

Shades of Gray  
by NSyncGrrl

Truth be told? I don't know what this is yet, if it'll ever go  
anywhere, not even if I'll ever write on it again. But it was fun so  
there's that, at least.

But today there is no day or night Today there is no dark or light Today there is no black or white Only shades of gray
--

1. No One Wants to Be Alone
2. In Daydreams of You
3. What Your Heart Tells You
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The above lyrics are from the song "Shades of Gray," written by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil. The song appears on Headquarters, released in 1967 by the Monkees. No copyright infringement is intended.

Shades of Gray  
1. No One Wants to Be Alone  
by NSyncGrrl

They had spent the day in the studio, working on the new album, and it was late when Lance walked through the parking lot with JC, headed for their cars. Joey and Chris bugged out earlier, claiming the night was young and there were clubs ripe for the picking. Justin said he wanted to work a bit more on the album, and because he had been quiet and down all day, JC didn't pressure him to pack it up and leave with them. Lance wondered what was bothering his friend -- since the tour ended they had sort of lost touch with each other, and Lance had hoped to spend some time with him outside of the studio, but Justin said he was busy and he'd catch up with them later. He hadn't smiled all day, Lance realized, and that thought made him stop abruptly at JC's car. "You go ahead, Josh," Lance said, waving him on. "I left something in the studio. I'm just going to run back and get it."

JC narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "He wants to be alone," he said softly.

Lance didn't have to ask who he was talking about, but part of him thought maybe Justin didn't want to be alone. Maybe that was the last thing Justin wanted right now. "Maybe he wants to talk," he replied.

Sighing, JC shook his head. "How can you do it, Lance?" he asked. His eyes sparkled sadly in the overhead light from the street lamp. "How can let yourself feel for him the way you do when you know he's not interested?"

"He's never told me he wasn't," Lance whispered. Rubbing his forehead with one hand, he said, "Look, I just think he needs a friend right now, okay? Someone to talk to. He's not himself today ... he just needs --"

"You?" JC countered. He shook his head. "Don't you get it, Lance? He's with Britney. You're just a friend. I've told you this time and time again -- that's all you'll ever be to him."

Lance bit his lip to keep back the angry words he wanted to say. Sure, JC reminded him often enough that Justin wasn't like that. He told him over and over again that it was futile. It was stupid. It would only hurt him more in the long run if he couldn't get over the fact that Justin didn't want him that way. But what the hell did JC know? Didn't he think Lance knew it was useless, loving someone who didn't love him back? Didn't he think Lance spent many sleepless nights staring into the darkness, tears drying on his cheeks, because all he wanted was to feel Justin beside him, feel his arms in the night, his kisses in the morning, and he knew he would never have that? "I just think he shouldn't be alone right now," Lance said, his deep voice low.

"Maybe he wants to be," JC pointed out. He placed a hand on Lance's elbow. "Leave him --"

Lance shrugged off JC's hand. "No one wants to be alone," he said, taking a deep breath. He'd at least talk to Justin, ask him if he wanted someone to listen. Lance could do that. Even if it was about Britney -- Lance wanted any part of Justin he could get, and he'd listen all night long if it meant that the morning found them that much closer as friends. "You go on home," he said, turning back towards the studio.

"You're only hurting yourself," JC called out.

Maybe, Lance thought. But it would hurt more knowing he never even tried.

Inside, Lance rapped softly on the studio door. "Justin?" he called as he opened the door. Justin sat at the console, his chin propped in one hand, trailing a pencil around one of the knobs on the control panel. He looked up as Lance entered the studio, a dejected expression on his face. "Are you okay?" Lance asked, closing the door gently behind him.

Justin sighed. "Yeah," he muttered, but he didn't look okay. He looked like the weight of the world rested on his shoulders, dragging him down. And he didn't sound okay, either -- he sounded upset, like he needed someone to talk to, someone to listen to him, someone who wouldn't judge him or monopolize the conversation. Someone who knew the real Justin Timberlake, the boy behind the superstar who was a little scared at times, a little childish, a little stubborn and given to petty jealous fits every now and then.

Someone who knew all about that Justin Timberlake but who loved him anyway.

Someone like me, Lance thought, easing into an empty chair. Pulling it up beside his friend, he stuck one finger on the knob Justin was doodling around. When the pencil hit Lance's knuckle, Justin reversed direction and ran it around the knob until it hit the other side of his friend's finger. Back and forth, back and forth -- Justin moved the pencil in an incomplete circle, changing direction every time the pen stopped. Lance risked a smile, and when Justin glanced up at him, the hint of a grin tugged at his lips. "Do you want to talk about it?" Lance offered.

Justin shook his head. "Nothing to talk about," he said.

"Oh, come on," Lance replied. "Hello? Where's that sunshine smile of yours? The one that chases away the clouds?"

One corner of Justin's mouth twitched up into a half-smile at that. "It's hiding," he said softly.

"Why's it hiding?" Lance wanted to know.

Justin's hand brushed against Lance's as he dropped the pencil, and Lance's skin flared at the brief touch like fire suddenly sparking

to life. "Lance," Justin started, turning away from him to stare out at the recording booth beyond the mirrored glass that separated it from the studio. He sighed. "Nothing's wrong. How can it be? I have the perfect life, the perfect career, the perfect girlfriend ... money and cars and the world at my feet. Whatever I want, I can get. Anything at all." Lance frowned at the bitterness he heard in Justin's voice, and when Justin chuckled, it was a haunting sound that scared them both. "I have everything I want, Lance. Everything I could possibly hope to want."

"But?" Lance prompted. He wanted to pull Justin against him, feel those strong arms encircle his waist, those angry fists clench at his back, but how could he ever say that to Justin? So instead he dared to touch Justin's shoulder, his friend's body warm beneath the thin denim jacket he wore, and told himself he didn't want more because he'd never get it.

"But I'm not happy," Justin whispered, turning those sad blue eyes towards Lance. God, Justin, Lance thought, drowning in his friend's deep gaze. I would die for you when you look at me this way. Don't you KNOW what you do to me? Don't you even suspect? "Is that not part of the deal?" Justin asked. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but I always thought the goal in life was to be happy. Isn't it?"

Lance nodded. "It helps," he said, squeezing Justin's shoulder gently. But I'm not happy, either, he told himself, studying his friend's pale cheeks and red lips, the blonde curls and blue sea eyes. I could probably be happy with you, but I won't get the chance so I'm not happy either. You aren't the only one, Justin. Trust me on that. Softly he asked, "Is it really that bad?"

"Right now it is," Justin sighed. Ducking his head into his arms, he ran his hands through his hair, tugging at fistfuls of curls. "Right now I'm just tired of it all, Lance."

"All what?" Lance asked, rubbing his palm across the expanse of Justin's back.

"Everything," Justin replied. "Just ... everything."

With tender fingers, Lance stroked the exposed flesh on the back of Justin's neck. His friend's skin was soft and warm beneath his touch, and Lance traced small circles into it, over and over again, wider and wider until he brushed along the downy hair at Justin's nape. "Is it Britney?" he asked gently.

"A little," Justin admitted. Crossing his arms on the control panel in front of him, he laid his head down and looked up at Lance. "What's wrong with me, Lance? I kiss her and it does nothing for me anymore. It feels like I'm kissing a sister or a cousin -- it's something I do because I love her, but I'm not in love with her. I don't know if I ever was." He frowned, his forehead furrowing slightly. "Does that make any sense?"

Lance caught his breath -- he felt as if someone had punched

him in the stomach, knocking the wind from his lungs. He didn't remember how to breathe, and he had to keep telling himself in, out, in, out ... he didn't just say he's not in love with her, did he? It was too much to hope for, too much to comprehend. If Justin wasn't in love with Britney, the perfect girl who was pretty and fresh and sparkling like a spring day, whose laughter was as contagious as the flu, whose sense of humor was so quirky you couldn't help but love her ... if Justin didn't like her like that, then maybe Lance really did stand a chance. What would Justin say if Lance told him how he felt right now? Would he laugh? Stare at him? Push him away? Lance didn't know, and suddenly he was too scared to find out.

But Justin was watching him closely, waiting for an answer. Clearing his throat, Lance murmured, "I understand," because he did understand, he understood perfectly. Justin didn't like her like that. Yes, he understood.

Justin sat up and before Lance realized what was happening, his friend leaned into him, resting his head on Lance's shoulder. With a lusty sigh, Justin whispered, "How can I have everything I want when I don't really know what it is I'm looking for?"

"I don't know," Lance admitted. He didn't. All he knew was that Justin's curls were soft where they tickled beneath his chin and his head was heavy against Lance's shoulder. One hand picked absently at the seam of Lance's jeans, Justin's fingers burning through the thick denim, searing the inside of Lance's thigh. Maybe you're looking for something more, he thought, rubbing along Justin's shoulders gently. Maybe you're looking for something like me. But he couldn't force his mouth to form the words, so instead he suggested, "Maybe you just need some time away from everything. Some time off ..."

Justin was shaking his head. "I can't do that to you guys," he said. "The album's almost finished. We've got appearances scheduled, photo shoots, tour dates coming up -- I can't just take some time off."

Lance sighed. "Justin, I don't know what to say. Maybe you just ... I don't know." He shrugged helplessly. "I really don't. Maybe you just need to get some rest."

"Maybe," Justin agreed, his voice soft. Turning his head, he looked up at Lance and smiled sadly. "Thanks for coming back."

"No problem," Lance replied. Justin looked at him closely, those deep eyes shining with promise, those ruddy lips slightly parted, and he was close, so close, so damn close ... abruptly Lance cleared his throat and stood up, pushing Justin away. He had to get out, get away, or he was afraid he wouldn't be able to stop himself from kissing his friend. And he didn't want to violate this intimate trust -- he wanted this tender moment to glow in his memory forever. "Just remember to smile," he said, his voice suddenly gruff. "It makes the rain go away."

Justin stood up as well. "Sure," he said, nodding, but a slight frown creased his brow and darkened his eyes as he headed for the door. Lance followed behind him, breathing deeply to control the pounding of his heart. He's not in love with her, he thought, closing the studio door behind them. Well, damn.

Shades of Gray  
2. In Daydreams of You  
by NSyncGrrl

Justin lay on his stomach across his bed, staring at his own face staring back at him from the centerfold of Bop magazine and wondering where the article was that he bought the magazine for in the first place. "Find out what makes Timberlake's heart beat," the cover proclaimed, and because he didn't know himself, he was curious to see what this teeny-bopper rag had to say on the subject. "Are you the girl of his dreams?" the tagline read. I doubt it, he thought, flipping through the magazine, but he couldn't find the end-all tell-all on him anywhere. And to think he spent four dollars on this piece of crap.

He should've gone to a psychic like Britney did on her birthday, have his palm read and his numbers worked, the whole bit, see if someone somewhere could see what the stars had in store for him. Because right now he didn't feel like he knew where things were going -- he wasn't even sure which "things" those were he wanted to know about. He just knew he felt like tossing the magazine aside like everything else and closing his eyes, falling asleep and never waking up again. He could dream of a place where he wasn't a superstar and he wasn't Britney's boyfriend and no one cared what he did or where he went or who he was with, because in those dreams he was always with Lance. Always.

There was this one dream -- it was his favorite, and it was a daydream of sorts, since he let it unravel in his mind before he fell asleep but while he was still awake enough to make it go where he wanted it to go -- and in it Lance always found him alone somewhere, on the bus, in the studio, on the stage after another show. He was always by himself and upset, and Lance walked up behind him and asked in that gentle, deep voice of his what was wrong. Justin would sniffle and say nothing, and then Lance would sit down beside him and drape an arm around Justin's shoulders, or maybe he'd take Justin's hand in his, and he'd say something like there had to be something bothering him, didn't he want to just talk about it? And of course around that time Justin would turn and look at Lance, see those large green eyes, always compassionate, always loving, and there would be a flirty come-on look in Lance's face that Justin found himself looking forward to whenever they were alone and Lance turned on the charm.

About that time, Justin would gather together his courage, because it was a dream and he was always doing things in his dreams that he'd never do in real life, things he didn't have the guts to do, and in the dream he'd lean forward and kiss Lance tenderly. It would be amazing, he just knew it -- sweeter than any kiss he'd ever given anyone else before, and Lance would say something like he'd always loved Justin, or the teasing looks, the flippant remarks, the hints of what he felt for his friend, all of those

were real, how he really felt, and Justin would kiss him again.

And somewhere between that second kiss and their making slow, passionate love, Justin always managed to finally fall asleep.

He wanted to live in that dream forever. He played it over and over again in his mind, whenever he was alone and no one could see the silly grin that pulled at his lips when he kissed Lance. They kept him sane, those phantom soft kisses he felt only in his head -- they kept him happy when he wasn't. In that dream he wasn't with Britney and the other guys didn't pick on him because all the girls thought he was the shit, and Lance's flirting and constant friendship meant more than Justin ever hoped it would.

But it was just a dream, wasn't it? In the waking world Lance was nice to him, nothing more. He'd smile and wink and he'd laugh at Justin's jokes, touch Justin's arm sometimes when they were together, but it didn't mean anything to him. He was just being friendly. That's what JC said the one time Justin tried to ask him about it. "He's just being nice," JC had said, scowling because Justin interrupted him while he was working on a new song. "I don't think he means anything by it, Justin. Why? Do you WANT him to mean something?"

No, maybe not, he had replied. Because if there was nothing there, then there was nothing worth jonesing over, right? Nothing worth pining for. Or so he had to remind himself every time Lance turned those beautiful eyes his way.

A loud rapping interrupted his thoughts. "Go away," he called out, sliding the magazine under his pillow as the door opened and JC stepped into the room. Turning, Justin looked over his shoulder at his friend and asked, "Can't you listen? I said go away."

"Phone's for you," JC said, ignoring him. He held the cordless receiver out to Justin, who looked at it balefully. "It's Britney."

"Tell her I'm busy," Justin replied. He didn't feel like talking to her. He didn't even feel like talking to JC, but he was already in the room and it was hard to pretend he wasn't there.

"Doing what?" JC wanted to know. He looked at Justin, lying on the bed, and frowned. "You don't look busy to me."

Justin sighed. "Josh," he whined, glaring at his friend. In a low whisper he hissed, "I don't want to talk to her right now, okay? Just tell her I'm busy."

"Hold on, Brit," JC said into the phone. Then, holding it out to Justin again, he said, "You tell her yourself. She's your girlfriend."

Justin crossed his arms on the bed in front of him and buried his head between them. Maybe JC would get the point and just go away. Maybe he'd tell Britney Justin wasn't feeling well, or he was taking a nap, or something ...

But no. JC wasn't going to be nice today. He was going to be



pissy and he was going to be hateful, Justin just knew it, and when JC tossed the phone onto the bed, Justin sighed lustily. "Just talk to her already," JC said. "Jesus, Justin --"

"Fine," Justin replied, picking up the phone. "Hey," he said into the receiver. "What's up?"

"What's up yourself?" Britney replied, her voice curt. "What are you busy doing?"

"Nothing," he muttered. Fuck you, Josh, he thought bitterly, rolling over onto his back to stare at the ceiling. JC stood against his dresser, arms folded across his chest, watching him closely. "You can go now," Justin said, nodding pointedly at the door.

JC didn't move. In his ear Britney asked, "Are you talking to me?"

"I'm talking to Josh," Justin said, sighing. "What do you want, Britney? I'm trying to take a nap."

For a moment she didn't reply, and he hoped maybe he had managed to piss her off enough that she would hang up on him. He could almost see her in his mind, debating on whether to press the issue or to just let it drop, and he wanted her to press it so bad, to just get pissed off at him, to get angry and to tell him to fuck off, and he would. He'd hang up the phone and storm out of the house, he could already picture the fit he'd throw in his mind, and then he'd drive over to Lance's apartment and bang on the door until Lance opened up and let him in. And then maybe there'd be enough emotion swirling around inside of him that he managed to finally let go and see if Lance's kisses were really as sweet as he imagined them to be.

But Britney wasn't playing her role, not today, and she just sighed and let the moment slip away when she asked, "So what are you doing tonight?"

"Nothing," Justin said again. They were out of the studio for the weekend and he had no plans at all. Nothing he wanted to tell her about, anyway. "What about you?"

"I'm going out with Heather," Britney said. Heather was one of Britney's dancers, a few years older than Britney herself, and when on tour the two girls hung out a lot together, did the club scene, went shopping, girl stuff as Britney liked to say. "Just to a night spot she knows of -- she's from around here. How's the new album coming?"

"Okay, I guess," Justin replied. He listened to the sound of his own breath through the phone, loud in his ear, and stared at the ceiling, studiously ignoring JC, still in the room. Well? he thought. Say goodbye already, Brit. Tell me you have to go.

"How are the guys doing?" she asked instead, and Justin suppressed a groan. "JC said you might go over to Lance's tonight --"

"Maybe," Justin said. Actually, he had asked Lance if he could spend the night and Lance said sure, come on over, and the only thing keeping Justin from sprinting over there right this second was the fact that Joey was there now, the two of them laughing and playing video games and goofing off, and Justin didn't want to walk in on that. He wanted Lance's full attention all to himself, undivided and focused entirely on him. So he said he'd come by around seven, maybe they'd order a pizza, watch a few movies, talk about ... well, about whatever Justin could think of to talk about, because he wanted to hear Lance's voice and he wanted to see his eyes sparkle with laughter, and he wanted to know that Lance was listening to him because he was the only one who did that anymore. And he wanted to keep that all to himself, not share it with anyone, not even Britney. "Look," he said, "I gotta go."

Britney sighed. "Okay," she said. "I just wanted to see how you're doing." He could almost see her biting her lower lip because he was being ... what was the word she always used? Unresponsive. And that always ticked her off. "Can I call you tomorrow?" she asked. "What time are you getting back in the morning?"

"I don't know," Justin said, suddenly angry because he didn't want to think about that right now. He didn't want to think about leaving Lance's when he hadn't even gotten there yet, and he wasn't going to think about Britney or the guys or the new album, or anything when he got there but Lance. "What is this, Twenty Questions? Christ, Brit, I don't know when I'm getting back, okay? I haven't even left yet."

"Justin --" she started, but he interrupted her.

"I have to go," he said. "I'll talk to you later. I promise. I'll call you when I get home tomorrow, okay? How's that?"

She sighed. "Fine," she said, her voice soft. "Call me then."

Before she could say another word, Justin clicked off the phone. Tossing it back at JC, he growled, "Thanks a lot, Josh. How hard is it to say I'm busy next time?"

"You aren't busy," JC said, watching him carefully. "When are you leaving tonight?"

Ugh. "What is this," Justin asked, sitting up, "suddenly everyone wants to know my schedule? I'm leaving when I get my shit together." He picked at the hem of his shirt and tried to ignore the way JC made him feel like he was just throwing himself at Lance because it wasn't like that, was it? He knew Lance was only flirting -- he knew it meant nothing. Hadn't JC said that? How could he just stand there and radiate disapproval that bit into Justin like a hungry dog, gnawing at him until he just wanted to hide his head in his pillow and dream that dream where Lance finds him and touches him softly and kisses him? How did JC manage to do that to him?

"I just wanted to know," JC said, shrugging. "Don't get all defensive with me."

"Just leave me alone," Justin pouted. He waited until JC pushed himself away from the dresser and left before he fell back to the bed again. Suddenly the ceiling was interesting, extremely interesting, commanding his full attention because when he stared at it, he didn't have to think. He didn't have to hear JC calling to him from the hallway, telling him to grow up. He didn't have to hear Britney's frown through the phoneline, and how in the hell did she get that one down, that way of projecting her facial expressions into her voice so when Justin closed his eyes he could see her perfectly pretty face frowning at him? He didn't want to hear anything but the rush of his blood in his ears, blocking out all sound, all thought, and he closed his eyes when even the ceiling became too much, white and endless and he didn't want to look at it anymore. Behind his closed eyelids he saw himself on his back on the bed, lying there like he was now, and suddenly the door opened, but this time it wasn't JC, it was Lance. And he sat on the edge of Justin's bed and asked him what was on his mind, and in a small, little-boy voice Justin muttered nothing.

And Lance smiled slightly, he didn't pout like Britney did. Then he ran a hand down Justin's arm, smoothing out the shirt sleeve, and with the hint of a smile in his voice he asked, "Absolutely nothing? Your mind's completely blank right now?"

"It's full of you," Justin heard himself reply, and because he liked the way that sounded, he replayed the scene over again, watching Lance walk through the door and sit down beside him, and this time when he answered, Lance surprised him by leaning down and kissing him.

Justin wondered how many more hours he had left to go until Lance expected him to come over.

Shades of Gray  
3. What Your Heart Tells You  
by NSyncGrrl

As Joey pulled on his jacket to leave, he turned to Lance and said suddenly, "Come with me, Scoop."

Lance sighed. It was quarter after six, and Justin had said he'd be over by seven, and there was still so much to do before he arrived. Lance wanted to run out to the store and pick up some beer, maybe stop by Blockbuster's for a movie, clean the place up a little, clean himself up a little -- he didn't have time to go party hopping with Joey, not tonight. "I can't," he said, holding the door open as Joey stepped out onto the porch. "Maybe some other time --"

"Why not? What else are you doing tonight?" Joey asked. He frowned up at the setting sun, still lingering on the horizon, and then turned to frown at Lance. "You need to get out more. Sitting around the house all the time isn't healthy."

Lance flashed his friend a quick grin. "Justin's coming over," he said, as if that explained everything. In his mind, it did. He couldn't wait to see Justin again. When he had called earlier and asked if Lance would mind if he stayed the night, he just wanted to come over and talk, spend some time together since they hadn't seen each other in a while, Lance couldn't say yes fast enough. He wanted to tell him to come over right then, but Joey was visiting and Justin said he'd stop by later, he had a few other things to do first. "He'll be here soon," Lance said, glancing at his watch. "Around seven ..." He trailed off, hoping Joey would get the point.

In a quiet voice, Joey asked, "Is that really such a good idea?"

Lance looked up at his friend sharply. "What do you mean?" he wanted to know. Don't tell me he's with Britney, Lance pleaded silently. JC said that all the time, as if he'd ever forget, and that was the reason he never told Joey how he felt for Justin, though part of him wanted to ask his friend's advice. Joey should've been the one he went to in the first place -- he was the one with all the experience in love, wasn't he? He had all the girls, he would know what to do about the way Justin's smile suddenly began to make Lance's day brighter, the way every touch made his blood boil. Since the end of the tour, Lance couldn't get enough of Justin, he wanted to be around him all the time. Justin intoxicated him like a heady scent, filling his senses and eclipsing everything else when he walked into a room.

It had been after one of the awards shows, Lance didn't remember which anymore, when the sight of Britney's hand in Justin's had been too much for him and he got shit-faced on champagne and confessed the way he felt to JC. "Jesus, Josh," he remembered saying, the words still ringing in his ears because he

heard them as if someone else spoke them aloud, he hadn't meant to say them himself, "is it so wrong to be in love with your best friend? To think of nothing but the way he smiles, the way he smells, the way he might taste or feel in my arms? And I can't help it, I can't HELP flirting with him because he doesn't turn me away, he stares at me with those endless eyes and he's so damn encouraging at times, it confuses the hell out of me. What am I supposed to think? What am I supposed to do? Tell me that, please."

"He's with Britney," Josh replied, and it had hurt to hear it but it was true, wasn't it? It was true. "He's not going to leave her, Lance, not for you, so just forget about him. It'll be better that way, trust me."

Only Lance couldn't forget about him, and he couldn't help himself when Justin was around, he couldn't stop the flirty looks and quick touches -- and he sure as hell couldn't stop his heart from racing when Justin flirted back. How could he forget about that? But he has Britney, he reminded himself, that voice in his head sounding so much like JC, and he didn't say anything to anyone else because he had been drunk and shouldn't have said anything in the first place, so how did Joey even suspect that maybe he was happier than he should be about Justin's visit tonight? Was it that obvious? "We're just going to watch a few movies," Lance said, shrugging. Don't tell me he's with her, he thought, watching Joey's guarded expression closely. Tonight he'll be with me, so don't ruin that by saying anything about her, okay? Please, Joe? "What did you think --"

"That's cool," Joey said, interrupting him with an easy grin that lit up his eyes and eased the fears gnawing at Lance's mind. "Really, Lance. I think it's great. You two will have fun together, I'm sure." Lance sighed. Now what does THAT mean? he wanted to know, but he wasn't going to ask. He wasn't sure he'd like the answer. "He'll be here soon?" Joey asked, toying with his jacket's zipper.

"Yeah," Lance replied. Something in the way Joey watched him closely, as if gauging how he'd respond to whatever it was he wanted to say, made Lance ask, "Did JC say something to you?"

"About what?" Joey asked, his brow furrowing as he frowned.

Lance shrugged. "Nothing," he mumbled. He had sworn JC not to say a word, once he slept off the alcohol and couldn't believe he had even said all he did the night before.

But Joey knew him too well -- they were close friends, weren't they? "What would he have to say about it?" Joey pressed, and Lance wished he had kept his mouth shut, just said goodbye and that would be it, that would be the end and Joey would leave and Lance wouldn't have to explain anything, would he? "Has he said something to you?" Joey wanted to know.

Lance shrugged again, noncommittal. "I don't know," he

muttered. "Really, Joe, I just was curious if, I don't know, if he had said something to you."

"No, he didn't," Joey said, looking at him until Lance felt as if he were being scrutinized, and he didn't dare breathe until Joey looked away. For a moment Lance thought he'd say something more, but then Joey shook his head and said, "Don't mind him, Lance. Just do what you want, you know? Do what you think you have to do."

"What do you mean?" Lance asked, confused. Are you talking about Justin? he wanted to ask. He got the feeling that they were both talking about the same thing, but neither one wanted to be the one to say it in so many words. "Joey --"

"Just do what your heart tells you to do," Joey said, smiling, and with a jaunty wave, he stepped off the porch. Crossing the yard, his feet swishing through the dry grass, he called, "Have fun tonight, Lance. I'm sure you will."

"I'm sure you will" ... God, Joey, Lance thought, going back into the apartment, just tell me what you're thinking next time, okay? Tell me if you think I'm stupid for liking someone like him, someone who won't or can't ever like me back. Maybe it would be easier to hear the words spoken out loud, because then he could dismiss them, instead of just feeling helpless and confused like he was now, wondering if Joey knew how he felt about Justin, wondering if it was clear in his smile or his voice or the way he watched Justin dance onstage, the way he stared when Justin walked. Was it that obvious? He hoped not. God, he hoped not.

Because if Joey knows, then maybe Justin does, too. Lance stripped off his shirt as he walked through the living room, heading for his bedroom. And God, I'd just DIE if HE knew. If he thought it was more than innocent flirting and if he even SUSPECTED what I'm thinking when I'm watching him. As Lance pulled on another shirt, he wondered if maybe JC had said something to Justin -- they did share a house. Maybe he encouraged Justin to call him up when he was in town? Maybe he was trying to hook them up -- maybe this whole sleepover thing was JC's idea to start with? Lance considered calling him up, asking if he had anything to do with Justin's wanting to stay the night, but a quick glance at the clock told him he was running late and he didn't have time to call JC right now, not if he wanted to get to the store and back by the time Justin got here.

I'll call him later, Lance promised himself, snagging his car keys from the coffee table as he passed through the living room again. He'd try to feel JC out, see if he had maybe talked with Justin, see if maybe Justin didn't say something to him -- now wouldn't that be something? Lance smiled just thinking about Justin saying something to JC, something along the lines of "Lance is so nice to me anymore, do you think he likes me?" because what would JC say to that? Would he say "yeah, he's got the hots for you, Justin, you rock his world" or would he just shake his head, say he didn't know, don't worry about it? Maybe he'd tell JC that he likes me, too, Lance thought, because this was his daydream, wasn't it?

Justin could like him back, and JC could suggest spending the night at Lance's, just to catch up on everything, just to talk, and didn't Justin tell him he didn't love Britney? He wasn't in love with her, there was something else he wanted, someone else he was looking for ... so maybe, just maybe, that someone was Lance?

Don't do this to yourself, Lance admonished. He locked the door behind him as he left the apartment and jogged to his car. Don't get your hopes up because you'll only make things worse. You'll feel like shit tomorrow when nothing happens and you don't want to ruin the friendship you DO have for something you might just be making up in your head. But as Lance started his car and backed out of his parking space, he couldn't keep the smile from his face, and he couldn't stop the sudden rush tingling through his body at the thought of Justin liking him back.

Shades of Gray  
4. Kiss Me Again  
by NSyncGrrl

The moment Justin walked through the door to Lance's apartment, he felt the rest of the world fall away from him, leaving him smiling and giggling at everything. He felt like a kid again, safe and free and alive -- he always felt alive around Lance, because Lance would look at him in that way he had that made Justin think he was the only thing that existed, and he loved that feeling. It left him breathless and giddy, and he had to keep touching things -- the back of the couch, the top of the television, the counter in the kitchen -- because he was afraid that at any moment he'd drift off and float away, there was nothing else holding him down.

And despite whatever JC said about Lance just "being friendly," Justin couldn't help but think there was more to it than that, there had to be. When the pizza came and they spread the box open on the living room floor, Lance sat a little too close to him, their knees touching with a warmth that raced like a fire through Justin's leg. At one point when Lance reached for the remote control, he leaned his elbow on Justin's thigh, and that had done terrible things to Justin's stomach -- he couldn't think, couldn't breathe, couldn't swallow, not with Lance bending over his legs like that. And there were the coy looks, the faint brush of fingers along the back of his hands, the trail of Lance's arm across Justin's chest when Justin laid down on the floor and Lance leaned on his stomach playfully. Who was JC kidding? Didn't he see these things? Didn't he even suspect?

I guess he doesn't, Justin thought, following Lance into the kitchen, empty pizza carton in hand. He's not here so he doesn't see the way we are together, the way we can BE together, and so he thinks it's all fun and games. But is it? I hope not. Oh sweet Jesus in heaven, I hope not.

But how would he ever find out? He couldn't exactly ask Lance outright, could he? What would he say? Do you like me? How ambiguous was that? Lance would say of course and Justin would be like more than just friends? And Lance would probably shrug because maybe he'd be afraid to admit it, not knowing how Justin felt. Maybe I can tell him how I feel, Justin thought, leaning against the sink as Lance folded up the pizza box. He watched the strong muscles in Lance's arms flex as he broke down the cardboard, his hands sure and steady and Justin wanted to feel those hands on his body, on his arms and his chest. He wanted to feel those lithe fingers curled in his own, to feel those pinked lips pressed against his. Right now Lance would taste yummy, slick with pizza grease, spicy with pepperoni, bubbly from the cola. His lips would be cool and his tongue hot, Justin could imagine it, a thickness inside his mouth that sent shivers through him and ... stop it, he warned, turning away as Lance noticed him staring and smiled at him. He's



going to ask you what you're thinking about and you KNOW you can't control what you say sometimes, you KNOW it just comes tumbling out and what the FUCK will you do when you tell him you're thinking of how nice it would be to kiss him right now? You don't want him to know that. So stop thinking it. "Justin?" Lance asked, and Justin bit his lower lip to keep from saying anything when he looked up at his friend. "What's on your mind?"

See? Justin's mind cried triumphantly, and he frowned slightly. Tell him you liked the pizza, tell him you're thinking about what's on TV tonight, tell him you want to go to the movies -- but when he opened his mouth, the words were already there, already formed, and he couldn't stop them from escaping. "Have you ever kissed a guy before?"

Lance's hands froze, the pizza box still caught between them, and he studied Justin for a full minute before clearing his throat. "Why?" he asked softly.

Justin shrugged. "Just curious," he said. He picked at a spot of dried paint marring the chrome sink and sighed. "You don't have to answer --"

"It's okay," Lance replied. He finished folding the box and shoved it deep into the trash can before continuing. "I don't mind. You won't say anything to the others?"

"No," Justin said quickly. Jesus, no. "I promise, Lance. I swear it."

Lance grinned. "Then yeah, I have," he said, his deep voice suddenly shy. Justin felt a thrill of excitement flash through him. "Before the group," Lance explained, "there was a guy back home --"

"Who was he?" Justin wanted to know. The thought of his friend kissing anyone thrilled him, but another guy? So maybe he'd kiss me. He hoped Lance didn't hear the eagerness and desire in his voice.

"No one you know." Lance stepped closer to him, reaching for the faucet to wash his hands, and Justin didn't move away. A small frown creased Lance's brow as he brushed against Justin's arms to turn on the water, and as he rinsed his hands, he said, "We were friends in high school, but we only hooked up about two months before I auditioned."

"Did you have sex?" Justin asked.

Lance laughed quickly. "No," he said, flicking water at Justin's face. Justin squinted his eyes shut and laughed. "Jeez, Justin. We only saw each other for a few months. I ain't Joey."

Justin grinned. "I know," he said, and because Lance was so close, he reached out and stroked the soft flesh of Lance's wrist with his thumb. Lance frowned again but didn't pull away. "What's it like to kiss a boy?" Justin asked.

"What do you mean?" Lance countered. He turned off the water and began drying his hands on a nearby towel, but he didn't interrupt Justin's soft caress.

Shrugging, Justin asked, "I mean, is it different than kissing a girl?"

"Not really." Lance grinned at him and, leaning closer, asked, "What's with all the questions? You want to kiss a boy?"

Maybe. Justin looked up into Lance's light eyes and suddenly he couldn't remember his name. What were they talking about again? His eyes widened as Lance's tongue darted out and licked his lips, wetting them a darker shade of pink, and Justin swallowed thickly. "I'm just curious," he whispered. "That's all."

"Curious," Lance said, and Justin nodded slightly, his gaze never leaving his friend's mouth. He couldn't look away from those full damp lips, and he wanted to taste them, feel them, lick them. Pursing those lips, Lance said, "Close your eyes."

"Why?" Justin asked, frowning.

Lance shrugged. "Trust me."

Justin raised his gaze to meet Lance's. Trust me ... "Lance --"

"Just close your eyes," Lance instructed, and he covered Justin's eyes with his hand. "Trust me, Justin. Please."

"Okay," Justin replied, closing his eyes. He liked the warmth of Lance's fingers on his skin, but when the touch disappeared, he frowned. "Lance?"

He felt Lance lean closer, his breath fan across Justin's cheek, his hand stroke Justin's chin, and then a warm tongue licked his lips tentatively. Sighing, he parted his lips and Lance let his tongue slip between them, his mouth covering Justin's, and had he tasted this sweet in the daydreams? Justin didn't think so. He didn't think he'd ever tasted anything like Lance, and he let his hand drift up his friend's chest as their kiss deepened, slipping his fingers between the buttons of Lance's shirt to brush along smooth skin hidden beneath the fabric. You wanted to know what it felt like, he told himself, as Lance's hand caught his, pulling it away. He's just being nice. This doesn't mean anything. It doesn't CHANGE anything between you two ... but it was hard to keep that in mind when Lance was kissing him so tenderly, his lips so soft, his breath feathery and light. Justin tightened his fingers around Lance's and prayed this kiss, this moment, this dream would never end. When Lance started to pull away, Justin leaned closer, wanting more, needing more. "Justin," Lance sighed, breaking the kiss.

"Kiss me again," Justin whispered. Kiss me forever, he wanted to say, but that wouldn't sound right. His groin throbbed with a budding ache, his whole body hungry for another kiss, but Lance laughed breathlessly and shook his head, his eyes twinkling with

mirth and was that lust written in them? I hope so, Justin prayed. I hope he knows how much this kiss turned me on, I hope it turned him on just as much -- he pouted slightly. "Please?"

Lance smiled disarmingly, clearing his throat and stepping back and dammit but the moment was lost. "There you go," he said, his grin widening. "Now you know what it's like to kiss a guy." With a wink he added, "Don't tell Britney."

"Lance," Justin started, but Lance turned away, busying himself with throwing out their paper plates and soda cans, and Justin sighed softly. Now he'd never get to sleep, not with the memory of that kiss. Not when he knew what Lance tasted like, he knew how it felt to be kissed by him, and could he help it if he wanted that again? He'd spend the rest of the night awake, listening to Lance's soft snores in the darkness and wishing for another kiss.

Shades of Gray  
5. Always On My Mind  
by NSyncGrrl

Lance watched Justin over the top of the newspaper he was pretending to read, but the tiny print just swam at the edges of his vision and all he could see was his friend. Justin sat on the floor in front of the TV between Britney and Chris, who were playing some racing game on the Dreamcast and giggling wildly every time one of them tried to kill the other onscreen. In one corner of the room Joey and JC played a game of cards, talking low about the new album. It was just another lazy Sunday spent at the house JC and Justin shared, and gray light slanted in through the rain-streaked windows, giving the den where they were gathered a dark, subdued air. Even Justin's curls gleamed dully, their usual shine gone with the sun, and his eyes were brooding, his lips pulled into a slight pout that Lance just couldn't seem to stop looking at. What made it worse was the fact that he knew what those lips tasted like now, and he couldn't get that memory out of his mind. Kiss me again. He still heard Justin's breathless words echo through his mind, and he closed his eyes and turned back to the stocks and told himself Justin had meant nothing by that. Nothing at all.

Hello? he thought, trying to concentrate on the paper in his hands. He's with Britney. She's right THERE and you think his kiss meant something? You think he really wanted you to kiss him again? Get over it already, Lance. He so obviously is.

But was he? Was he really? Lance didn't know, but every now and then he'd glance up and catch Justin looking back at him, and there was a thoughtfulness in his friend's face that made Lance wonder if maybe he wasn't thinking about that kiss, too.

Britney whooped with delight as she managed to run Chris off the road and out of the game. "Finally!" she cried, laughing as she clapped her hands together. Chris laughed and tossed the controller at her playfully. "I won! Thank the Lord --" She flashed Lance a quick grin that he couldn't ignore and then she turned to Justin and wrapped her arms around his neck. Hugging him tightly, she said, "I won, honey. Give me a kiss."

You don't need to see this, Lance warned himself, but he couldn't look away. He saw the uncomfortable expression flit across his friend's face and he noticed the way Justin's hands fumbled at Britney's waist awkwardly, and he watched as Justin gave her the tiniest of pecks on the cheek. And ... He's looking at me, Lance thought, swallowing thickly. He had to get out of there. He's kissing her and looking at ME and what the FUCK is up with that? Justin's dark eyes watched him, gauging his reaction, trying to tell him something with just that look alone, something he didn't dare believe --

Folding the paper hastily, Lance rose to his feet and mumbled, "I gotta go."

Justin frowned and stood up, too. "Where are you going?" he wanted to know.

Lance slid on his shoes and looked around at his friends. On the floor Chris and Britney were busy resetting the game for another round. Across the room JC shifted his gaze from Lance to Justin and back again, his face unreadable over the fan of cards in his hand. Joey took another card from the pile and stuck it in his hand, and as he poured over his cards he asked, "Leaving so soon, Scoop?"

"I've got things to do," Lance replied, and he half-smiled at Justin as he started to leave. Things that don't include sitting here watching the two of you together, he thought to himself. She's a great friend and I love her to death but Jesus, I love him even more. And I don't need this pain -- I can sit at home and be lonely without anyone else's help, thank you very much. "I'll see you guys later. Where's my coat?"

"In my room," Justin replied. Hope crept into his eyes as he started towards Lance. "I'll show you --"

"He knows where it is," JC replied in a curt voice.

Damn. Lance bit back a sigh and nodded. "I know," he said, nodding at Justin. And there was that pout again, just the slightest press of those full lips, and Lance knew he was staring, he couldn't look away from that mouth he knew tasted so sweet, like cola and pizza and just thinking about it made him ache ... it took everything he had to smile and force himself to wink at Justin. "I'll find it."

As he stepped out into the hall, he heard Joey's quiet voice. "You can at least walk him to the door, Justin."

Oh no, Lance thought, picking up his step. Joey, do you think this is helping? Suddenly his palms were slick with sweat, he felt feverish and his head throbbed with a dull pain, his heart pounded in his chest and is this what they mean by lovesick? he wondered, forcing a shaky laugh. This is going to be hard. Before I could've slipped out of the house and said goodbye and be done with it. But with only him at the door, I'll want to kiss him again. I'll want to kiss him goodbye and I can't and I HATE that. I'm too damn scared to just tell him already and I hate that, too. He's with Britney -- what's he want me for? Nothing. You understand that, Lance? Not a damn thing.

Behind him he heard Justin jog down the hall. "Hey Lance, wait up," he called, but Lance was already at Justin's room and he stepped inside as he tried to compose himself. He's with Britney, he reminded himself, but that thought was little comfort when Justin closed the door behind him and laughed breathlessly. "Do you have to go?"

"Yeah," Lance said. He didn't turn around as he headed for the bed, where their jackets were spread out like laundry waiting to dry. His was beneath Joey's, and he pulled it out quickly, hoping Justin didn't ask him to stay. Because I might just say yes if you ask me prettily enough, he thought, shrugging the jacket on. He glanced at Justin, leaning against the door, and smiled wanly. "I've got some stuff I have to do."

"Like what?" Justin wanted to know. He wasn't going to make this easy.

Lance shrugged again, settling the jacket comfortably onto his back. "Just a few things I have to take care of," he mumbled. Nothing really, he added silently, watching Justin watch him closely. Just sit at home and wish I was here talking to you. That's it.

Suddenly Justin grinned. "Can I come too?" he asked.

Lance laughed at the childlike hope that filled his friend's voice. "What about Britney?" he asked, hating himself for mentioning her.

But Justin simply shrugged. "I'll tell her I'm leaving with you," he replied. As if it's that simple, Lance thought. Well, why wouldn't it be? She doesn't know how you feel for him. She has no CLUE -- "Lance?" Justin prompted. "She won't mind --"

"No, she won't," Lance replied, and when Justin frowned he realized it came out harsher than he intended. "I'm sorry," he muttered, not meeting Justin's wounded gaze. "I've got to go."

Justin stepped away from the door, and for a moment Lance thought that would be, they would say goodbye and he'd just leave, but then Justin stopped in front of him and whispered again, "Do you really?" Lance felt his friend's gaze burn into him but he refused to look up -- he didn't want to see the pain in those dark eyes, the pain he'd put there, because those eyes would haunt him all night long and he didn't need that. Justin reached out and touched Lance's wrist, and he fought the urge to pull away. "Lance --"

It took everything Lance had to whisper, "Goodbye." He stepped back and as Justin's hand fell away, the next step was easier to take. Don't look at him, he told himself, but his heart wasn't listening, his eyes had their own agenda, and he looked up to see that pout again, that haunted look in Justin's eyes, and he sighed as he took another step. But the edge of the bedroom table caught him in the small of his back, and he winced as he sucked in his breath sharply. "Fuck."

And then Justin was there, his arms suddenly around Lance's waist, his hands massaging Lance's back. "Are you okay?" he asked, overly concerned, and he was so close that Lance could kiss him again if he were bold enough, just lean forward and brush his lips against Justin's -- Stop it, he admonished himself, but when Justin pulled him away from the table and further into his arms, he

dared to rest his head against Justin's shoulder. This close he could smell Justin's heady cologne, a crisp scent like forest leaves that clung to his sweater and when he didn't pull away Lance pressed his nose against Justin's neck and breathed in the thick cologne deeply. "Lance?" Justin asked, only now his voice was soft and husky, and Lance wondered if this was what he sounded like when the hour got late and he was in the mood.

"Fine," Lance breathed, and Justin tightened his arms around him. Only Lance's arms, folded between their chests, kept them apart, but Lance promised himself he'd remember every second of this embrace -- he'd replay it over and over again, like that kiss, and he'd never forget it. At least for this moment in time, he had Justin. He had what he wanted. And as the moment stretched out and grew awkward, he didn't want to pull away. He didn't want it to end.

In a quiet voice, Justin whispered, "Do you remember the night I stayed over?" His words tickled along Lance's ear, warm and barely there.

Lance laughed gently. "It was just the other day," he replied. "Of course I remember it." Before Justin could say anything else, he pushed against his friend's chest, breaking out of the embrace. "I'm fine, Justin," he said, a little too quickly, and Justin ran a nervous hand through his hair as he stepped back. Lance ignored the thin blush creeping into Justin's face and he cleared his throat. "I'm fine, really. I gotta go."

"Okay." Lance felt Justin's gaze on his back as he walked to the door, and he thought he should say goodbye again because he was really leaving this time, even though he'd feel Justin's arms around him forever. Hours from now he'd still feel the ghost of that embrace, and he'd probably cry himself to sleep tonight, wishing he had Justin with him again, wishing he were in his arms and God, if he had only been brave enough not to push him away. When Lance opened the door, Justin said softly, "I can't stop thinking about that kiss."

Lance stopped, hand on the doorknob, and waited. When Justin didn't say anything else, he whispered, "Neither can I."

"Do you think --" Justin started, but Lance shook his head. He didn't want to go there.

"No," he said quickly. "You're with Brit, remember?" He glanced back over his shoulder and Justin's hurt look cut into his heart, made him want to apologize, take the words back and never let them escape.

Justin sighed. "If I wasn't?" he asked, hopeful.

Lance forced himself to shrug, trying to be nonchalant, and with a wink he said, "Oh definitely."

And he hurried out of the room before Justin could say anything to convince him that Britney didn't matter. At least now you know,

he told himself, and he couldn't keep the grin from his face as he left the house because at least he wasn't the only one still haunted by that kiss.



Shades of Gray  
6. Any Chance I Get  
Part 1 of 2  
by NSyncGrrl

It was awards' night, another show to sit through, another performance, and after it was all over, Justin was tired. At least Brit's in London, he thought as he leaned against the bar and nursed the glass of hard lemonade Joey bought for him. The last thing he needed was to have her hanging all over him tonight. She loved the after parties and usually he didn't mind them so much, but Lance had found a cute little brunette to dance with and he hadn't even looked at Justin since he hit the dance floor. And he can't even dance all that well, Justin thought sourly, watching Lance lean down to hear something the girl shouted in his ear.

You're just mad, a part of him whispered, and it was true. He was pissed. He wanted to be out on that dance floor, backing up against Lance's crotch and wiggling into him, feeling that hardness in his pants pressed tightly against him, and he sure as hell didn't want to be here at the bar, watching Lance with someone else. Some girl -- he said he'd give you the chance, he reminded himself, downing the rest of his glass. The bartender refilled it without being asked. Just get rid of Britney and he said, what? "Oh, definitely." That means yes, Justin. So what are you waiting for?

But there was a problem. He stared into the bottom of his glass, swirling the alcohol around until it seemed to move in time with the music, and there was just one little problem, wasn't there? Britney. He loved her, he'd known her for years and he loved her like the sister he never had, and they were always together so it was only natural she was the first girl he kissed, the first girl he asked out. But somewhere along the way he had met Lance, who was prettier than any girl and had that infectious laugh, those light eyes, that way of looking at him that made Justin feel as if he was the only one in the entire world, the only one who mattered, and that was what kept him up nights, that look. When he finally started to admit to himself that maybe, just maybe, he was falling for Lance, he did the only thing he could think of to do -- he ran the other way. Because he wasn't like that. He didn't like guys. So he asked Britney if she'd be his girl and she laughed and told him she thought they were already dating, and he thought that would be the end of it. That would be it.

Only Lance is tenacious, he mused. He gets inside of you and haunts your dreams until you can't sleep without seeing his face behind your eyes, you can't breathe without thinking of him. He's like a drug you know you shouldn't take but you know it feels so good that you can't help yourself. So you say you don't like him and the next time he smiles at you, you fall all over again. He raised his glass to his lips only to find it empty already. Already? Who's drinking it?

The bartender didn't have an answer, but he refilled the glass without a word. I should call her now, he thought, glancing around the darkened club for a pay phone. She's a million miles away. I can call her and tell her you know, Brit, you didn't win any awards tonight, sorry. I think we should see other people. Are you having a fun time in England?

Somehow he didn't think that would go over too well.

Suddenly Lance was at his elbow, sweaty and breathless, and he winked at Justin. "I'll have whatever he's drinking," he told the bartender, leaning against the bar. When his glass came, he took a long swallow from it and sighed, content. "Hey," he said, smiling Justin's way.

Justin tried to smile but from the way Lance's eyes clouded over, he thought maybe he wasn't succeeding too well. "Hey yourself," he muttered. How many drinks had he had? He lost count, but right now he was tired and wanted nothing more than to hitch a ride back to the hotel and sleep off the alcohol and the night and the image of Lance dancing in his head. "Where's your girl?"

Lance laughed at that. "Joey took her," he said. Someone pushed him, and for a brief instant his hot body was pressed against Justin's. Without even thinking Justin wrapped his arm around Lance's waist, pulling him closer, out of the way, and Lance giggled as Justin leaned his head onto his shoulder. "You're drunk."

"I'm sleepy," Justin replied, rubbing his eyes against the rough wool of Lance's sweater. Breathing in deeply, he smelled sweat and cologne and ... "God, you smell good," he breathed against Lance's neck.

Lance laughed again. "Justin," he warned, pushing at his friend weakly. He looked around the club, distracted. "We can't ... not here --"

Justin didn't hear him. He pressed his lips against the curve of Lance's throat and kissed his cool damp flesh. Why not here? he thought, tasting salt and sweetness, his hand clutching at the back of Lance's sweater. Britney wasn't around, and it was dark, Lance was warm, he said he'd give him a chance -- hadn't he said that? Justin clearly remembered that. "Oh definitely." "Lance," he sighed, licking below Lance's ear. "Please."

Lance pushed him away. "Justin," he said, frowning at him, and Justin closed his eyes in defeat. Fine, he thought, trying hard not to pout, but he wanted Lance and he'd wanted him for so long, and now he was finally ready to admit it, he was finally ready to accept it and move on, he wanted him, and what was the problem here? Why was Lance pushing him away? "God," Lance muttered, and then he drowned the rest of his drink and slammed the glass onto the table. "Come on," he said, taking Justin's hand. His palm was cold from the glass and wet with sweat, but his grip was strong and sure as he led Justin away from the bar.

"Where are we going?" Justin asked, stumbling as he followed.

When Lance stopped at the door, Justin fell against him, but Lance wrapped one arm around his waist and hugged him close. "We're leaving," he said simply. "You're drunk, Justin. You have to get back to the hotel and get some sleep."

"Sleep with me," he whispered. Lance shook his head but Justin ran a finger down his neck and giggled when Lance frowned at him again. "Come on, Lance, you know you want to."

An uncomfortable look flickered across Lance's face as he helped Justin from the club. "Justin, hello? You have a girlfriend."

Justin sighed lustily and pushed away from his friend. Spreading his arms wide, he threw his head back and shouted, "Fuck Britney!" into the night sky. "Fuck her!"

"Justin!" Lance cried, pulling him towards the limo. Justin giggled wildly. "What the hell are you trying to do? Jesus, the next thing you need is the press to quote you on that."

"Oh, fuck them too," Justin said, yawning as he tumbled into the back seat of the limo. He laid down, curling his knees to his chest, and patted the seat beside him. "I'm sleepy, Lance. Come here, lie with me."

"No," Lance said, slamming the door as he sat down opposite Justin. "You go to sleep. I'll wake you up when we get to the hotel."

Justin let his eyes slip close. "Okay," he agreed. Beneath him the limo purred to life, and he let the steady rhythm of the road lull him quiet. In his mind he saw Lance sitting across from him, watching him sleep. At first he thought maybe his eyes were still open and he just didn't realize it, he thought he was sleeping and he really wasn't, it was just the alcohol playing tricks on him, but then Lance leaned over and kissed him, tasting like he had the other night, like pizza and cola and Justin knew he must be dreaming. He sighed and Lance pressed him back against the seat, straddling him as the limo drove into the night, and slowly he unbuttoned Justin's shirt, his lips kissing down Justin's chest, his tongue licking his nipples erect, his teeth nipping at the soft skin until Justin moaned, already hard and wanting so much more. "Lance," he sighed, and rolled over onto his back as in his dream Lance's lips moved lower, kissing his stomach, his tongue twirling around Justin's belly button as his fingers fumbled with the button on Justin's jeans. He moaned Lance's name again.

And then someone was shaking him awake, shaking away the sensations flooding his body, shaking him hard -- "I'm up," he mumbled, trying to sit up, but he fell to the floor of the limo and strong hands pulled him out of the car. "I'm up," he said again, trying to brush the hands away as he stumbled against the side of the limo. "I'm up."

"So you keep saying," Lance said, closing the door. "Come on, Justin. This is why you shouldn't drink."

"I didn't drink much," Justin muttered as he blinked away the sleep from his eyes. He still felt the ghost of Lance's lips on his stomach and his crotch ached fiercely. Had that really been a dream? It felt so real, so alive, and if it was a dream, he wanted to go back to sleep so he could dream it again.

Around them the hotel garage was silent this late in the evening and Justin let Lance help him to the elevator. Inside the lift he leaned against Lance, his arms encircling his friend's waist and his head once again resting on Lance's shoulder. Here, alone, Lance didn't push him away. Instead he curled an arm around Justin and hugged him close. In a breathy voice Justin whispered, "Did you kiss me?"

"What?" Lance asked, frowning as he watched the numbers above the door light up to their floor. "When?"

"In the car," Justin replied. He still tasted those kisses so they had to be real, didn't they?

"You were asleep," Lance told him. His hand rubbed Justin's back in long, soothing strokes, and he laughed when Justin nuzzled his nose against his neck. "I didn't touch you."

"I dreamed you did," Justin sighed. When the elevator came to a stop and the doors opened onto their hall, he asked, "Are you sleeping with me tonight?"

"That's not such a good idea," Lance said carefully. He helped Justin to his room, taking the key from Justin's nerveless fingers and leading the way inside.

Before he could find his way to the lamp beside the bed, Justin kicked the door closed, cutting off the light from the hall and plunging the room into darkness. Blindly he latched the door behind him as he reached out, snagging Lance's shirt and pulling him back. "What's not good about it?" he asked, kissing the nape of Lance's neck. His friend's rich cologne filled his senses and his groin throbbed with desire. "You said you'd give me a chance."

"I don't want to hurt Britney," Lance whispered, but he didn't pull away as Justin's hands eased around his waist.

"She's not here," Justin replied. Beneath his lips Lance's skin was so sweet and warm, so soft, and his fingers worked the hem of Lance's shirt up until Justin could rub his hands across the flat expanse of his friend's bare stomach. "It's just you and me, Lance. No one else. Please."

"You're drunk," Lance said again, but he turned in Justin's embrace and in the darkness his lips found Justin's. I was wrong, Justin thought as Lance's tongue slipped into his mouth. He tastes like alcohol tonight, warm and amber and intoxicating, and that WAS just a dream because this ... THIS is real.

Shades of Gray  
6. Any Chance I Get  
Part 2 of 2  
by NSyncGrrl

He's drunk, Lance reminded himself as Justin's hands caressed his back in the darkness. Tomorrow he won't remember a thing, he'll wake up beside you and go, "What the fuck?" because he might like you, he might like your kisses, but face the facts, man, he's got a girlfriend who's in London tonight, and she trusts him to be faithful to her, she TRUSTS him not to be doing what he's doing right now, moaning your name and kissing you like he's dying of thirst and you're the only thing that can quench it, and just keep in mind he might like you but he's with her --

No, Lance corrected, tonight he's with ME.

"Justin," he whispered, and Justin gasped in delight as Lance's hands roamed through his short cropped hair, tugging gently on the thick curls and pulling him down for another kiss. With small steps he backed away, leading Justin to the bed, and Justin stumbled after him eagerly, his lips hungry on Lance's own, his tongue warm as it licked experimentally into Lance's mouth, tasting his own tongue, his lips, his skin. How many nights had he dreamed of this? Of Justin's hands on his chest, of Justin leaning down into him, greedy for his touch? Too many, he thought. Too many nights and he's mine now, he's finally with ME --

He felt the edge of the bed strike the back of his knee and suddenly he lost his balance, tumbling to the ground and pulling Justin down with him. "Shit," he muttered as he landed hard on the floor. For a second he lay in the darkness, stunned, and watched the lights from the traffic play across the ceiling.

And then Justin was crawling over him, straddling his hips and kissing him breathless. "Lance," he moaned, trailing his lips down the curve of Lance's jaw with sloppy, half-formed kisses that reminded him just how drunk his friend really was. "Oh God, Lance, stay with me tonight."

"On the floor?" Lance asked, hoping to elicit a laugh, but Justin just moaned in agreement. "Justin, there's a bed --"

"I'm hot," Justin announced without warning, and he sat up, tugging at Lance's sweater. "Take off your shirt."

Lance giggled. "What? That makes no sense --"

"Take it off, Lance," Justin whined, pulling the thin sweater up over Lance's head. "Off off off."

"Okay, hold on," Lance conceded. As he took off the sweater, he felt Justin's fingers pick at his nipples, playful tweaks that made

him shudder with sudden lust. Tossing the sweater away, he caught Justin's hands in his and pulled him down for another kiss. "There, it's gone. All better?"

Justin laid down on top of him, his body a warm, welcome weight, and Lance wrapped his arms around his friend as he felt those soft curls tickle beneath his chin when Justin nodded. "Much better," he whispered. "Let's sleep here."

"I'm not sleeping on the floor," Lance replied.

Justin slid off to one side and cuddled against him, his fingers picking at Lance's erect nipple again. "It's my room," he said, sleep thickening his voice. "I can sleep on the floor if I want." When Lance tried to sit up, he held him down. "You stay here, too."

"I'm just going to cut on the light," Lance said patiently. He felt Justin roll away and grinned in the darkness. You're so damn cute when you're inebriated, Timberlake, he thought, feeling his way to the table beside the bed. I didn't know that one little kiss would be all that I needed to make you mine. So you're still with Britney -- so what? Right now you're with me, and a few more nights like this and how much longer will you be with her, anyway? He clicked on the lamp and laughed when he saw Justin lying beside the bed, staring back at him with half-closed eyes. "Get up, silly."

"I'm hot," Justin whined again, and then he clawed at his shirt, trying to tear it away from his body. "Lance, it's hot in here. God, so fucking hot --"

"Stop it," Lance said, slapping Justin's hands away before he could rip his clothes. "You just had too much to drink, that's all." Squatting down, he began to unbutton Justin's shirt gingerly, letting his hands linger on the soft skin of Justin's midriff.

"Undress me," Justin said playfully, and Lance grinned. Never thought I'd hear you say that, he mused, opening Justin's shirt to expose his smooth chest. Justin's hands fumbled with the waistband of his jeans, and the look of consternation that marred his face as he struggled to unzip his pants was priceless. "Lance, help me here. I'm about to die --"

With sure hands, Lance unzipped Justin's pants and tugged them down over his hips. He stared at the bulge in Justin's boxers as he pulled down the jeans, and Jesus, he's THAT hard for me? For ME? Damn. Poking at the tenting erection, Lance winked and said, "Someone's just slightly aroused here."

"Who?" Justin asked, propping himself up on his elbows. He shrugged out of his shirt and blushed when Lance cupped his cock through his underwear. "That would be me," he said bashfully. "Don't pick on me. You turn me on."

Is this the alcohol talking? Lance wondered. He hoped not. Squeezing Justin gently, he watched as his friend's eyes slipped closed and his mouth opened in a slight moan. "You never told me I did this to you." For emphasis he ran his thumb along the taut

fabric at Justin's crotch, smiling when Justin threw his head back and moaned again, louder this time.

"You never asked," Justin replied. When Lance pulled down his jeans, Justin looked up at him from the floor. "Touch me again," he pouted.

"I thought you said you were hot," Lance pointed out.

"You make me hot," Justin said, kicking his legs as Lance struggled with the pants. "Take them off, Lance."

"I'm trying," Lance said, frowning. He stood up, raising Justin's leg as he picked at Justin's shoelaces. "Your shoes are still on, Justin, and you're not helping any."

Justin sighed lustily and laid back down on the floor. "You make me sick," he started singing, just a breathy tune that Lance could barely hear as he untied Justin's sneakers. "I want you and I'm hating it. You make me sick." Picking at the carpet, Justin asked, "What's the next line?"

"Something about a candlestick," Lance muttered. Justin's shoestrings were tied in knots and he couldn't get them loose, Justin was just lying there, his bare skin inviting, his erection aching to be touched again, Lance wanted to touch it, to kiss him and hold him tight and here he was fucking around with these damn shoes ... and Justin wanted him to remember the next line of a song? "Justin," he sighed, ready to give up, let the boy sleep in his damn shoes, that's what he got for getting drunk in the first place --

And then the shoelace slipped free and the shoe came off in Lance's hand. He tossed it to the ground and dropped Justin's foot. Grabbing the other leg, he turned his attention to the other shoe, which came off much more easily. Finally the pants came off and he smiled down at Justin, naked except for his boxers, the white fabric glowing slightly in the scant light. "There," he said, dropping Justin's leg back to the floor. "You still hot?"

Justin shook his head. "Now I'm cold," he said, holding his hands out to Lance. "Come warm me up."

"In the bed," Lance said, pointing. "I'm not lying on that dirty floor. You don't know what's been crawling around down there. Roaches and spiders and --"

"Shut up," Justin warned, but he scrambled to his feet and fell onto the bed, rubbing a hand through his hair to shake away anything that might be crawling in his curls. Pulling his knees to his chest, he rolled into a tight ball in the middle of the bed and closed his eyes. "I'm in bed," he said, yawning widely. Lance stared into the dark maw of his friend's mouth and wondered what it would be like to feel those lips on his dick, already hard, and they were fooling around tonight, weren't they? Justin was in a playful mood and if he could just find the right words, maybe this could last beyond right now, this moment, the two of them, together. He's

got a girl, Lance reminded himself. He may want you tonight but think of her because he's going to in the morning. Then he'll think of her and where will you be? Where will you both be? Opening one eye, Justin asked, "You're sleeping with me, right?"

"What about --" Lance started.

"Don't say her name," Justin replied. He covered his ears with both hands and squeezed his eyes shut. "I'm not listening, Lance. I'm not thinking about her. I'm not."

Leaning down over his friend, Lance kissed the soft skin of Justin's temple and whispered, "I'm not thinking about her, either." He let his hands smooth across Justin's chest and back, rubbing the tension out of his friend's body, until Justin dropped his hands from his ears and rolled over beneath him, his own hands caressing Lance's chest until he began to pick at his nipples again. "Stop that," Lance laughed, brushing his fingers away.

"I like them," Justin said simply. He pinched Lance's nipples and grinned when Lance laughed and twisted away. "What?"

"That tickles," Lance explained.

Justin pulled the blankets out from under him and snuggled beneath the sheets. "Where are my pillows?" he asked. When Lance pointed at the head of the bed, Justin crawled up and laid back down. "Take off your pants," he commanded, yawning again.

"I thought you'd never ask," Lance said slyly. I've waited so long for this, he thought as he kicked off his shoes and slipped out of his jeans. In just his underwear his own erection was painfully obvious, but when he bent to click off the lamp he heard Justin's soft snore and he looked at his friend only to find him sleeping soundly on his stomach, his arms shoved beneath one of the pillows as he hugged it tight, the blankets draped around his bare back almost negligently. "Justin?" Lance whispered. Damn. That's the last time I get it on with you when you're drunk. He considered waking his friend with fevered kisses and hot hands, take care of both of their erections despite the late hour and the fact that Justin wouldn't remember any of it in the morning anyway, but he decided against it because that was the thing, Justin wouldn't remember it, and Lance wanted him to relive every touch, every kiss, every whispered sigh and breathy moan every time they were together. He wanted to hear Justin call out his name when he came, not fall asleep. Too late, he thought, clicking out the light. He's ALREADY asleep.

For the briefest of moments Lance thought maybe he should sneak back to his own room now. It might be awkward in the morning, waking beside Justin. What would the others say? What would they think?

Who the fuck cares? he countered as he eased beneath the covers beside Justin. He snuggled close to his friend, his arms encircling Justin's narrow waist as his head rested on Justin's



shoulder. He could smell the sharp fresh scent of Justin's deodorant and the faint cologne that still clung to his skin. Joey said do what your heart tells you to do, and God, THIS is it, this is right, I know it. He closed his eyes in the darkness of the hotel room and, with the steady beating of his friend's heart beneath his head, he let Justin's even breath lull him to sleep.

Minutes later he opened his eyes as the phone rang, surprised to find the morning sun already peeking through the window. I just fell asleep, he thought, groggy. He remembered the awards, the club, Justin's kisses --

Beneath him someone moaned. Justin. So that part really did happen. The phone rang again and Lance rolled over to answer it. "Yeah?" he asked, his deep voice still thick with sleep.

"Morning, sunshine," a bright voice chirped in his ear. A girl's voice. Someone he knew ...

Oh shit. "Britney," he sighed. I'm in bed with your boyfriend, Brit -- how's London treating you? "Shit, what time is it?"

"Lance?" she asked, surprised. "God, hon, I'm sorry I woke you up. I thought I dialed Justin's number --"

"You did," he said. Thinking fast, he added, "We got in late and I must've crashed here, I don't really remember. We didn't win anything, though. I know that." Beside him Justin turned over and blinked in the gray light. When he saw Lance, he smiled and, leaning closer, kissed Lance's bare shoulder. Christ, Lance thought, swallowing hard.

"I saw the show on TV," Britney said, sighing. "You guys looked good, though. Sounded great. Is my guy around?"

Cuddling up against me, he wanted to say but didn't, even if it was the truth. Justin's arms were around his waist, his head on Lance's bicep, his damned fingers finding Lance's nipples again and picking one of them erect -- "He's still sleeping, Brit." Justin's hand froze, the tender bud caught between his fingers, and he watched Lance closely, a slight frown on his face. When his fingers squeezed into a tight pinch, Lance brushed his hand away. "Do you want me to get him up for you?"

Justin shook his head violently. "I ain't talking to her," he hissed. "God, Lance, I can't --" Lance pursed his lips, hushing him silently. With a pout Justin added, "I don't want to."

But Britney sighed again. "That's okay," she said. "I'm sure he's exhausted. Just tell him I called, will you? Tell him I miss him and he can call me later on tonight, if he wants."

"Okay," Lance said. When he hung up the phone, he said, "She wants you to call her later. She misses you."

"Fuck," Justin muttered. Hugging Lance close, he whispered, "You should've told her what we were doing last night. Maybe then

-- "

"She's your girlfriend," Lance replied. When Justin looked at him, a sad expression in his eyes, he sighed and said, "I'm not telling her anything, Justin. That's up to you."

Justin kissed his shoulder again, and this time Lance shrugged him away. "Lance --"

But Lance got out of bed and pulled on his pants. Suddenly he felt dirty and ashamed -- what had they done last night? Just kisses but still. Britney trusted them together. She hadn't thought anything of it when he said he spent the night. She trusts you, and you're her friend, Lance, he reminded himself as he pulled his sweater on over his head. The smoky odor of the club lingered in the knitted fabric, and he had never wanted a shower so badly. "Where are you going?" Justin asked as he headed for the door.

"Back to my room," Lance said. At the doorway he turned and almost came back when he saw the forlorn expression on Justin's face, the naked need, the desire, the want -- "She's your girl, Justin. I can't do this to her. I'm not like this."

He didn't let Justin's pout persuade him. "I've liked you for a long time," Justin said quietly. "Last night was amazing. Like a dream come true, what I remember of it."

NOW you tell me, Lance thought. "But what about Britney?" Before Justin could answer, before Lance could convince himself returning to the bed would be okay, it would be right because Justin said he liked him, before he could even think that Britney wouldn't know if he crawled back between those covers and what she didn't know wouldn't hurt her, he left the room, closing the door on Justin and his own ache and the memory of those kisses last night.

Shades of Gray  
7. Alone At Last  
Part 1 of 2  
by NSyncGrrl

"Well?" Lance asked as he walked through the front door Justin held open for him. He carried a bag of groceries and winked at his friend on his way into the kitchen. "Have you told Britney yet?"

Justin shook his head and closed the door behind him. It had been almost a month since the awards show, since that night they slept together and all Justin had to do was close his eyes and he could still remember the way it felt to wake up in Lance's arms, he could still taste those stolen kisses on his lips. But now it seemed as if they would never get another moment like that, they would never hook up again, because when they were together the other guys were there, and whenever Justin managed to get Lance alone for a few minutes, his friend reminded him of his girlfriend and what was he supposed to do about that? He didn't have a clue how to tell her that he wanted Lance, he had always wanted him, and she was just something he tried to hide behind until he couldn't deny his feelings anymore. I don't want to hurt you, Brit, he thought, watching as Lance began to empty the contents of the shopping bag onto the kitchen table. It's not you, it's me. Admit it, Justin -- you're scared. She's known you forever and you're scared to tell her you don't love her that way. You don't know how she'll take it.

"Why not?" Lance asked, frowning at him as he entered the kitchen.

Justin shrugged. "I haven't had the time," he said, but that was a lie, wasn't it? He had plenty of time -- the past few weeks Lance had been in Canada with Joey, filming that movie they were working on, and Britney's tour was over so Justin had all the time in the world to talk to her. Only every time she called, he was too busy to come to the phone, and he hadn't seen her in days. JC even stopped taking messages for him anymore.

But tonight Joey was still in Canada, Chris and JC had gone to the studio to listen to the latest mix of their next single, and when Lance called yesterday to say he was in town and wanted to see him, Justin couldn't think of anything else he'd rather do. And he's here now, he thought, easing his arms around Lance's waist. His friend stiffened slightly but Justin kissed the back of his neck and Lance relaxed. "It's just us," Justin whispered, hugging him close. "Just you and me, Lance. Finally."

Lance laughed. "Justin," he warned, turning in Justin's embrace. "You have to tell her. I'm not going to do this."

"Do what?" Justin asked, fastening his lips onto Lance's collarbone. He grinned against Lance's skin when his friend gasped

his name. "You like this?" he murmured, kissing the hollow of Lance's throat. His hands spread out along Lance's back, holding him tight as his tongue licked its way up Lance's neck. Leaving tiny kisses on the underside of Lance's chin, Justin whispered, "Tell me what you like, Lance. Tell me how to turn you on."

Lance placed his hands on Justin's shoulders as if to stop him, but then he leaned back, grabbing fistfuls of Justin's shirt as he pulled his friend closer. "We shouldn't," he breathed, but the words weren't a protest so much as a resignation and it was easy to ignore them. Of course they should -- Justin knew this was right, nothing had ever felt like this before, nothing ... "Justin," Lance sighed, and his arms eased around Justin's neck as Justin kissed his way back to those pinked lips, aching for his own.

"Just you and me," Justin whispered again. Wasn't this what it was supposed to feel like? Lance in his arms, moaning against him, warm and alive and making his blood rush in his ears, making his breath come in short little gasps ... wasn't this what it was supposed to feel like when he was with someone? Because he had never felt this way before, he'd never had this lust curled in his groin like a tiger ready to pounce, he'd never wanted to spend the rest of the evening lost in someone else. "Lance --"

"No," Lance sighed, and it sounded so much like yes that Justin didn't let him go. Instead he pushed the groceries aside and lifted Lance's butt in his hands until he sat in his palms, and his legs wrapped around Justin's waist as he was eased onto the table. Justin's lips crushed against Lance's, silencing him, his tongue eager and hungry and they were alone, weren't they? So who was stopping them now? He pulled Lance close and felt the arousing hardness in his friend's pants press into his stomach. Lance's hands held Justin's head, keeping him near. "We can't," he breathed between kisses.

"We can," Justin replied. "Jesus, Lance, we can."

"We shouldn't," Lance countered, but he cupped Justin's cheeks in his hands as they kissed, the words turning to breathy moans and soft sighs, and suddenly Justin didn't care about dinner or the movies they were going to watch after they ate -- all he wanted was to get Lance into his room and let his body take over. He wanted to forget everything else but this man in his arms, his friend, Lance, who said he'd give him a chance. That's all Justin wanted right now -- his chance to show Lance how good this was, the two of them together, how good it could be.

He heard a key scrape into a lock, a tiny sound that he ignored because Lance tasted so right and felt so wonderful in his arms, and he kissed along Lance's neck and sucked on his earlobe, leaning into him, trying to lay him down on the table so their bodies could press closer together, he wanted to feel Lance beneath him and he wanted these kisses to last forever and -- "Why didn't you knock?" someone asked from the foyer as the front door opened.

JC. Justin let Lance shove him away and the moment was lost. "I was just about to," Britney replied -- Britney! Lance unwrapped his legs from Justin's waist and slid off of the table, busying himself with the groceries, but Justin saw the wild fear in his friend's eyes before he turned away. What the hell is she doing here? Why are they back already? What the fuck --

He stepped away from Lance and ran his hands over his buzzed hair nervously as the kitchen door opened. JC looked at Lance, fumbling with the cans on the table, and when he turned his gaze onto Justin, a scowl clouded his face. "What are you two doing here?" he asked suspiciously.

"I live here, remember?" Justin reminded him. Out in the hall he heard Britney laugh at something Chris said, and he lowered his voice. "What's she doing here?"

With another glance at Lance, JC said, "She's your girlfriend. Remember?" A can of stewed tomatoes fell from Lance's hand to thud onto the floor heavily. "I imagine she's looking for you."

"Look at this!" Chris cried, his arms around Britney's shoulders as they stumbled into the kitchen. "I've got me some Britney Spears here. Ain't I the shit?"

"Shut up," Britney laughed, slapping Chris's hands away playfully. Justin tried to smile as she came over to him. "Hey honey," she said, wrapping her arms around his neck. He managed to turn away as she kissed him, her lips brushing against his cheek where he could still feel Lance's hands, strong and warm on his skin.

"What are you doing here?" Justin asked, disentangling himself from her embrace. What are you ALL doing here? he wanted to ask because it had been just him and Lance and they were getting along fabulously and suddenly they weren't alone anymore. "I didn't know you were coming over."

Britney frowned up at him. "I couldn't get you on the phone," she said, and he sighed. Don't start, he thought, pulling away from her to help Lance with the groceries. "So I thought I'd stop by and see you. Is that okay? Justin?"

"Fine," he muttered, but it wasn't okay, it was horrible, and it wasn't just her, it was Josh and Chris and now Lance was chopping the chicken for their meal, and each time the knife came down on the wooden cutting board Justin imagined he could hear Lance's disappointment in the sound. Stepping up to the sink, Justin leaned over and whispered, "I'm sorry." He meant for the fact that they weren't alone anymore. He meant because Britney was there. Angrily he started opening the canned vegetables, twisting the can opener until it threatened to snap off in his hands. "God, Lance --"

"Me too," Lance replied, his voice quiet. "You need to tell her --"

"I know," Justin said. He knew, he did. He just didn't know how to do it.

Behind them a chair scraped across the floor as Britney sat down at the table. "What's for dinner?" she asked, her voice a little too bright. Justin knew her too well, and that was her you're pissing me off but we're in front of friends so I'll just play along with this for now tone, and he dreaded the moment she managed to get him alone. She was just dying to lay into him about not returning her calls, and for this cold shoulder act, he could almost feel it radiating from her like a heatwave.

What's it to you? he wanted to say. You aren't staying anyway. But beside him Lance shrugged and said, "Chicken alfredo. There's plenty if you guys want to stay."

"I live here, remember?" JC said. In Justin's hand the lid of the can broke free, splashing cold liquid onto his hands that he washed away in disgust.

Chris dug into the grocery bag and pulled out one of the DVDs Lance had rented. "Oooh, Clockwork Orange. I love this movie. You guys mind if I watch it with you?"

Justin sighed. "No," he pouted. "I guess not." There went the rest of their evening.

"If you'd rather --" Chris started, but Britney interrupted him. "Justin, what's your problem?" she wanted to know.

"Good question," JC muttered.

Jesus. Since when was everyone against him? Justin tossed the can opener into the sink and whirled around, glaring at his friends. "You know," he started, and then Lance placed a hand over his, a comforting gesture, reminding him that he wasn't the only one in this room who wanted the others to disappear. He wasn't the only one aching to be touched and kissed and he wasn't alone. As long as Lance was here, he wasn't alone. "Forget it," he mumbled. Pushing away from the sink, he stormed out of the kitchen. "I'll be in my room."

"Justin, wait." Britney followed him into the hall. "What the hell's wrong with you? Justin? Stop and look at me when I'm talking to you."

"I'm going to lie down," Justin said. He didn't stop, he didn't turn around -- instead he hurried up the steps two at a time. "I'll be back down for dinner."

"Justin," Britney said, and he heard her footsteps echo his as she stared up the stairs. "Honey, we need to talk --"

But he didn't feel like talking. He wanted her to leave, he wanted them all to leave, and he wanted Lance to himself like he had before they showed up. Because Lance was saying no but his whole body was saying yes, he was screaming for Justin, and by the end of the evening it wouldn't matter that Britney didn't know, he'd see to it that she didn't matter to Lance. Why is this so hard? Justin wondered. At the top of the stairs he turned and frowned

down at Britney. Now I know what will make me happy, I know what I want, and I still can't have it? Why the hell not? "Not right now," he told her. "I've got a headache, Brit. I'm just going to lie down and we can talk about it later, okay?"

"Talk about what?" Britney asked, confusion written plainly across her pretty face. "Jay --"

He slammed the door as he entered his room, cutting off her words. I have a headache, he thought, and even though that wasn't exactly true, there was a dull pain behind his eyes that pricked into tears when he threw himself down onto the bed. Burying his face into the pillow, he wondered again why this had to be so damn difficult, and why was JC being such an ass to him? He didn't know. And why had they come back when Lance was in his arms? He didn't know that, either.

He wished it had been Lance who followed him from the kitchen instead of Britney. In his mind he imagined Lance opening the door to his room, because even if Justin had told him he didn't want to talk about it, he knew Lance would've come in just to check on him anyway, just to see if he was okay, because that was the type of friend Lance was. That's why I love him, Justin thought wearily. Because he acts like I'm all that matters. I'm the only thing in the world to him.

In his daydream Lance sat on the edge of his bed and rubbed Justin's back softly, his fingers tracing long, intricate patterns that burned through Justin's shirt and into his skin. "You don't want to talk about it?" Lance would say.

"No," Justin would pout.

And then Lance would curl up beside him and hold him and let him pout, and they wouldn't say another word, but when Lance began kissing his neck, Justin would roll over into his arms and everything would be alright.

Why couldn't it have been Lance instead of Britney? Justin wondered again, sighing as he relived the few kisses they had shared before the others came in.

Shades of Gray  
7. Alone At Last  
Part 2 of 2  
by NSyncGrrl

At the sink Lance rinsed off the knife he was using to cut the chicken and wondered how bad it would look if he went after Justin himself. But Britney followed him, he mused, and maybe he shouldn't interrupt that, maybe now he'd tell her they should see other people and then Lance wouldn't feel so bad about the few brief moments they managed to share. Because I'm not going to play her like that, he promised himself. But it's getting hard to pretend I don't feel for him. It's getting hard to keep this to myself. He's making it hard, the others -- Joey knew the way Lance felt for Justin, even though he never said anything. Lance had seen it in his friend's leer when he told Joey he was going back to Orlando for the few days they had off from the set. "Have fun," Joey told him, with a wink that suggested he thought Lance would do just that. And then there was JC ...

Behind him Chris sat down in Britney's vacated chair and started reading the back of the DVD cover. "Do you guys know this movie is one of the greatest films of all time? I fucking love it. My favorite part's when that lady -- hey, you've seen this before, right?"

"I haven't," Lance replied. "So don't tell me about it."

"I won't," Chris promised. A minute later, he laughed and said, "I love it when they tape his eyes open --"

"Chris," JC warned. "Shut up."

Lance threw the knife into the sink, where it clattered against the stainless steel noisily. "What the hell's your problem, Josh?" Lance wanted to know. He turned and leaned back against the sink, pinning his friend with a level gaze that demanded an answer.

Chris looked up at JC, then over at Lance. "It's okay," he said, frowning. "I said I wouldn't ruin the movie for you."

"Why can't you leave Justin alone?" Lance asked, ignoring Chris. "You come in here and make him feel like shit just for breathing anymore. What's up with that?"

JC glared at Lance, anger flashing in his eyes. When he spoke, his voice was soft and low, but a muscle clenched in his jaw and Lance knew he was barely keeping a rein on his emotions. "Chris, why don't you go pop the movie in now, hmm?"

But Chris shook his head and set the DVD case down. "No way, man," he replied, settling back into his chair. "This is just getting good."



Lance sighed. I don't care who knows anymore, he thought, and it was the truth. If he and Justin managed to get together, they'd all know eventually. And maybe now was the only time he could confront JC and get a straight answer, because they had an audience, didn't they? Maybe things would finally get out in the open, and that could only be a good thing, right? "I'm waiting, Josh," Lance said evenly.

JC scowled at him. Crossing his arms defiantly, he muttered, "This isn't the best time --"

"Why not?" Lance asked. "Justin and I had the place to ourselves and you just happen to show up. You just conveniently run into Britney on the way. You answered the phone when I called, JC. You knew I was in town."

"Hold up," Chris said, raising his hands in front of him to break into their conversation. "What are we talking about here?"

"I told you to leave," JC told him, turning his attention to the older man.

But Chris shook his head. "You suggested it," he replied. "It was an implied statement, JC. You didn't tell me to get my ass outta here in so many words." Looking at Lance, he asked, "What's up between you and Justin?"

"Nothing," JC replied, a little too quickly.

Lance ground his teeth in frustration. "He was talking to me," he pointed out. "What the hell's your problem, Josh? What do you have against the two of us --"

"He's got a headache," Britney interrupted as she entered the kitchen. All three friends stopped and looked at her. I almost forgot she was here, Lance thought wildly. Did she hear? God, if she figures it out before he has a chance to tell her -- she frowned at them, confused at the sudden attention. "What?" she asked. Turning to Lance, she added, "What did I say?"

Lance shrugged weakly. "I don't know," he mumbled before turning back to the sink. If JC didn't want to talk about this now, then fine. He'd corner his friend later and have it out with him. This belittling needed to stop. Justin didn't need him riding his ass, not when he had enough on his mind. Like how to tell Brit, Lance mused, busying himself with preparing dinner. "He's laying down?" he asked, just to fill the silence.

"Yeah." Britney came to stand beside him and watched as he began to cut up the vegetables for their salads. Nimble she picked up a piece of tomato from the cutting board and popped it in her mouth. "Lance," she sighed, "do you know what's bothering him?"

Behind them JC cleared his throat. "Let's put that movie in," he said, and Lance glanced back to see him pulling Chris from the kitchen. The smug look he threw at them made anger bunch

Lance's jaw. Sure, he thought bitterly. Leave me with his girlfriend. Leave me to handle these damn questions. Fuck you, Josh.

"I don't know," Lance muttered as he chopped the tomatoes. It wasn't his place to tell Britney about him and Justin. What would he say? I like the way your boyfriend kisses? I want to stay in his arms forever? He makes the rest of the world easier just because he's in it? Somehow he didn't think that would go over well.

Britney sighed again. "I just thought he might've told you something," she said quietly. Lance watched as she picked at the head of lettuce, a sad expression on her face. "He never talks to me anymore but you're one of his best friends. He didn't say anything?"

Lance shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said. God, I'm sorry. You just don't know how sorry I am, honey. If I didn't feel for him the way I did, if I hadn't felt this way for such a long time already, if he didn't like me back ... I'm so sorry.

"Sometimes?" Britney asked, glancing at the kitchen door to make sure the others were gone. She looked up at Lance, her eyes sparkling with unshed tears, and she lowered her voice to a whisper as she admitted, "Sometimes I think he's cheating on me."

"Oh God," Lance sighed, and his hands shook so badly, he couldn't finish cutting the tomato. "Britney --"

"What?" she asked, blinking away the tears that threatened to fall. "Do you know something, Lance? Something I should know about?"

He didn't trust himself to speak, so he simply shook his head. "I don't know anything," he mumbled, but he didn't look at her because then she'd see it in his eyes, she'd see he was lying and she'd know it was him, Justin was cheating on her with him, and how the hell did he ever get in this position? Why did she feel the need to talk to him? Of all people -- why did it have to be him?

Because you two are friends, he told himself, trying to calm the whirlwind that roared through his mind. You've been friends for a long time and she knows you'd tell her the truth --

But I didn't. I lied to her. I lied ... "You'd know if there was someone else, wouldn't you?" Britney wanted to know. "If he was interested in another girl --"

Lance laughed. "Honey, I'm sorry," he said again, and this time he managed to meet her gaze, to look her in the eye. "I don't know what's up with him lately, I swear, but I can promise you, there's not another girl."

Relief flooded her face, and when she smiled at him, he hated himself for giving her that false sense of security. But that wasn't really a lie, he thought, watching her wipe her eyes carefully so she didn't smear her eyeliner. He's not interested in another girl, is he? He's interested in me. "Maybe I'm just PMSing," she said, and then

she laughed. "You didn't need to know that. But I feel better knowing he's not ..." She sighed and smiled again. "I'm glad there's not someone else."

I didn't say that, Lance mused, but he didn't want to correct her. That was Justin's job, wasn't it? This was his girlfriend -- he had to tell her, not Lance. "Maybe you should go talk to him," he suggested. "Ask him what's wrong ..." Not me, he added silently. Don't ask me.

But Britney pouted and turned away. "I tried," she said. "He doesn't want to talk about it right now."

And neither do I, Lance thought. In an effort to change the subject, he asked, "Will you set the table? I guess it's five of us."

"Sure," she said. When she finished setting out the plates and silverware, she stirred the sauce on the stove and asked, "How much longer til it's ready?"

"Not much," Lance said. "You want to go wake Justin up?"

To his surprise Britney shook her head. "I'm not up for a fight tonight." With frightened eyes she looked at Lance and asked, "Can you go get him? I'll put out the food. Please?"

I really shouldn't, Lance thought. I should tell her no, I don't need to be in that room with him, the door closed, just the two of us -- I don't need to see him sleeping ... but this was Justin, he couldn't say no if he wanted to, could he? "If you're sure ..."

He didn't need Britney's quick smile to encourage him. Before she could change her mind, he hurried from the kitchen, taking the steps two at a time. Upstairs he stopped in front of Justin's door and took a deep breath to calm his racing heart. Just knock already, he told himself. Just wake him up and get back to the kitchen before she suspects something, or before JC comes in and sees you're gone and gets his panties twisted into knots again ... but he didn't knock, he didn't want to. He wanted to catch Justin unaware and uninhibited, to see his friend sleeping peacefully, the frown smoothed out, the pout gone ... carefully he eased the door open, wincing as the hinges creaked. "Justin?" he called out softly. There was no answer.

Inside the room Justin lay on the bed, rolled on his side with his hands tucked under his head. Even in sleep his forehead was furrowed, as if his dreams were troublesome. Lance stepped into the room and closed the door quietly behind him, waiting until it latched before tiptoeing to Justin's side. Gingerly he sat on the edge of the bed, studying his friend's pale skin, his darkened hair, the high spots of color on his cheeks, the deep pink of his chapped lips. When Lance ran a hand over the fuzz that used to be Justin's curls, Justin's eyelashes fluttered briefly and his lips parted in a sigh. "Justin?" Lance whispered. God, he didn't want to wake this boy up. He didn't want to disturb him.

Before he could stop himself, he leaned down and pressed his

lips to Justin's cheek, feeling the strong bone beneath the soft skin. Justin sighed again, and Lance moved lower, his mouth tickling along his friend's jaw, where a faint growth of hair prickled his lips. "Justin," he breathed, and when Justin turned slightly, Lance covered his mouth with his own, kissing him awake. His tongue slipped between Justin's lips easily, and for a brief moment Justin tried to pull away. Then Lance felt hands on his chest and Justin moaned into him, giving in. Opening his eyes, Lance looked at Justin's eyelashes for a moment and then giggled. "Wake up, sweet stuff," he said, sitting up.

"Kiss me again," Justin said, opening his eyes. He stretched and smiled up at Lance. "Please?"

But Lance shook his head. "It's dinner time," he said, running one hand across Justin's stomach. Justin laughed at the ticklish touch. "You have to talk to her, you know that, right?"

"I know," Justin replied. He caught Lance's hand in both of his and pouted prettily. "Why can't this be easy?" he wanted to know. "I don't want to hurt her."

Lance sighed. "I know," he said. He didn't want to hurt Britney either, but he had a feeling that whatever happened, however Justin said the words, they'd still sting. "Get up," he said, tugging on Justin's hands. "Dinner's ready."

"Kiss me one more time." Lance grinned as he leaned down and kissed Justin tenderly. When he started to sit up, Justin hugged him close and whispered, "Once more."

"No," Lance told him. Standing, he ignored Justin's pleading eyes and said, "They're waiting for us." When Justin opened his mouth to speak, Lance shook his head. "No," he said again, hoping his voice sounded as stern as he wanted it to sound. "No. Come on."

With a weary sigh Justin pushed himself up and followed Lance from the room. No more kisses, Lance thought as he lead the way downstairs. Well, little ones, maybe, but nothing like what we were doing before the others came in, not until he tells Britney. I've waited this long, haven't I? I can wait a little while longer. But when Justin's hand slipped into his, Lance didn't know just how long he could hold out. He didn't know how strong he could be, not when Justin was so damn insistent and he wanted him so damn bad.

Shades of Gray  
8. Advice from a Friend  
by NSyncGrrl

Justin looked up from his bowl of cereal as Chris entered the kitchen. "When did you get here?" he asked, sticking a spoonful of Frosted Flakes into his mouth.

"Been here," Chris replied. He leaned across the kitchen table and grinned devilishly at his friend. "So tell me something, Juju."

"Don't call me that," Justin growled. It was too early in the morning for Chris's humor. The five of them stayed up late the night before, despite the fact that Justin wanted to be alone with Lance ... but no, before Justin could sit next to Lance on the loveseat, JC plopped down beside him, leaving Justin the spot beside Britney on the couch. "She's your girlfriend," JC said later, and why did everyone feel the need to keep telling him this? As if he didn't know. Glaring at Chris, Justin shoveled more cereal into his mouth and muttered, "I didn't know you spent the night."

"I didn't," Chris replied. "It's after eleven, Justin. Where the hell have you been?"

"Asleep," Justin told him. He remembered Chris and Lance leaving around the same time last night, come to think of it. Then Brit said she was leaving, would I walk her to the door? And we stood in the foyer and I watched Lance drive away as she was talking to me, and I still don't know anything she said, I wasn't listening, because I wanted to be in that car with him, to be driving away from HERE, to be miles away and alone with him ... he'd have to call Lance up today and find out how much longer he'd be in town. Maybe they could get together and maybe he'll invite me to spend the night, Justin thought, stirring his cereal and trying to ignore Chris as his friend picked at the placemat beneath Justin's bowl. Maybe --

"So," Chris said suddenly, grinning, "what's up between you and Lance?"

Justin choked on a mouthful of cereal. "What?" he asked, forcing himself to swallow.

Chris laughed. "You can tell me," he said. Lowering himself into a chair, he leaned closer to Justin and winked. "Come on, Juju. Talk to me."

"About what?" Justin asked. He couldn't tell Britney and Chris thought he'd open up to him? Where did you hear this? he wanted to ask. Did Lance tell you? Or JC? Where the hell do you get the idea that there's something between us?

Chris sighed. "Don't play stupid with me, Justin. I know there's

something going on."

"How do you know?" Justin asked. Absently he toyed with his spoon, stirring the cereal in large, lazy circles. It was getting too soggy to eat, and now he'd lost his appetite. Is it that obvious? he wondered. Who else knows? Fuck, maybe I don't have to tell Brit after all. Maybe she's already figured it out for herself. "Chris --"

Shrugging, Chris picked a flake out of Justin's cereal bowl and popped it into his mouth. "Lance told JC to lay off you last night," Chris told him. "JC didn't want to talk about it cause I was there, so I thought hey, this must be something juicy, you know? So tell. What's the scoop?"

Dammit the hell, Justin thought bitterly. Of course it would have something to do with JC, wouldn't it? "There is no scoop," he said. When Chris reached into his cereal bowl a second time, Justin pulled it away. "Go away. Are you here to see Josh? Go bother him."

"So did you kiss him?" Chris asked, puckering his lips. Justin felt a dull anger rise in him and he wanted to slap that stupid look off his friend's face, if only to stop those stupid kissy sounds he made. "Tell me, Justin -- does he kiss good? Better than Britney?" Widening his eyes, Chris whistled low. "Oooh, what are you going to do about her? If you dump her, can I go out with her? Just once? Just to say I did it?"

"Chris," Justin warned. This wasn't funny, and he wasn't going to talk about it. Standing up from the table, he dumped his cereal into the sink and clicked on the garbage disposal. Over the whirl, he said, "Leave me alone."

"Come on, man," Chris cajoled. "You can talk to me. I'm your big brother."

"You're a pain in the ass," Justin replied. Rinsing out his bowl, he set it on the dish drainer and sighed. "There's nothing to tell, okay, Chris? Nothing at all."

But Chris didn't buy that. "Then what was he doing here last night?" he argued. "No wonder you got pissed when we showed up. Rained on your parade, eh?" With a suggestive leer, he added, "Were you two getting the groove on?"

"Shut up," Justin muttered. He stormed out of the kitchen -- he didn't have to listen to this. Bad enough he got the cold shoulder from JC anymore, but this was Chris! How old was the boy? God, Justin thought, racing up the stairs to his room. He heard Chris hurrying behind him. "Chris --"

"Tell me," Chris said again. At his room Justin tried to slam the door shut but Chris caught it before it could close and forced his way inside. "Justin."

"What?" Justin asked. Sitting on the edge of his bed, he glared at the hint of a smile on Chris's face, the gleam in his friend's eyes,

and pouted because he wasn't going to talk about this. He didn't have the strength for it. "Get out of my room."

Chris sighed. "Look," he said, suddenly serious, "I'm sorry, Justin, okay? I'm sorry for teasing you, really. I just want to know what's going on with you two." When Justin didn't answer, he continued, "What are you afraid of? I'm not going to jump down your throat, man. I think it's cute. You two are cute together. Really."

Justin squeezed his eyes shut. Cute, he thought. I hate that word. "Chris --"

"I'm not going to tell you it's wrong," Chris said, talking over him. "Hell, you're what, twenty? You guys can fool around if you want. I just want to know the deal, okay? As your friend. You can talk to me."

Like I can talk to JC, Justin thought bitterly. "Nothing's going on between us," he said quietly. When Chris frowned at him, disbelief written plainly on his face, Justin added, "Not yet."

Chris's eyes lit up. "Yet," he said, and Justin nodded. "Does that mean I stand a chance with Britney?"

Justin grabbed a pillow and tossed it at Chris. "Get out!" he cried. "Jesus, I try to tell you something and you have to joke about it, don't you? Get the fuck out of here."

"I'm just teasing," Chris said, catching the pillow easily. "I'm sorry, Justin. Really."

"No, you're not," Justin replied. "First JC, now you -- I don't need this, Chris. I don't fucking deserve it."

But Chris wasn't leaving until he heard the full story, and now his interest was piqued. Hugging the pillow to his chest, he sat cross-legged on the floor and, chin in hand, stared at Justin. "JC?" he asked. "What's his problem?"

"I don't know," Justin admitted. "He hates ..." He sighed, trying to gather his thoughts together. How much should he tell Chris? What if Lance didn't want him to say anything? What if -- but he DOES, he told himself, frowning at Chris's overeager grin. He wants me to tell Britney and he wants to give me a chance, so maybe it's okay if Chris knows. If he promises -- "This doesn't leave this room," Justin told him.

"Scout's honor," Chris said, drawing an imaginary X over his heart with one finger.

Justin's frown deepened. "I don't know what his deal is," he whispered. "I tried talking to him before and he's like Lance doesn't like you. He's only being nice."

"Is he?" Chris wanted to know.

Justin gave Chris his patented yeah, right stare. "I think I'd know if he was only being nice," he replied. "Not to kiss and tell --"

"Why not?" Chris asked with a wink.

"But it's more than that," Justin said, as if he hadn't spoken. "He's told me it's more than that."

Chris twisted his lips into a thoughtful expression. "Did you tell Josh that? Maybe he's just looking out for you two."

"Maybe it's none of his damn business," Justin replied hotly. Maybe it's none of yours, either, he added, but it felt good to finally talk about it with someone. I should be telling Lance, he thought, and maybe today they'd get a chance to catch up with each other, to spend some time alone and just talk about everything that was going on between them, everything they both were feeling. Because I want to hear him tell me again that he'll give me a chance. "All I know is I like Lance, okay? There, I said it. I like Lance and I don't know how I'm supposed to tell Britney and I'm talking too much again. Fuck." He bit his lip to keep from saying anything else. Chris didn't need to know all of this. "Can you go away now? Just leave me alone already, please?"

But Chris shook his head, smiling. "So you like him," he said, and when Justin nodded, he laughed boyishly. "That's too cute. You think he likes you back?" Before Justin could reply, he hurried on. "Of course he does, if he's kissed you already. And you said he said he likes you --"

"Well, not in so many words," Justin admitted, his voice quiet. "But he said he'd give me a chance if I didn't have Britney. Doesn't that count?"

"And you've kissed him," Chris pointed out. "That sure as hell counts in my book. He doesn't strike me as the type to go around kissing just for fun." Justin shook his head. "Now the question is, how are you going to tell Britney?"

"I don't know," Justin whispered. He didn't, and he didn't want anyone to remind him that he needed to just buck up and tell her already, if he wanted to be with Lance. "I don't even want to think about it right now, Chris. He's in town and I want to call him up and just hang out with him. Just us, get it? Just him and me."

"I get it," Chris said. Standing up from the floor, he tossed the pillow back at Justin. It hit his shoulder and fell to the bed. "Just tell her you want to see other people. Tell her it's not working out. Blame it on the distance or the touring or the fans, like Dani did. Shit, you don't have to tell her you're ditching her for Lance, you know?"

"Yeah," Justin said, even though he hadn't thought of that. Just tell her it's the distance, that might work. Once the tour starts, tell her you can't handle it. She'll believe you, Justin. She'll HAVE to. "So you're cool with this?" he asked as Chris opened the door to his room.



Chris shrugged. "Sure. Whatever floats your boat, you know?" He stopped and frowned back at him. "Just remember we're a group first, Justin. Don't go screwing each other over when you two have to work together, you hear? Or I'll come kick your ass."

Justin laughed at that. "I'd like to see you try," he replied, but he knew what Chris was saying. Only I won't screw Lance over, he promised himself, reaching for the phone. As he dialed Lance's number, he laid back on the bed and stared at the ceiling. Maybe that's what JC's scared of, too. Maybe he thinks if we get together, we'll mess up the group. Maybe I should talk to him about it.

But then Lance answered the phone, his deep voice bringing a smile to Justin's face, and JC was the last thing on his mind.

Shades of Gray  
9. Alone Again  
Part 1 of 3  
by NSyncGrrl

Lance knew he shouldn't go in. He had spent the day with Justin and he loved every minute of it, even moreso now that Justin was flirting back with him, and even if they were in public, there had been the little touches in the hollow of his back and along his arm, the smile Justin saved just for him, the flash in Justin's eyes when Lance winked at him. It was more than Lance could've ever hoped for, and he found himself laughing at everything Justin said, because they were together and there was nothing anyone could say to bring him down. But when he pulled into the driveway of the house Justin shared with JC, Lance felt a familiar dread settle into his stomach, a nervousness that seemed to bother him whenever JC might be around, because JC was quick and cutting when it came to Justin, wasn't he? Lance still couldn't figure that one out. Maybe he's just looking out for me, Lance thought, staring into Justin's pleading eyes. Maybe he thinks this is all so sudden, that Justin's only using me because I'm something new, something fun. And he can't see that's not the way it is at all ... is it? "Justin," Lance sighed.

"Please?" Justin begged. "No one's home. Just come on in for a few minutes, have something to drink. I know you want to." I do, Lance thought. Was it that obvious? "Come on, Lance. I don't want today to end just yet."

"I don't either," Lance replied. Another sigh, and he tugged the hand brake up quickly. "Alright," he conceded, turning the car off and getting out before he could change his mind. "Just for a few minutes, though."

"Okay," Justin agreed. On his way around the car, he stopped and kissed Lance's cheek. "A few minutes," he whispered, trailing his fingers down Lance's bare arm.

Lance stepped back and looked up and down the empty street nervously. "Justin," he warned, following his friend to the house. "We have to be careful. What if Britney drives by and sees you hitting on me?"

Justin laughed at that. "Then I wouldn't have to tell her, would I?" he countered, unlocking the door.

That's not what I meant, Lance wanted to say, but he kept quiet. Sinking onto the sofa, he clicked on the TV and listened as Justin rummaged around in the kitchen. "I guess the others are still at the studio?" he called out. He wondered if he should at least stop by sometime before he had to head back to the set, just to see what the new album sounded like. Justin and I should both go, he thought, looking up as Justin entered the living room, two bottles

of beer in his hands. But there's JC to deal with. Shit. Taking one of the offered bottles, Lance twisted the cap off and sipped at the cold draft. "You know," he started, turning to look up at Justin.

Before he could finish, Justin sat down beside him, so close his leg rested on Lance's own. Reaching across his friend, he set his bottle on the end table, his other arm snaking behind Lance's head to stroke at his neck tenderly. "Now we're alone," Justin murmured, and when he leaned down to kiss Lance, the only thing between them was Lance's own bottle of beer. As Justin's lips parted his own, Lance felt his friend's hand take the bottle from him. "Lance," he whispered, his tongue licking into Lance's mouth hungrily.

"Justin, no," Lance said, pushing Justin back. "We can't --"

Angrily Justin sat up and glared at him. "Okay, stop it with this we can't shit, because we're both old enough to know what we want, right? And I want you. And I thought you wanted me. So why --"

"Britney," Lance spat, angry because Justin was angry and who made him that way? I did, Lance thought, and he hated that. "Yes, I want you. I've liked you for a while now, Justin, and you think it's easy to push you away? It takes everything I have because I want you so bad, my whole body aches for your touch." He looked at Justin's sullen eyes and sighed. "There, you happy? Now you know. I fucking hurt for you, Justin, and you have a girlfriend, who just happens to be a friend of mine. I don't want to screw her over."

"You won't," Justin replied. His arm still rested behind Lance's head, and he didn't have the strength to shrug it off. "That's my problem, Lance, not yours. And I'm going to tell her, I promise. I swear to you on all that is holy --"

"I get the picture," Lance said bitterly, taking another swig of his beer. Pushing up from the sofa, he added, "I gotta go."

Justin pulled him back down. "You don't," he said, and suddenly he was hugging Lance, his head on Lance's shoulder and his hands rubbing along his arm as if to placate him into staying. "I just have to figure out a way to do it so she doesn't think I'm dumping her for you."

"But you are," Lance said, his anger dissipating beneath Justin's tender caresses. I give in too easily, he thought, resting a hand on Justin's knee.

Turning his head, Justin looked up at him with huge eyes and smiled. As if that makes everything better, Lance thought, but didn't it? In just a little way, perhaps? Lance thought maybe it did. "Do you think she'll still be your friend then?" Justin asked, and damn his infallible logic. Lance pouted. "Just let me do it my own way, Lance. I don't want to lose her as a friend, but I want you." He reached up and tugged playfully at Lance's ear. "I've always wanted you."

Lance laughed at that. "Bullshit," he muttered. When Justin frowned at him, startled, he added, "This started with that kiss, didn't it? Kiss me again, you said. I was tempted. Shit, I wanted to. But I knew it wouldn't mean anything to you so I didn't."

"I meant that," Justin whispered. "I wanted it."

But Lance shook his head. "You got to thinking about it and now you want me, is that it? Hell, it wasn't even all that great of a kiss." Justin's frown deepened, and Lance laughed again. "I can kiss better than that."

"Prove it," Justin dared.

Lance looked at his friend, so close, and thought how easy it would be to give into these arms holding him, those lips begging for his. "Justin," he sighed. "Not while you're dating her. Because how can I be sure it's not just fun and games to you? How can I be sure you really mean it?"

"Because I do," Justin told him. Lance squinted at him, unconvinced. Justin traced the curve of Lance's jaw with one hand, his gaze following the path his fingers followed along Lance's skin, and in a quiet voice, he said, "It wasn't just that kiss, Lance. I didn't really think you liked me all that much, to be honest. I thought we were just friends, and you were just really nice to me. That's what JC said."

"When did he say that?" Lance wanted to know. His heart quickened in his chest. When did he say I was just being nice? God, don't tell me he KNEW you liked me all along. If he did -- "Motherfucker."

Justin jumped at that. "Whoa," he said, turning Lance's face towards his. "You've been listening to too much Limp Bizkit, baby."

"I told him --" Lance started, and then he laughed. "Baby?" He liked the sound of that.

Justin grinned. "Told him what?" he asked, smoothing his thumb across Lance's bottom lip.

Before he could stop himself, Lance kissed the tip of his thumb. "I told him I liked you," Lance whispered. "And if he knew you liked me too, I'm going to kill him. Do you know what he told me?"

"What?" Justin asked, frowning. "That I was only being nice? That's what he told me."

"He said you had Britney, you didn't like me," Lance said. "That fucker." Justin giggled and brushed his thumb across Lance's lips again. "What?"

"You're cute when you cuss," Justin replied. "You don't do it much, do you? It sounds funny coming from you."

"Funny?" Lance asked, but when Justin leaned forward and

silenced him with a kiss, he didn't pull away. Didn't I say no? he thought briefly, and then Justin's tongue was inside his mouth and it tasted so sweet, felt so good, to be in his arms and kissed like this, that he couldn't say no again. "Justin," he breathed, his hand coming up between them to push him away, but instead it eased around Justin's neck and pulled him closer as they kissed again.

"I've always liked you," Justin sighed, trailing tiny kisses along Lance's cheek. "I'll tell you a secret."

"What's that?" Lance whispered. They were only inches apart and even though they were alone, he didn't want to raise his voice for fear that the moment would shatter like glass around them, leaving them among the broken shards. We were just arguing, he thought, staring into Justin's eyes, deep as the ocean. And now we're cuddling and God, if he even KNEW what he does to me, how he feels in my arms, how he TASTES to me ... "Justin? What's your secret?"

"I've always liked you," Justin breathed.

Lance laughed. "So you said." His hand stroked the smooth skin along the nape of Justin's neck, his fingers tickling through the fuzz left from his shorn curls. "Not just cause I kissed you once and you wanted more?"

Justin shook his head earnestly. "Remember when you first came to audition for the group?" he asked. Lance thought back to when he had visited Orlando years ago -- he knew Justin vaguely, through the singing coach they shared, and he thought him a beautiful boy, cocky and sure and how could he not love that? Justin was everything Lance wasn't. When he nodded, Justin continued. "You sang and I thought God, he's awesome." Lance laughed, and Justin blushed. "I did! And then you were introduced to the guys, and do you remember what you said when you shook my hand?" Lance shook his head. Kissing along his neck, Justin sighed. "You said so you're the cute one, eh? And God, Lance, I fell right then and there. You thought I was cute."

"I did," Lance said, laughing as Justin's breath tickled behind his ear. "You were cute."

"That was part of my jack-off fantasy for years," Justin admitted, and Lance laughed again. "It was, honest! I'd lie in bed and hear you say I was the cute one and then you'd do wicked things to me until I came."

"You didn't," Lance said, but the thought of Justin getting off on him made his face heat up and his groin throb.

"So see?" Justin asked. "I've liked you for a long time, baby cakes. Not just cause you kissed me."

"But cause I thought you were cute," Lance pointed out, and when Justin nodded, the scruff of his hair pricked along Lance's cheek. "I was afraid you just wanted something different," he whispered as Justin kissed his way back up Lance's jaw and around

his chin until their lips met again. "I thought maybe you were tired of Britney so you'd try me for a while."

Justin kissed him, cutting off his words. "No," he sighed into Lance's mouth. "God, no. You have to believe me --"

"I do," Lance replied, silencing Justin with another kiss.

Shades of Gray  
9. Alone Again  
Part 2 of 3  
by NSyncGrrl

This is what I want, Justin thought, pressing Lance back against the sofa as they kissed. How long had it been since they got home? A few minutes, nothing more. Only it had to have been much longer than that, because Justin's crotch ached something fierce and his lips were swollen from these kisses, and their beers had grown warm where they sat on the table, waiting. As Justin's hands roamed Lance's arms and chest, he wondered how sudden it'd be if he let them slip a little lower, where he knew Lance wanted him to touch because he knew he wanted Lance to touch him there, and every now and then Lance shifted beneath him and his knee settled against Justin's erection, which didn't help any. "Lance," he breathed, his hands smoothing across his friend's stomach. When Lance moaned into him, Justin let his fingers fumble open the button on his friend's jeans.

"No," Lance whispered, his hands suddenly hard against Justin's chest. "Justin --"

"It's okay," Justin told him, kissing him quiet. He pressed against Lance's leg until the hardness in his pants throbbed sweetly, and he eased his hand around the bulge at Lance's own crotch, the zipper sliding down quietly between them. "Shh," he breathed, cupping Lance's erection in his hand. His friend arched into him and gasped his name. "See? It's okay, Lance. Do you like this?" For emphasis he squeezed gently, and Lance's hands fisted in his shirt. "Does this feel good?"

"Justin," Lance sighed, and he moved his hips as his friend's hand caressed his erection. "No, Justin, we can't ... no ..." But he didn't push him away, and when Justin smiled, Lance pulled him down for another kiss, raising his hips to meet his friend. "We can't."

"We are," Justin replied, squeezing again. "I've never done this before," he admitted, kissing Lance greedily. "Tell me what to do, Lance. Tell me --"

The front door opened, and now Lance pushed him away, and Justin threw himself against the opposite end of the couch, straightening his bunched shirt as Lance zipped up his jeans. Justin watched JC come into the house, instant scowl in place when he saw the two of them alone, Lance running a hand through his disheveled hair to straighten it out. Then Chris entered, closing the door behind him, and he winked at Justin lewdly. "What did we miss?" he asked, stepping into the living room.

"Nothing," Lance said, his deep voice suddenly breathy and a little high. He cleared his throat and tried to look nonchalant, but

his face was flushed and the t-shirt he wore did little to cover his erection, once again confined in his jeans. "I was just leaving."

"What's the rush?" Chris asked, plopping down on the loveseat. JC ignored them as he headed into the kitchen, and when they heard the refrigerator open, Chris called out, "Hey Josh, bring me a beer, will you?"

"No," came their friend's reply.

Chris frowned up at JC as he headed upstairs to his room. "Fuck you, too," Chris muttered. "Jesus, what's his problem?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Justin told him. And what are you doing here? he added silently. If you think it's cute that we're together, then why are you sitting here hampering the mood, hmm? He wondered how rude it would be to ask Chris to leave.

"I've got to go," Lance whispered. He looked at Justin with wide eyes and smiled ruefully. "I had fun."

Chris laughed at that. "I bet," he said.

"Chris," Justin warned. He wasn't in the mood for this. I'm in the mood for something else, he mused, daring to run a hand down Lance's leg, which his friend promptly shook off. With a sigh, he asked, "Don't you remember what I told you this morning?"

"What was that?" Chris wanted to know. "Don't call me Juju?"

"No," Justin said, frowning as Lance laughed. "I said get out."

"Juju?" Lance asked. "That's cute."

God. "Chris --"

"Look, I'm not leaving," Chris said, propping his feet up on the coffee table between the sofas. "You guys want to be alone? Go to Lance's place. There's no one there, right?"

Lance looked at him guiltily, and Justin could almost read his friend's mind. Why not? "You could spend the night," he suggested, his voice low.

"You don't mind?" Justin asked. Lance shook his head.

Chris sighed, exasperated. "You two are never going to get it, are you? Could ofs and would ofs and ifs. Forget what everyone else thinks already, will you? Just do what you want to do. You want to stay the night, do it. You want him to stay, ask him. Don't be so damn wishy-washy."

"Shut up," Justin growled, but Lance grinned at him.

"Go get your stuff," he said, pushing Justin's leg off the couch. "You're staying the night."

"See?" Chris asked as Justin stood up. "Was that hard? Go get



packed."

"Shut up," he said again, smiling as he hurried upstairs. In his room he shoved a change of clothes into a duffel bag, along with his deodorant and cologne. Go to Lance's house, he mused, grinning to himself as he zipped the bag closed. Brilliant, Chris. Why didn't I think of that? He didn't know, but he was glad someone was thinking, because right now the only head he was thinking with was the one in his pants, and he wanted to get Lance alone again. He was going to suggest his room but Chris was right, wasn't he? No one would interrupt them at Lance's house. No one ... "All mine," he whispered, closing the door to his room behind him. He liked the sound of that. All mine. He's all mine and I'll talk to Britney when he leaves, I swear it.

On his way down the hall, headed for the stairs, he stopped in front of JC's closed door and raised his hand to knock. I should tell him I'm leaving, he thought, but instead he leaned against the door and listened, hoping to hear something inside. Faintly he heard music playing, and he knocked quickly before he could change his mind. "Josh?" he called out.

"It's open," his friend replied. When Justin pushed the door open, he found JC sitting at his desk bent over his journal, and he looked up as Justin entered the room. Noticing the duffel bag slung over Justin's shoulder, he frowned and asked, "You leaving?"

"Going to Lance's for the night," Justin replied. JC's frown deepened into a scowl and he turned away. With a sigh, Justin pushed the door shut and let his bag fall to the ground. "What's your problem, JC? I'm sick and tired of this shit."

For a moment JC continued to write in his journal, ignoring him, and Justin thought maybe he wouldn't answer. Fuck it, he thought, hefting the bag again. When he reached for the door, though, JC asked, "So you two are like that now?"

Justin twisted the door knob in his hand and frowned. "Yeah," he said softly. "I guess we are."

Without looking at him, JC asked, "And he's okay with Britney? You just get it all, don't you, Justin? The girl, the guy, everything you want."

"It's not --" Justin sighed. "I like him, Josh." JC laughed, and Justin glared at him. "I do. And I'm going to tell Brit --"

"What?" JC wanted to know. "Sorry babe, I'm leaving you for Lance?"

"Not like that --" Justin started, but JC pushed his chair back and stared at him, his hard eyes surprising Justin. "Josh --"

"You're an idiot, Justin," JC said bitterly. Before Justin could object, he hurried on. "You think you can just fuck around with whoever you want? Dump her for him, it's that easy? What happens when the press wants to know why you guys aren't

together anymore, hmm? Tell me that. Tell me what you're going to say when a reporter asks why you two broke up."

Justin pouted. "I'll say it's none of their damn business," he replied hotly. It wasn't. Just like it's none of yours, he added silently.

"What if they ask her?" JC pressed. "What if she's pissed and she says you left her for Lance? What the hell do you think that'll do to our record sales?"

"This isn't about the sales," Justin said, angry. "This is about what I want, JC. Doesn't that matter here? Doesn't that count?"

"No," JC said, turning away from Justin's shocked expression. "The group counts. You get it on with one of the guys, you endanger the whole group. You want to fuck around on your girlfriend, fine. Lance likes boys, fine. Just don't get together because then you mess it up for all of us."

You're wrong, Justin thought stubbornly. "We won't mess anything up," he said. "I don't see how you can say that --"

"You're the front man, Justin," JC reminded him. "This past tour was all about you, wasn't it? And this new album, half the shit on here you wrote yourself. It's all about you, much as I hate to admit it. You're the favorite."

"That has nothing to do with this," Justin replied. "Not a damn thing --"

"What happens when the parents see you splashed on the cover of the National Enquirer?" JC continued as if he hadn't spoken. "The guy their daughters dream of, the one plastered all over their little girls' walls, and he's in the tabloids because he's gay. Look at Tom Cruise."

"I'm not Tom Cruise," Justin said, angry. "You're blowing this all out of proportion."

JC laughed. "I know you're not Tom Cruise. Fuck, I know you're a pain in the ass most days, Justin, and moody and a bitch to work with sometimes, and I can't for the life of me figure out what it is about you that gets Lance hard."

"Hey!" Justin cried. "That's uncalled for, Josh." Tugging the door open, he stepped out into the hall and said, "I don't know why I thought we could talk about this. I don't know why I fucking bother --"

"You knocked on my door," JC pointed out. "You came to me. Don't like what I have to say? Tough shit. Leave."

"I am," Justin told him. "I'll see you later." Maybe, he thought, slamming the door shut behind him. Or maybe I'll ask Lance if I can just stay at his place when he goes out of town, give me some time away from you and your damn attitude, JC. A bitch to work

with? What the fuck was that all about? He'd have to ask Lance if he was a bitch. He didn't think so, and what was that about the tour being all him? They all planned it, not just him. They all agreed on it ... didn't they?

Fuck you, JC, he thought as he headed for the stairs. I don't need you to make me doubt myself. I do that way too much already. And I won't mess up the group, you'll see. It'll be nothing like what you think. I'll prove to you Lance and I are nothing like that.

Shades of Gray  
9. Alone Again  
Part 3 of 3  
by NSyncGrrl

In the living room Lance picked at his shirt and waited for Justin, hating the sudden awkwardness between himself and Chris. What did he see? he wondered, tugging the shirt down over his throbbing erection. His groin hurt, and he couldn't wait to get back to his house and shuck off these jeans, walk around in his boxers for awhile, at least until he was able to take care of the thickness raging in his pants. He suggested we go to my house -- great idea by the way, you get brownie points for that one, Kirkpatrick -- but what's he thinking? Lance would give anything to know that right now, because somehow he doubted that Chris was as lost in Seinfeld as he appeared to be.

After a few minutes, Lance looked at his watch and sighed. Wonder what's taking Justin so long, he thought, frowning. You need to be stronger, Lance. Keep him at bay, at least until he's a free man. Just until he tells Britney ... that's what he thought he'd been doing, actually, but somewhere between sitting down on the couch and the others coming in, his no's seemed to turn into yes's and he knew he had to keep thinking about Britney, he couldn't fuck her over, he didn't want to, and you're not strong enough, he told himself. Justin makes me weak and giddy and all he has to do is pout those pretty lips and touch me once or twice and damn, I'm hard for him and ready to rumble. Maybe letting Justin spend the night was a bad idea. Maybe he should just leave now, it'd be just him and his hand and sure, he'd be lonely, but at least he wouldn't be tempted, would he? At least --

"Damn, Lance," Chris said suddenly, looking over at him from the corner of his eye, "I can hear you thinking all the way over here."

"You cannot," Lance replied. When Chris winked at him, he blushed. "Leave me alone."

"I'm just playing with you," Chris told him. Scooting to the end of the loveseat, he leaned over and whispered dramatically, "So we spoiled the party again, huh?" At Lance's confused expression, he added, "JC seems to have a knack for interrupting when you two are getting your ya-yas on."

Lance sighed. "We weren't --"

"Fuck," Chris drawled, grinning. "You got a hard-on the size of Florida in them jeans, Lance, unless that's a banana you shoved down there." Lance felt his face heat up, and God, he thought. Justin, hurry up already, will you? Get me out of here. "So tell me --"

"No," Lance said quickly, cutting him off. "You don't need to know."

"But I want to," Chris replied. "Color me curious. Inquiring minds want to know."

With a faint scowl, Lance watched his hands twist in the hem of his shirt. "It's none of your business," he said softly. Because you'll tell me it doesn't mean shit to him, he added silently, and I get that from JC so why do I need to hear it from you, too? I don't need anyone to tell me Justin's not interested because he is, he is and you just don't know ...

Chris sighed dramatically. "Do you and Justin even talk?" he wondered. When Lance flushed hotly, he hurried on. "Because I told him this morning I was cool with it and now you're all down my throat --"

"You know?" Lance whispered. Maybe we DON'T talk enough, he thought as Chris nodded. But if Chris knew and he wasn't breathing down his neck about it, maybe he had nothing to worry about. With a shaky laugh, he said, "I wish everyone felt that way."

"Fuck JC," Chris said suddenly, sitting back. "He's just mad because he ain't getting any. He hates anyone who's getting more than him. Look at me," he added, reaching for the remote. "Ever since I broke up with Dani, he's my best friend. But before that? Shit." He flicked the channels on the TV, looking for something to watch. "He has issues, Lance. But they're his problems, not yours."

Lance sighed. "I wish he'd just lay off of Justin already," he admitted.

"You weren't watching that, were you?" Chris wanted to know. Too late if I was, Lance thought, watching his friend scroll through the channels, but he shook his head. With a shrug, Chris stopped at MTV and frowned. "You remember when they actually played videos on this channel? I used to love Downtown Julie Brown. I wonder what she's up to these days, you know? They should have a show about all the old VJs, let us know what they're doing now. Totally Pauly Shore, he was the bomb. That Martha girl -- isn't she on one of those morning shows?"

"I don't know," Lance said.

Without looking his way, Chris picked up the conversation where he had left it before the TV distracted him. "You told him to shut up about it, didn't you? Jeez, I thought you were going to go postal on his ass. Don't touch my boy, yo." Lance laughed at that. "Tell me, is he all the magazines make him out to be?" Chris wanted to know, winking at him. "I mean, this is Justin Timberlake. American's most wanted, and now he's yours. And what's that like, exactly?"

"God," Lance gushed, and when Chris leered at him, he cleared his throat, embarrassed. "I shouldn't even be saying this."

"I won't tell," Chris promised.

"I can't," Lance replied, shaking his head. Chris grinned and punched his knee playfully. "Let's just say I'm not disappointed, shall we? Not in the least."

"Aww yeah," Chris crowed. They heard Justin's footsteps on the stairs, and when he entered the living room, Chris called out, "I hear you're the mac daddy, Justin."

"Shut up," Lance told him, pushing up from the couch. Turning towards Justin, he shook his head and rolled his eyes. "Don't listen to him."

"He told me --" Chris started, but Lance picked up a pillow from the loveseat and hit him with it. "Hey!" Chris cried, shoving the pillow away. "What'd I say?"

Justin forced a smile and followed Lance to his car. He was quiet -- too quiet, and Lance wondered if he were mad. He's the one who told Chris already, he reminded himself, sliding behind the wheel. As he backed out of the driveway, Lance said softly, "I didn't tell him anything he didn't already know."

"What?" Justin asked, startled. He turned from the window and frowned at Lance. "Who?"

"Chris," Lance replied. With a faint smile, he added, "You're not even here, are you? I finally get you alone again --"

"I'm here," Justin said quickly. To prove his point, he rested a hand on Lance's thigh, squeezing gently. Once he got the car on the road, Lance covered the hand with his own and moved it higher, until Justin's fingers brushed against the swollen tip of his cock through the fabric of his jeans. "What are we talking about again?" Justin whispered, squeezing once more.

Lance gasped as Justin traced the outline of his erection. "Chris," he managed. "He said he talked to you this morning." Justin pressed into him sweetly, and he bit back a slight moan. "Oh God, Justin, I don't know if I can drive with you doing this."

"We can pull over somewhere," Justin suggested.

"Or we can wait until we reach my place," Lance countered. "You told Chris?"

Justin shrugged. "He asked," he replied. "No, he hounded me, wouldn't leave me alone until I gave him a yes or no answer. He's a pain in the ass."

"But he's cool with it," Lance pointed out. When Justin moved his hand away, Lance caught it and brought it back to his crotch. "Where do you think you're going? I'm not done with you yet."

"I thought you couldn't drive while I played," Justin countered, but he worked the button loose and eased open Lance's zipper, his

hand rubbing gentle circles around his friend's erection. "You don't mind?"

"Jesus," Lance hissed as Justin squeezed again. "I'd be crazy to object."

"I mean me telling Chris," Justin said, sighing. "He said he wouldn't tell anyone."

Lance tried to shrug nonchalantly, but Justin's hand was doing wonderful things to him and he barely managed to stay on the road, let alone try to look calm and collected while doing so. With one hand on the wheel, he let the other trail up Justin's arm, the rasp of skin on skin soothing between them. Just a few more miles, he thought, turning onto the freeway. Then these damn pants are coming OFF. "I think Joey knows," Lance admitted. When Justin frowned, he hurried to explain. "I didn't say anything, but every now and then he comes out with something that just floors me, you know? Like he thinks we've been getting it on for a while now and it's just starting to leak out. He's not as stupid as he wants us all to think."

"Yeah," Justin said, nodding. "JC knows, too." Suddenly he asked, "Do you think I'm a bitch?"

"What?" Lance asked, laughing. "Where'd you hear that?"

Justin sighed. "I told JC I was spending the night with you and he's all so it's like that and I told him yeah, and he said he thinks I'm stupid. He says I'll fuck up the group and it'll get in the papers and our next record will bomb --"

"He's so positive sometimes," Lance replied. He shook his head, anger tingeing the edges of his thoughts. So that's his problem, he thought. He thinks we have to be this perfect band -- we have to be who the fans WANT us to be. What happened to being ourselves? Isn't that what this new album is all about? "Fuck him. Chris says he's just mad cause he's not getting any."

Justin laughed at that. "Oh God," he said, giggling, and his hand kneaded Lance's erection absently. Don't stop, Lance thought, letting his hand drift to Justin's. He laced his fingers through Justin's own and raised the hand to his lips.

Kissing the back of Justin's hand, Lance whispered, "I don't think you're a bitch. A prima donna, sometimes. A diva, definitely --"

"What?" Justin asked, incredulous. When he tried to twist his hand free from Lance's grip, Lance laughed and held on tighter. "A prima donna?"

"I like you like that," Lance replied. With a wink, he added, "Isn't my opinion the only one that counts?"

"Yeah," Justin agreed, grinning. This time when he pulled his hand free, Lance let go, and it wandered back to the bulge of his

erection peeking through his open zipper. "As long as you're happy --"

"I will be," Lance interrupted, "once you're girlfriend-less."

"I will be," Justin reminded him, "once you leave town and I can get a chance to talk to her." Stroking Lance's erection, he said, "I just want to spend some time with you, okay? Without mentioning her -- can we do that? No Britney tonight, please?"

Lance smiled. Marvelous idea, he thought. "Okay," he agreed.

Justin grinned. "So as long as you're happy, I'm happy."

"And as long as you keep doing what you're doing," Lance told him with another wink, "I'm happy."

Justin leaned forward and kissed his cheek tenderly. "This?" he asked, his voice throaty as he squeezed gently.

"Justin," Lance gasped, swerving back onto the road. "You're going to make me wreck this car, you know that, right?"

Justin simply laughed.

THE END