!” he said, fearing that someone would catch them. He stood up, glancing back at the parking lot. “Someone could show up at any time and see us!” he argued, turning his attention back to Justin only to find that he was standing right in front of him.
“Come on, where’s your sense of adventure?” his boyfriend asked, pulling him down into another kiss. As Justin kissed him, he slowly tugged his shirt up and over his head and he forgot about his original fear of being caught.

Justin pulled away, catching his hands and pulling him towards the dock. He laughed and shook his head, allowing his boyfriend to tug him only a few feet onto the dock before stopping.

“No! This is a bad idea,” he tried to argue, but Justin was having none of it.

He watched as his boyfriend walked to the end of the dock alone, removing the rest of his clothing when he reached the end.

“Come on! It’ll be fun, just jump in real quick and then we’ll get out. The faster you do it, the faster it’ll be over with…,” Justin teased, looking back at him and beckoning for him to join.

“You’re nuts! The water must be freezing,” he called, walking slowly to join Justin at the end of the dock.

“Come on! Please…,” Justin whined, trying to remove his pants.

“No, no, I’m not doing that,” he argued, trying to sound serious through his laughter.

“Fine, then, I’ll go by myself.”

“No, we don’t have any towels! You’re going to get lake water in my car!” he tried to reason as Justin leapt off the dock.

He smiled down at his boyfriend as he came up for air, pushing the hair out of his face.

“Come on in, the water’s fine!” Justin called.

“No way!”

“Come on, I’ll make it worth your while…” his boyfriend bargained.

“Oh really? How so?”

“Jump in and you’ll find out!” was the only response he got.

He bit the inside of his cheek as Justin turned onto his back, floating face-up in the lake. He knew his boyfriend was trying to lure him in with his body, and damn it, it was working. He snuck a look at the parking lot one last time before stripping off his pants and shoes and jumping in.

“Oh my god, it’s cold! You ass!” he yelled at his boyfriend, who was hanging onto the ladder on the side of the dock laughing hysterically.

He swam over to him as fast as he could in an attempt to get back to his clothing.

“Hold on, just wait a second,” Justin spat out around his laughter, using his body to block the ladder. He grabbed onto the metal on either side of his boyfriend’s head, drawing his body closer. “It gets better!” Justin argued.

He didn’t respond, pulling his body even closer so he could kiss his boyfriend. He felt Justin’s arms wrap around his neck and he pressed him back into the ladder, using it for support.

“Hey, anyone out there?” a man yelled from the other end of the dock. He opened his eyes and saw a flashlight swooping across the lake.
“Yeah, sorry, just took a quick dip!” he hollered as Justin scrambled to climb the ladder.

He followed Justin up to the dock quickly, and they dressed hurriedly as the man’s boots thumped down the dock towards them.

“Justin? Zach?” the man said, shining the flashlight on them as he struggled to get his socks on over his wet feet.

“Officer Standall?” Justin asked, causing him to look up at the man.

The man lowered the light, and he could finally see that it was Alex’s dad in full police uniform.

“Sorry sir, we were just fooling around,” he said, crossing his arms over his exposed chest and wishing he could reach his shirt on the shore.

“No problem boys, just stay safe. It’s not a good idea to be swimming out here alone,” Officer Standall said, waving for them to follow him back along the dock.

They paused to pick up their shirts and the blanket and Alex’s dad waved goodbye as they got in his Audi and drove away.

“I can’t believe I let you talk me into that!” he stated, taking a second to glare Justin’s direction.

His boyfriend snorted, trying to hold in a giggle. He shook his head in disbelief as Justin burst into laughter.

“You should have seen the look on your face!” Justin finally got out.

“I’m sure it looked just like yours, shocked and scared.”

“Mmmhmm…so where to now?” his boyfriend asked.

“I dunno, the movie theater?” he replied, wiping a drop of water from his face.

“Why don’t we make a pit stop first?”

“Okay, sure, where do you want to go?”

“School. By the bleachers, there’s something I want to show you,” Justin replied, smirking at him.

“Oh, you want to get caught by the cops again?” he asked, laughing as he turned towards the school anyway.

“At least if we get caught at school, we can say we were there to run laps…” his boyfriend said, reaching over to tickle the hairs on the back of his neck.

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Tony
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After a long afternoon at the shop, he was finally headed home. He was sweaty and covered in grease, and couldn’t wait to hop in the shower.
Pulling onto his street, he passed Mara’s house and noticed the gate to her yard was open. At first, he didn’t think much of it, but it continued to weight on him as he parked his car.

He got out of his mustang, casting another glance in the direction of Mara’s house. Her car was parked in the driveway, but he couldn’t see that there were any lights on inside. Looking longingly at his house, wishing for a shower, he followed his instinct and started walking over to Mara’s to check on her.

It would only take a few minutes, tops, he told himself as he crossed the street. But he felt a twinge of unease as he walked up her drive and into the yard. The porch light should have come on by now, she had several motion sensors around the yard so she always had a clear view of Lewis.

The front door opened a crack as he reached the first porch step and he heard Mara whisper loudly for him to get his ass moving. It startled him, but he obeyed. Taking the steps two at a time, he jogged for the door only to be pulled in and down to the floor of the front hall.

“What the hell?” he asked, his eyes adjusting to the darkness of the house.

“What the fuck are you doing here? Trying to get yourself killed?” Mara asked as she shut and locked the door.

“The front gate was open, I came over to see if you were all right,” he explained, feeling silly on his hands and knees. “Can I get up now?” he asked as Lewis gave him a quick sniff and walked away.

“No, the house is being watched. Here,” she said, handing him something in the dark. It was a handgun, a 9mm he judged as he raised it for closer inspection. “What the hell?” he asked again, afraid now. He wasn’t aware Mara even owned a gun.

“Safety’s on, but it’s loaded,” she replied, reaching into her back pocket and handing him an extra clip. His eyes were adjusting to the darkness now, and he could see that she, too, was carrying a firearm.

She peeked out the window by the door, continuing to avoid answering him. He looked around the front hall, surprised that Lewis hadn’t stuck around. The dog never left her side when she was happy, but now, when she was clearly agitated, he was nowhere to be found…

He heard a growl from the next room, as if the big dog had read his mind.

“Somebody’s waking up,” Mara muttered, turning to him.

“You have to tell me what’s going on,” he pleaded as Lewis’ growls grew louder.

She sighed, making her way down the hall to the front room in a crouched position. “Come on then, stay low,” she ordered, motioning for him to join her.

He made his way around the corner, startled at the sight that met his eyes. The streetlights shone through the bay window, making it easier for him to see the scene in front of him. Lewis was standing guard over a man who was tied up in the middle of the floor, laying in a pool of his own blood.

The room was a mess around him; chairs and lamps overturned and the glass coffee table in pieces. Mara was sneaking another look through the window, her gun raised to the ceiling.
“He broke in through the upstairs window, fell down the stairs trying to get away from Lewis,” she explained. “Not a very quiet stalker,” she added, glancing back at him.

“He’s lost a lot of blood,” he said nervously, crawling closer to the man on the floor.

“Well he shouldn’t have broken my coffee table,” she shot back tersely.

“Who is he?”

“How should I know?” she asked tapping her thigh to call Lewis to her.

“Like I’m going to believe that?” he asked, tilting his head towards her. “How can I help you if you don’t tell me what’s going on?”

She licked her lips, turning back to the window. “It’s not safe,” she argued, tapping the floor. Lewis laid down beside her facing the middle of the room, obeying her unspoken command.

“I’m already here!”

She turned back to look at him, sighing. “Mara isn’t my real name…” she started to say, interrupted by a moan from the bound man.

“So what? Is it like a nickname or something?” he asked, frowning as the man started to move.

Lewis let out a low growl, shushed by a touch from Mara. “It’s the name they gave me when I entered witness protection,” she said, staring at him as she tried to gauge his reaction.
Zach and Justin continue their date - and Clay gets a surprise visitor...

Zach

He pulled into the parking lot at school, apprehensive at the thought of getting caught. He didn’t feel like he was embarrassed about being seen with Justin, but he wasn’t quite ready to explain their relationship to his parent’s if they were caught.

“Why did you want to come here?” he asked, looking around for signs that anyone else was around.

“You’ll see,” Justin said as he grabbed the blanket and opened the car door. “Follow me,” he continued, giving him a wink and a smile.

He didn’t know why he let Justin talk him into these things, he thought as he got out of the car and followed his boyfriend to the bleachers.

He frowned as Justin continued beyond the bleachers, wondering where he was off to. He picked up his pace as he rounded the corner, unable to see where Justin went. He looked towards the school, but there was no sign of the lanky teenager.

Suddenly, his boyfriend jumped out from underneath the bleachers, startling him.

“What the fuck, man?” he asked, shoving Justin in the shoulder.

“You couldn’t see me, right? It’s pretty dark under here,” Justin said, grabbing the front of his shirt and pulling him back into his hiding spot. His boyfriend started kissing him, running his hands down his chest, over his abs, and underneath his shirt.

He let himself enjoy Justin’s touch for a moment, sinking into the kiss for a few seconds before breaking apart from it.

“What are you doing? What if someone sees us?” he asked nervously, looking over his shoulder. He turned back to talk Justin into heading back to the car, but his boyfriend had dropped to his knees and was pulling down the zipper of his jeans. “Justin! Cut it out…” he begged half-heartededly as Justin fondled him roughly through his boxers.

“No one’s going to see us. You didn’t see me,” his boyfriend reminded him as he grabbed his butt and pulled him closer. “Besides,” he bargained, “this is way better than doing it in the car.”

“You don’t have to do it at all.”

“I want to,” Justin said, looking up at him. “And I know you do too. We’ll just have to bear with each other as we figure things out. I don’t know about you, but I’ve never done this before,” his boyfriend said with a laugh.
He was about to object when Justin pulled down his boxers and pulled him into his mouth.

“Oh shit,” he muttered, feeling himself grow firm at his boyfriend’s touch. He felt betrayed by his body, but no one had touched him like that since before he had started hanging out with Jessica. His breathing became heavy and he let out an involuntary cry as Justin shoved him deeper into his mouth.

“If you don’t want to get caught, you should be a little quieter,” Justin teased as he came up for air, continuing to stroke him with his hand.

He couldn’t seem to make his mouth form the words of a reply, letting a sigh escape him instead.

Justin paused momentarily. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it?” he asked.

Nodding his head, he looked down at his boyfriend. “Please don’t stop,” he begged as his body screamed for release.

Justin took him in his mouth again, forcing another groan out of him as he sped up his pace. He didn’t last much longer and he was almost embarrassed, except for the fact that Justin wasn’t completely ready for him and nearly choked.

“Sorry, are you alright?” he asked, pulling his boxers back in place and kneeling next to Justin. He placed a hand on his boyfriend’s shoulder, feeling bad that he hadn’t given more of a warning.

“I’m fine,” his boyfriend said as he laughed. Spitting once off to the side, he added, “That’s just going to take some getting used to, it’s nothing like going down on a girl.”

“Well, I better get practicing then,” he teased, wrapping his arms around him and kissing him deeply. He pressed Justin back onto the blanket on the ground and returned the favor with enthusiasm.

Hearing his boyfriend moan with pleasure gave him joy, and the initial feeling of awkwardness was quickly replaced with confidence. He grinned around his boyfriend as he felt his hand grip his hair. He let Justin guide him, knowing he was close by the frantic sounds he was emitting. When his boyfriend was finished, he wiped his chin and laid down next to him.

“Feel better?” Justin asked, pulling his jeans back up.

“Much,” he replied honestly. “We should do that more often,” he suggested.

“Can’t say no to an offer like that,” Justin replied, turning his head to give him a peck on the cheek. He saw the light from Justin’s phone as he turned on the camera.

“What are you doing?”

“Taking a picture, silly. Tyler isn’t the only one who can capture memories,” Justin answered. “Now put a smile on that handsome mug,” he ordered playfully.

Obliging, he smiled for the camera, truly happy for the first time all day.

“Ya know, it’s not that late. We could still catch the late show…,” his boyfriend hinted, casually showing him the time on his phone.

He grinned and pulled him in for another kiss. “Sounds good to me,” he replied.
It was just about time to close the concession stand, there being only one movie showing left. He glanced at his phone, hoping to see a text from Tony.

When he saw there was nothing, he sighed. His love must still be working at the shop, he thought as the doors to the theater opened.

He smiled as Zach and Justin walked in, laughing and bumping shoulders. “Hey guys! What’s up?” he asked, happy to see them getting along so well.

“Hey Clay! Just here with my date to see the movie, is it any good?” Justin asked as they veered off to stand next to him.

“Yeah it’s pretty good! Tony and I saw it last week,” he replied, a little surprised that Jessica wasn’t with them.

“Awesome! Hey, you want any popcorn?” Zach asked Justin as he leaned against the countertop.

“Naw, I’m good. I’d take a soda though, if you’re buying?” Justin replied, playfully poking at his boyfriend.

“Don’t worry about it, on the house,” he said as he poured a soda from the fountain and handed it over to them.

“Thanks Clay!” Justin said as he took a sip and passed it to Zach.

“Yeah, thanks man, I appreciate it!”

“No problem, enjoy the show! I’ve got closing duties to get to,” he replied as his coworker came in from the ticket booth.

They waved goodbye as they headed towards the doors of the theater, Justin grabbing hold of Zach’s hand as they walked away.

“Aren’t they just so cute?” his coworker, Amanda, asked as she made her way behind the counter for the broom.

“Uh, yeah,” he said, nodding in agreement.

“Not as cute as you and Tony, of course,” she added with a smile. “I’ll get the bathrooms if you get garbage?”

He knew she hated taking out the garbage to the alley behind the theater, it was dark and the occasional rat would make an appearance. The last time she had run back inside shrieking and he had had to go out there to finish the job anyway, so he agreed without argument.

Cleaning the popcorn machine and behind the soda fountain wasn’t his favorite task, but he got it done quickly and made his way around the lobby collecting the garbage.

He made sure to wedge the doorstop in tight so he wouldn’t have to walk around the block to get back inside. He hated that the door locked automatically, and he cringed as he heard it slam shut behind him.
“Damn it!” he yelled, glancing back over his shoulder. He was sure he had kicked the doorstop in enough to keep it open.

He was shocked to see a shadowy figure standing in front of the closed door. The figure stood tall, broad shoulders blocking the door.

“Can I, uh, can I help you?” he said, trying to hide the shakiness in his voice.

He received no reply and began to back away, garbage bags still in hand. The figure stepped forward menacingly, causing his heart rate to skyrocket.

Stumbling into the garbage bin, he felt like a trapped animal. The figure’s arms reached for him and he decided to try and make a break for it.

He hurled the garbage bags at the figure as he turned and ran down the alleyway, adrenaline pumping. He wasn’t coordinated, but he was a quick runner and he hoped he was faster than whoever it was who was pursuing him.

He had made it halfway down the alley when another figure stepped in front of him. Trying to avoid crashing into him, he veered to the right, narrowly missing the brick wall.

Feeling a surge of hope at the sight of the street, he urged his legs to go faster. Suddenly, a black SUV swerved to block the entrance to the alley and screeched to a halt. He tried to backtrack, but he was going too fast.

“Oh shit!” he yelled as one of the doors of the vehicle opened his pursuers shoved him bodily inside. He tried to use his momentum to propel forward to the other side of the car, frantically trying to open the car door even though he heard the sound of the door lock.

“Fuck!” he cried, using his elbow to bash at the window. Stupid child locks, he thought as his funny bone stung at the impact.

“Bullet proof glass, mue filho,” a man with a heavy accent said from behind him as the driver sped away down the street.

He turned to see who was speaking, but he felt a prick in the side of his neck. His breath came in gasps and his vision blurred as whatever he was injected with began to take effect. Vaguely aware that someone was guiding his body down into the seat, he struggled to blink his eyes open.

The last thing he saw before darkness took over was the scarred face of the man who had left the rat on the back of Tony’s car.

“Tony….,” he tried to whisper, the sudden rush of fear for the love of his life pushing back at the wave of unconsciousness that washed over him.

“He’s alive. And you’ll both stay that way if we get what we want,” the man soothed, using a hand to close his eyelids as the darkness took hold of him.

End Notes

Hello! This is my first time posting any written works of mine, but I just finished ’13
Reasons Why' and I love the dynamic between Clay and Tony and felt inspired. I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!