

Best of Intentions
by NSyncGrrl

It was a simple plan. It wasn't the best of plans, but they had the best of intentions. Nothing should have gone wrong ...

Justin didn't mean to be late. He didn't mean to lead Lance on, or to make things so damn complicated between them. He had the best of intentions when he came to his friend, seeking comfort and something more. But Lance couldn't see that ...

Lance waited for Justin. He'd wait forever, if he had to. He wanted to hear the words, not just feel the touches and taste the kisses. With the best of intentions he pushed Justin away until he was ready to tell Lance what he wanted, what he needed, what Lance wanted to hear ...

But somehow, somewhere along the way, something went wrong.

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Chapter 1
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He was running late.

Justin glanced at the alarm clock as he rushed into the bathroom. 7:15 -- they were scheduled to be at the NBC studios by 7:30 sharp, but he had spend half the night on the phone with Britney, talking about this and that and before he knew it, it was after three in the morning and there was no way he would wake up in a few hours if he didn't hang up and go to sleep now. And he was right. The limo left with the other guys fifteen minutes ago, and Justin would've gone but he hadn't even finished his cereal then, so he shoveled spoon after spoon full of milk and Cheerios into his mouth and wished fervently that he had at least tried to go to sleep earlier last night.

Last night? Try this morning. He didn't fall asleep until after four, he was sure of it.

In the bathroom he stared at himself in the mirror, his toothbrush sticking out of the corner of his mouth, and suddenly the room around him tilted dangerously. "Whoa," Justin moaned, clutching the sink with both hands. Closing his eyes, he waited for the moment to pass, but his stomach lurched and he spat the toothbrush and a mouthful of toothpaste out into the sink. His mouth tasted foamy, sticky, full of marshmallows and cotton and he couldn't spit enough to get everything out. With a hard twist of the handle, he turned on the faucet and splashed a handful of cold water into his mouth. His teeth screamed in protest, icy pain like steel shooting through him and he gagged, leaning over the sink until he was sure he would throw up, just vomit away his breakfast that he hurried to eat and he hated getting sick, it left him weak and shaky and he didn't need that, not now, not ever but sure as hell not now, not when he had to get out of here and be at the studios in what, fifteen minutes? Was it ten now? Justin didn't know, and as he rested his hot forehead against the cool counter top he didn't know how he was going to stand upright ever again. What the hell had he eaten?

Cheerios, he thought randomly. Milk. Toast? I don't think so. Sugar. Lots and lots of sugar. So thick that it sank to the bottom of the bowl and every spoonful brought up a small pile of wet sugar on the tip like a tiny shovel digging into the sandy bottom of the ocean, and it was sweet and it was good and I always eat Cheerios like that so why the hell do I feel like I'm going to die right now?

Gingerly Justin pushed himself up from the sink. Maybe this was just a flu, that thing Joey had last week which left him weak and dizzy for three days before it passed. Maybe that was it, just a little something he got because he wasn't the healthiest person alive, was he? Staying up late every night and eating too much sugar and wolfing down his food. Maybe that was all this was, a little bug, a little cold that had him reeling and maybe he should call Josh now,

dial up his cell phone and tell him he wasn't going to make the talk show today, just call in sick.

Good idea. Justin felt a little better just thinking about it, the promise of lying back down in bed fully dressed and sleeping away the rest of the day as sweet as the sugar in his cereal. He'd call Josh. He'd tell them he couldn't make it and what would they do, really? Drive back and kidnap him? Force him into a car at gunpoint and make him appear on the show? He chuckled at the image, just to prove to himself that he could.

The room spun around him drunkenly. "Jesus," Justin muttered, raising one hand to his head to stop it, stop it all, just stop it now please, just let him get off. That's it, he thought, stumbling from the room. He'd call Josh now and tell him he wasn't coming, do the show without him, there was no way in hell he was going to make it today.

From far away a dull knocking started up, a light tap that pecked into Justin's mind like a bird, picking away at whatever wasn't sick or nauseous inside. The door -- maybe it was one of the bodyguards, come to check on him. Get me a doctor, he thought, unlocking the door. Get me some pills, something to make this stop, something to end this pain --

A girl his own age stood on the other side of the door, a bored I don't want to be here today look on her round face. She wore some kind of uniform and toyed with the hem of the shirt. "I'm sorry," she stammered, glancing around at the empty hallway. "I thought everyone was gone ..."

"What --" Justin's voice cracked, and he swallowed against the lump in his throat and tried again. "What do you want?"

She pulled a large linen cart into view. It overflowed with white towels, twisted into damp shapes. "I'm ..." She sighed, thinking for a moment, and Justin thought maybe she was frowning because he looked like shit. He was about to ask her to call a doctor when she smiled brightly and said, "I'm the maid. I just need to get your towels --"

"I'm sick," Justin whispered. Leaning against the door, he grabbed his stomach as it tried to twist inside of him and closed his eyes. A cool hand touched his brow, and the girl may have said something, he wasn't sure, he couldn't really hear her anymore. God, he just felt so damn awful and if he could only get to the bed, maybe he could lie down and sleep this thing away.

"Are you okay?" the girl asked. He heard that much. When he opened his eyes everything blurred together, as if he was looking through a filmy gauze and he couldn't blink the world into focus. "Mister, are you ..."

Justin felt her hands on his shoulders and then he fell back. He hit his hip against a chair and heard the distant clatter of something -- me, he thought, it's me hitting the floor, that's what it sounds like when I fall -- and then the world went black.

Fuck, Marie thought. Pulling the linen cart into the room, she latched the door behind her and sighed as she looked down at the man collapsed on the floor. His face was contorted in a grimace of pain, his eyes clenched shut, his hands bunched into fists at his waist. David said it would be easy, didn't he? Just slip the stuff into the sugar and wait fifteen minutes for it to take effect. But look at this. This boy looks like roadkill, sprawled out at my feet, and this is supposed to be EASY? Marie didn't think so.

First of all, this wasn't some schmuck off the street. This was Justin fucking Timberlake -- where did they ever get the idea that this would work? And why was it up to her to do this? She wasn't He-Woman. How the hell was she supposed to lift this kid into the cart? Why wasn't David here again? Because two people will be suspicious, she reminded herself. Well fuck you, David, she thought, smoothing down the front of her uniform. Next time you play Merry Maid and see how you fucking like it.

But it was too late to turn back now, wasn't it? If she left him here, his friends would return and get him a doctor and the drugs would be found in his system, and then the questions would start, the police would get involved, someone somewhere would remember her face, and it would be all over, wouldn't it? Might as well carry out the plan, get the money and then see what happened.

As she kneeled down beside Justin, Marie felt a snag tear up the back of her hose. Fuck, she thought again. This just wasn't her day. Carefully she placed two fingers beneath Justin's chin to check for ... yep, there it was, slow and steady but a pulse nonetheless. So she didn't overdo it -- wouldn't that have sucked? Killed him with an overdose before she even got his ass in the cart. How do you hold a dead body for ransom?

Next she pulled up one of his eyelids. She wasn't sure what she was looking for, but they always did that in all the TV shows. But he doesn't respond so that means what, he's out cold? No shit, Sherlock. She let his eyelid close again and tugged on his arm. Jesus, she thought, falling to her knees. This boy was heavy.

For a few minutes she pulled at his arms, trying to get his shoulders off the ground, or maybe his legs, or something, some kind of leverage, but he wasn't helping in the least and she only managed to exhaust herself without getting him any closer to the linen cart. Finally she knocked the cart on its side, spilling towels and bedsheets out onto the floor. She rolled him into it, and as she yanked on the side of the cart to right it again, a phone rang. Marie froze. Oh shit, she thought randomly, and another jerk on the cart brought all four wheels on the floor again, Justin inside amid the towels like so much dirty laundry.

The phone rang again. It was the cell phone by the bed, a shrill sound that stopped Marie's heart. Don't answer it, she told herself, and then another part of her mind whispered, Like I was going to. But when it rang a third time, she wondered if it could be heard out in the hall, if someone passing could hear it, a bodyguard or another maid or someone who would wonder why Justin didn't

answer and come to investigate. So she wrapped a towel around her hand and, picking up the phone, dropped it into the toilet, cutting it off in mid-ring. For a long moment she stared at the blue water, the phone lying against the hard porcelain, before she became aware of the sound of running water. Glancing at her reflection in the mirror, she saw a wide-eyed girl, fear like a rash covering her pale face. Is that me? she thought, reaching out to shut off the water. Is this who I've become?

Fuck it. That was David's voice, the one that she heard whenever doubt clouded her judgment and she didn't know what to do. With the water off, the room seemed quiet, too quiet, and suddenly Justin was looking at her, she knew it, she felt his gaze and he was angry and pissed and livid with fury, and she whirled around, a scream rising in her throat that she managed to stifle just before it escaped.

There was no one behind her.

Back in the bedroom, the linen cart was still upright. Justin was still curled inside like a lost boy sleeping away the day, and it was now almost quarter to eight, she had to get moving, she was running late. David would be in position now, he'd be looking at his watch and wondering what the hell was taking her so long, he'd yell and scream and cuss, and it made her angry just thinking about it. She scooped up the towels from the floor and tossed them into the cart, strategically covering Justin's body. Then she tugged on the side of the cart -- damn fuck but he's HEAVY, she thought, kicking open the door to his room and struggling to get the cart over the metal doorframe. You need to go on a diet, buster. Lose some of that muscle, SOMETHING, because I can't be dragging your passed out ass all over creation, you know that, right? You know --

The door swung shut, pushing the cart over the frame and ramming it into her stomach as strong hands caught her waist. "Easy there," a deep voice said, a deep Southern voice, and did she mention it wasn't her day yet? Because when she turned around and looked into Lance Bass' wide green eyes, she knew he could see everything written plainly across her face. "Are you okay?"

She tried to remember how to speak. Your friend's in this cart, she wanted to say. I'm only borrowing him for a bit, is that okay? Does that make ME okay? Jesus Christ, how can you look at this boy and SPEAK? "Um, fine," she mumbled. "I'm fine."

Pointing at the closed door, Lance asked, "Was anyone in there?"

Not anymore, Marie thought, and she wanted to laugh. God, you're LOSING it. "No," she whispered. "He ..." He did something, what did he do? "He left when I came in. Said he was ... running late? Yeah, he was running late."

Lance frowned. "Did he say where he was going?"

NO, she wanted to scream, and to keep sane she maneuvered the cart towards the service elevator. "No," she said over her shoulder. When she wasn't looking at him, it was okay, she could pretend it was all okay. She concentrated on the elevator ahead

and ignored the fact that Lance mother-loving Bass was behind her, watching her walk away, and damn but now he was catching up with her. "I don't know where he went," she said, stopping to push the elevator's down button.

"I tried calling him --" Lance started, and then he laughed. "Well, I guess he just left without me, eh?"

"Yeah," Marie said. She stared at Lance's reflection in the shiny steel elevator door and prayed he'd take the other lift down. Don't make this harder than it already is, please.

But when the doors opened, Lance stepped around her into the elevator and took one side of the linen cart. "Let me help you," he said, and she watched in surprise as he lifted the cart up over the small space between the floor and the elevator. "This is heavy."

No shit, she thought, pushing the cart into the elevator. "I can handle it from here," she said, holding the open button. Maybe he'd take the hint and leave.

No such luck. Lance laughed softly and said, "Do you mind if I take this down to the lobby? I'm running a little late myself."

Pushing the lobby button, Marie sighed and muttered, "Aren't we all?"

* * *

The girl leaned over the side of the linen cart and stared at her own reflection in the mirrored door of the elevator. Lance didn't know if she was just bored or scared or both -- he was still waiting for the Aren't you that guy from that group question, but as the elevator hummed, the numbers above the door lighting up one by one, lower and lower, he thought maybe the question wasn't going to come. Maybe she didn't know who he was, but he doubted that seriously. She was young enough to have heard of 'N Sync -- maybe a few years old than him, not as old as Chris, surely -- and the look of fear on her face when she bumped into him coming out of Justin's room told him she knew who she was dealing with here.

And where the hell was Justin anyway? Lance didn't know -- it wasn't like him to be running this late. He probably stayed up too late the night before, like usual, talking to Britney or his mother or someone and not falling asleep until early this morning. Why couldn't it have been me? Lance wondered briefly, but he knew why. Justin had never said the words but Lance knew. Because they weren't like that. The few times they fooled around were just that, fooling around, at least to Justin. He had too many beers one time and when Lance helped him to his room he kissed Lance full on the lips, his arms slipping around Lance's neck and his tongue licking into Lance's mouth before Lance managed to realize what was happening and pushed him away. The other time was after Britney told Justin she wasn't going to play the role of his sometime girlfriend to the press, after he went and told the whole world on Rosie that finally yes, they were dating. And then Britney called him and Lance remembered it vividly, the way Justin's eyes were

red and raw from crying because she had chewed him up and spat him out, making him feel like shit for the way he treated her, and when Lance opened the door Justin had curled into his arms and hugged him tightly and asked to spend the night. Somewhere in the darkness of an anonymous hotel room Lance had tasted Justin's kisses again, a sweetness that made Lance angry and bitter because they were just convenient kisses, weren't they? Just momentary touches meant to make Justin feel better and why did Lance even put up with it? Why did he bother?

You know why, he told himself. Because you're hoping that one day it won't just be convenient or easy or okay for him, one day it will be forever, as necessary as the air he breathes and that's what you want from him, to be that needed, that loved. He knew Justin had that in him, and part of him knew that if he held out long enough, maybe Justin would see how he felt and come around, maybe Justin would need him as much as he wanted to be needed.

So Lance had called Justin first thing in the morning, because he knew when he tried calling his room last night and the phone was busy that he was going to stay up too late. And he knew that the alarm clock wouldn't be enough to wake Justin up, and he was right. The cell phone hadn't even been enough -- Lance had to walk down the hall and bang on the door until Justin answered, eyes bleary and curls askew, blinking in the bright light and asking what time it was. He knew Justin wouldn't make the limo, so he waited down in the lobby for him, intending to drive them both into the studio -- so they'd be a little late, JC would get over it -- and when Justin didn't come down, Lance tried calling his cell phone again. After four rings he got a User is out of range message, and that was strange, wasn't it? Justin was upstairs, several floors up but still in range, right?

And somehow between here and there, he missed him. Damn, he thought, fingering the phone in his pocket. He glanced at the girl beside him again, who seemed intent on pretending he wasn't there. What did I do, Justin? Lance wondered as the elevator slowed to a stop. Why can't you just tell me yes or no and stop dicking us both around? "This is my floor," he said, smiling at the girl beside him.

She looked back with wide, staring eyes. "See ya," she muttered. Was he really that scary?

He hoped not, but when he stepped towards the opening doors she pulled the linen cart out of his way, and he sighed wearily. Now he'd have to drive to the studio alone, but Justin wouldn't be the last to arrive so at least he wouldn't get the brunt of JC's anger. JC could be such a stickler for detail sometimes --

A young man pushed his way into the elevator, knocking Lance back against the linen cart. He was in his mid-twenties, and his dark brown hair hung straight to his shoulders like a curtain, hiding his chiseled face. Lance took in the torn jeans and the worn flannel shirt peeking out from beneath a battered leather jacket, and he thought he'd just ignore the fact that the man almost knocked him down because he didn't relish a fight with someone like this. With a wary glance at the girl, he started for the doors again, only to find the newcomer blocking his way. "Marie," the man snarled, pushing

the cart back until he pinned the girl to the wall. "You're late."

"I know --" she started, her eyes shifting to look at Lance.

The man turned to glare at him. "Who the fuck are you?" he asked. Up close he had a young face and burning eyes, blue and hard like a stormy sea, and Lance stepped back further, putting some distance between himself and this stranger. Who the fuck AM I? he thought wildly. Just some dude who wants to leave, trust me. Don't want any trouble, mister. Just heading for the door -- The guy pushed Lance in the chest, pushing him back against the wall. "Can't you speak? Marie, who is this?"

"Lance," the girl whispered. Marie, Lance thought. Her name is Marie and she knows who I am, doesn't she? "David, he's not --"

"So he knows," the stranger, David, said, turning to the girl, and Lance thought maybe he could squeeze past him and out into the lobby and still make it to the studio in time, but the elevator doors were closing, trapping him in here, with these people. "Where's the other one?" David asked.

The other -- Lance turned to Marie. "Where's Justin?" he asked softly. He didn't know who she was or who this guy was, or why either of them would be talking about where Justin was, but suddenly he knew Justin was in trouble, this was why he hadn't come down to the lobby, Lance hadn't missed him, this girl did something to him, he didn't know what -- "Marie?" he choked. "God, where is he?"

She looked at him guiltily and then, turning to David, said, "He doesn't know. Let him go, David." David reached into his pocket, and her voice raised an octave higher. "David, he doesn't know, that's not part of the plan --" And then there was a gun in David's hand, something small and deadly, and Marie's face went a shade paler as she tried to slide down the wall, away from them, away from everything, and Lance wanted to slide down with her because now David had the gun aimed at him and where the fuck was Justin?

"Look," Lance said, trying to remain calm. He held his hands up and away from his pockets, away from anything that might make this David guy suspicious or angry or upset. "Maybe we can just talk about this, okay? Maybe you can tell me where Justin went? Marie? Could you do that for me?" From the corner of his eye he saw her nodding, and if only David hadn't entered the picture, he could've asked her and she would've told him, he was sure of it. "Maybe we can --"

"Shut up," David growled. With the barrel of the gun he punched the button for the garage level and glared at Marie. "This is all your fault. You couldn't hurry it up, could you? And now we have to deal with him --"

"He's not --" Marie started, but David kicked the side of the linen cart with one Doc Marten boot and she bit her lip to keep from saying anything else. From inside the linen cart came an indistinct groan, and suddenly Lance knew where Justin was, why he hadn't answered his cell phone, why he wasn't in his room

anymore -- and he had no fucking clue how he was going to get them out of this.

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Chapter 2
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The hotel's garage was dingy and empty. Why shouldn't it be? Lance mused, helping Marie maneuver the linen cart out of the elevator. It wasn't even eight in the morning yet -- the place was practically deserted. David walked behind them and Lance knew the gun was still there, trained on him, sharp and deadly despite the fact that it was hidden in David's pocket. The wheels echoed dully on the hard concrete as they pushed the cart, keeping to the shadows at the back of the garage, and Lance thought out different scenarios in his mind. He could see himself bolting towards the guards at the front of the garage, out there near the sunlight and the exit and the rest of the world, but he couldn't leave Justin behind. Justin, who was lying beneath the towels, he was sure of it. He wanted to rip the linens aside and make sure he was alright -- had Marie hit him? Shot him? Poisoned him? Lance didn't know, and his heart hammered in his chest, his palms slick with sweat and worry and without thinking he leaned into the cart, brushing the towels away until he felt Justin's rough curls against his fingers.

Marie slapped his hand away. "He's fine," she hissed, glancing back at David. "Don't make this worse, please. Trust me, he's fine."

"Why should I trust you?" Lance wanted to know, but he didn't really have much of a choice, did he? "What did you do to him?"

Marie sighed. "He's just a little drugged --"

"Shut up, Marie," David growled, and Lance looked over at Marie to find her biting her lip against something she wanted to say. Say it, he thought. Say it and maybe he'll get mad at you and it'll distract him enough that I can get Justin out of here. Why did they want Justin anyway? Lance slowed down as they approached a large white van, but David rammed the gun in the back of his ribs. "Keep walking."

"I'm not --" Lance shook his head. "Okay, look. Is Justin okay? Just answer me that --"

"Yes," Marie said. She frowned at David as he unlocked the double doors at the back of the van. "He's fine. Or he will be. I promise."

"I said shut up," David warned. Throwing the doors wide, he ordered, "Get him inside."

Marie looked at Lance, a pleading expression in her eyes. "I can't lift him," she whispered. "Can you help me?"

Help you what? Lance wanted to ask. Help you kidnap him? Hello? Why should I do that? But then David sighed and thrust the gun into Marie's hands. "Hold this," he said, glaring at Lance as he dug roughly into the linen cart. Lance could imagine those hard hands on Justin's body, ignorant and rude and touching him in

places Lance didn't want to think about ... pushing David aside, Lance said, "Let me get him."

"He's heavy," Marie cautioned as Lance pulled Justin's arms up out of the linen cart. Really? he thought, offering her a sardonic smile. The muscles in his back screamed at him but he managed to lift Justin up, his head lolling to one side in a sickening way that made Lance want to cry. What did they DO to you, Justin? Jesus, you're so damn pale, and your lips so damn ruddy, and what I wouldn't GIVE to see you open your eyes, please Justin, please just open your eyes -- he backed up, pulling Justin along with him, every part of his body protesting the weight in his arms, and when David took Justin's legs Lance didn't say anything. There was nothing to say.

Together they lifted Justin into the back of the van, and then David took the gun from Marie's hands and waved it at Lance. "You, too," he said. "Get in."

Frowning at Marie, Lance climbed into the van. Inside it was dark and empty except for a few army green duffel bags scattered around, but the floor was carpeted, which was something, at least. Marie climbed in after him and rummaged through one of the bags, trying not to look at Lance as she extracted a long roll of thick electrical tape. "I'm sorry," she whispered, picked at the end of the tape. It screeched as she pulled up a long strip, and then she bit it off from the roll. "Stick out your hands."

Lance did as instructed, and Marie wrapped the tape around his wrists, over and over and over again, until Lance wondered if they'd ever get it off. When she bent down to do the same to Justin's wrists, Lance said, "Don't hurt him."

"I won't," Marie said. She tore off a piece of tape and strapped his wrists together. Lance could hear his steady breathing against the floor of the van, and he hoped whatever they used to drug him with would wear off soon. It made him feel weak and vulnerable and so out of control to see Justin just lying there like that.

Outside of the van, David barked, "Hurry it up, will you? Jesus ever-loving Christ, you're slow, woman."

Lance looked up at Marie. "Don't gag me," he said. He saw the indecision waver in her dark eyes and he flashed her his most disarming smile. "What am I going to do? I can't leave him here."

"Why not?" Marie asked. "You could scream for help --"

"And you'd hurt him," Lance countered. "I'm not going to let you do that."

Marie laughed, a shaky sound. "You're awful confident for someone whose hands are tied." Lance just grinned, and she sighed. "Fine. But the minute you start carrying on, I'm going to have to tape your mouth shut." Before Lance could answer, she jumped out of the van and David closed the doors behind her. Lance heard them lock and wondered again how he was going to get out of this, whatever this was.

Carefully, he eased over to where Justin lay stretched out on the floor and lifted his friend's head from the stale carpet. It was hard with his hands bound together, but he managed to get Justin up against him, until his head rested on Lance's chest, and Lance leaned back against the cold steel wall of the van as the engine rumbled to life beneath them. Folding his hands together, Lance rested his mouth on the top of Justin's head, the burnished curls tickling his nose, still smelling fresh and clean and slightly damp from his shower earlier. He closed his eyes tight against the images those smells called to mind. Justin, he thought, sighing. How the hell are we going to get out of this?

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The first sound Justin became aware of was a low, breathy humming that vibrated through him and in him and above him, surrounding him like the strong arms across his shoulders and making him feel impossibly safe. After the way he felt this morning, this feeling was a shock, and he lay still for a long while, hoping it wouldn't pass. There was only one other time he could recall waking up this secure, this loved, and in these arms. "Lance?" he asked, surprised at the weakness in his own voice. The humming stopped. He tried to push himself up but his wrists wouldn't move, his hands wouldn't cooperate, and he fell back against the warm chest and sighed. "Lance?" he asked again, stronger this time, and when he opened his eyes he saw that he was inside a van or a truck, some type of vehicle. Suddenly his heart skipped. What the -- "Lance?" This time fear laced his voice.

"Shh," Lance breathed softly, right into his ear, and Justin nodded. He could be quiet. He could keep it down. He could -- "Where are we?" he whispered.

"I don't know," Lance admitted. At least it was Lance, and to reassure himself, Justin leaned back and looked up at his friend. Yes, it was definitely Lance, the slight frown creasing his brow the only sign of worry about him. He glanced towards the front of the van and Justin turned to follow his gaze.

A girl sat in the passenger side seat, and beyond the windshield the sky was cloudy and gray -- daylight, but he couldn't determine how late it was, how many hours since this morning had passed, since he had gotten ... "Lance," he whispered, trying to sit up again. This time Lance raised his arms, releasing Justin from his embrace, and the world rushed at him as he sat upright, dizzying his head and churning his stomach. For the first time, he noticed the tape around his wrists, around Lance's wrists, and frowned. "I was sick --"

"You were drugged," Lance told him, and Justin nodded again. He was drugged. He'd accept that. He'd accept anything Lance told him right now, because he didn't have a freaking clue what was going on and apparently Lance did, and if Lance wasn't screaming around and throwing a fit then maybe everything was okay. So Justin would simply follow his lead. Their hands were tied -- fine. They were in the back of a van -- okay, fine. The van was moving ... "Where are we going?" he asked. Lance should know that, too.

"I don't know," Lance admitted, and now Justin's world came crumbling apart at the edges, rumpling like paper set aflame, because if Lance didn't know then how the hell was he supposed to know?

Justin cleared his throat and looked over his shoulder at the front of the van. The girl was still staring straight ahead -- she didn't know he was awake yet. "Who's she?" he asked.

Lance laughed, a short, bitter sound that scared Justin. "I don't know," he said. "I don't know, Justin, okay? I don't know." Taking a deep breath to steady himself, Lance pulled his knees to his chest and hugged them close. "Her name's Marie. The guy is David."

"The guy?" Justin didn't see anyone but the girl. Marie. Whoever she was.

"Driving," Lance said. In the dimness of the van's interior, his light eyes looked like fireflies in the night. "I think we've been kidnapped."

Kidnapped. Justin chuckled. "You're joking, right?" Kidnapped. Like that ever really happened. Like it would ever happen to him. He twisted his wrists violently, trying to break the tape, but it was strong and sticky and when it started to pull at the hair on his arms, he stopped. "Kidnapped?" he asked, and Lance nodded. Kidnapped. "Why?"

"I don't know," Lance admitted. He stared at his hands, tied together with tape, and sighed. "All I know is I came back to get you and you were gone. Marie said you had left --"

"Where did I go?" Justin asked. "I was sick -- some maid came to the door ..."

"That was Marie." Lance shrugged. "They were after you --"

"But why?" Justin frowned. Who was he that someone would try to fucking kidnap him?

Lance sighed again. "Justin, I don't know. I don't, okay? I don't."

"Okay." Justin raised his hands to his face and tried biting the tape. It didn't work, and only left a sticky residue on his lips and tongue that didn't fade away. When he looked back towards the front of the van, Marie was watching him with wide eyes, and he flashed her his most winning grin. "Hey there," he called. Lance looked up at him, frowning slightly. "You're Marie, right?"

The guy in the driver's seat glanced up into the rear-view mirror, his eyes hard beads in the reflection. "Shut up," he growled. Turning towards Marie, he slapped her thigh, a loud sound in the closed vehicle. "Marie, I told you --"

"Not to talk to them," Marie sighed, "I know." She let her gaze linger on Justin for another moment before turning away.

Kidnapped. "We're fucked," Justin whispered, and Lance

nodded. Kidnapped.

* * *

Since leaving the hotel garage, Lance had hummed through their first album completely, stopping only once when Marie glanced back at him during the bridge of "Drive Myself Crazy." He started in on their European release, getting as far as "I Want You Back" when Justin came around. Thank God, he thought, watching Justin struggle to comprehend the situation. I didn't know how I could do this alone so thank you, Lord, for letting him wake up. Thank you for letting her not kill him. Thank you for just letting him BE here with me -- I really need someone right now and I'm sure as shit glad it's him. Their first album was what, an hour long? About that. So he figured they'd been driving for almost an hour and a half, maybe a little longer. By now the guys would suspect something -- they were scheduled to appear on live television at 8:30, and knowing JC he would've been pissed but he'd go on without them, make up something about how they were out of town, or sick, or tied up ... if only he knew how right THAT one was, Lance thought bitterly. His wrists were beginning to get a little sore from the electrical tape wrapped around them.

"Lance?" Justin asked. He sat in the middle of the floor and watched Lance closely, as if he expected Lance to make sense of this whole situation for him.

I don't know anymore than you do, Lance thought, but he didn't want to say that. He knew this was hard for Justin -- hell, it was hard for him, and he had been conscious during the whole thing. He couldn't imagine waking up to it all. "What?" he asked quietly. If he spoke softly, Marie wouldn't look back at him, and if she didn't look back, David wouldn't say anything, and as long as David didn't speak, the tension in the van was thin enough that Lance could pretend it didn't exist at all. But when Justin didn't continue, Lance prompted, "Justin? What is it?"

Justin laughed. "What is it?" he asked, his voice cracking slightly. Don't lose it, Lance thought. Please Justin, I need you here. Hold it all together and stay with me, please. "I'll tell you, Lance. What the fuck is going on here?"

"Keep it down," Lance hissed. "Jesus, Justin --"

"Keep it down?" Justin asked, raising his voice. His eyes flashed in the scant light as he glared wildly around the confines of the van. Leaning into Lance's face, he whispered, "In case you weren't paying attention, we're fucking kidnapped, Lance. And you want me to keep it down?"

"I want you to stay calm," Lance said, hoping the tone of his voice would soothe Justin's nerves, even if just a little. He grabbed the front of Justin's shirt and pulled him closer. Justin's eyelashes fluttered nervously as he watched Lance's mouth move. "We've got to stay together, Justin, do you hear me? We have to stay quiet and stay alert and wait for our chance to escape, and when we get one, we have to take it without a second thought. So I need you to

stay with me, okay? Can you do that?"

"Okay," Justin whispered, nodding. He licked his lips, the light in his eyes shifting as he tried to pull himself together. "Okay. I can do that."

"Okay." Lance ran his hand over Justin's curls and smiled. "We're going to get through this," he promised.

"I know," Justin replied. He scooted over beside Lance and leaned against the side of the van. Where his thigh pressed against Lance's hip, a delicious warmth curled through Lance and he almost believed his own words. Almost.

In the quiet of the van, time stretched away into an infinite grayness where the only sounds were the steady roll of the wheels beneath them, the choppy rumble of the engine, and the rush of wind and noise when they passed another vehicle. Before long those other vehicles came fewer and farther between, and Lance suspected they were driving way out into the country somewhere, the road under them growing bumpy and rough the further they traveled. Justin scooted closer, until his side pressed against Lance's completely, and then he pulled his knees up like Lance had, hugging them close to his chest. Leaning his head on his arm, he looked at Lance and whispered, "Do you think they're going to kill us?"

"No," Lance replied. Except for the gun, he hadn't seen any other weapons, and he didn't think Marie had it in her to kill someone. David maybe, but if they were just going to kill them, wouldn't they have done it already? Lance thought so. Offering Justin a tight smile, he added, "Don't worry. I won't let them hurt you."

Justin grinned, his eyes lighting up. I hope you're thinking about the times we kissed, Lance thought, watching Justin study his face. I hope you're thinking that I'm strong right now because you're the only reason I'm holding this all together. You're the only thing that's keeping me sane right this second. "Do you think they'll hold us for ransom?" Justin asked.

Lance shrugged. He didn't know what was going on, remember? But he was the strong one today, he was going to keep Justin strong, and if that meant talking to him and getting him through this, then so be it. "I don't know," he admitted. "Maybe. You think anyone would pay it?"

"All the fans," Justin said, laughing softly. "Though I'm sure some people would pay to keep us here. The Backstreet Boys, maybe. Eminem --"

Lance laughed. "How much you think that would be worth to them?" he asked.

"Lots," Justin said. "Anything to keep our next album from hitting number one."

"But think of the publicity we'll get," Lance pointed out. He could see the headlines now once the guys informed their parents

and their friends and the police that he and Justin simply disappeared. "Sales will go through the roof, people will be selling our pictures and t-shirts and old pizza boxes on the Internet for billions of dollars, there will be Timberlake sightings all over the world like you were Elvis or something ..."

"I want to go home," Justin said suddenly, his voice quiet. Lance looked at him sharply and frowned to see the tears shining in his friend's eyes.

"I know," Lance whispered. "I do, too."

"I want to be back at the hotel," Justin continued. "I want to go home --"

"I know," Lance repeated. "Justin, believe me, I know."

Justin sighed. "Well," he said, twisting his wrists in a halfhearted attempt to free himself, "at least you're here. I don't know how I'd do it alone."

"Me either," Lance said. "At least you're here" -- Justin, you don't know how much I wanted to hear that right now. Those four little words made all of this bearable.

Best of Intentions
Chapter 3
by NSyncGrrl

The daylight faded from the windshield and the sky darkened as they drove. Justin wondered how long they had been on the road, when they'd stop for gas, when they'd stop at all, but mostly when they'd stop for gas because he was hungry again and he needed to go to the bathroom something fierce and maybe if they stopped somewhere, maybe he and Lance could escape. Maybe they could just run for it. You've been sitting here all day long, he reminded himself, hugging his knees to his chest. You woke up, ate some cereal and got sick and passed out and you're weak, you're starving, you haven't moved at ALL today and you think you can just jump out and start running if you get a chance?

Lance said he could. Lance said they had to be watchful and take the first opportunity that presented itself, and Justin wasn't going to let him down. If Lance took off, Justin would be right behind him.

Every now and then a swath of bright light would shine into the back of the van, starting at the back of Marie's seat and cutting across the far wall before disappearing through the thin seal where the doors met. Justin wished he could slip away that easily, just slide through that tiny crack and race away into the growing night.

But I'm not leaving Lance behind. No, he wouldn't do that. He couldn't. Lance, who was always there for him, always. How many times had he stumbled during rehearsal only to find Lance's strong hands on his hips? How often had he called Lance up in the middle of the night because he couldn't sleep? Lance never hung up on him, just let him talk and laughed in all the right places and didn't tell him to shut up and hang up the phone and go to sleep already like Joey did, and he didn't not answer the phone like JC, who just slept through it and let it ring and ring and ring until Justin thought he'd scream if it rang one more time. And he didn't just talk all the time like Britney did, just get on the phone and yap yap yap when Justin called her up to talk, not the other way around. And sometimes? Sometimes Lance just sat there beside him and didn't speak, didn't talk, didn't say a word, and Justin didn't feel the need to fill the silence with unnecessary noise. They just sat there together, each lost in their own thoughts, their own worlds, and Justin didn't feel alone. Lance made him feel like he didn't have to pretend to be someone he wasn't, he didn't have to be famous, or popular, or smart to be liked.

Sometimes? Sometimes he wondered why Lance didn't treat him like the others did. Sometimes he wondered if Lance liked him more than he admitted, and it was that thought that kept Justin up at night, when he was supposed to be asleep. He wondered if Lance still remembered the time he got drunk after that awards show a few months back, and Lance's hands had been so warm along his body, so strong, so real, and Justin couldn't stop himself from kissing him. He didn't want to stop, and would've pulled Lance

down to the bed on top of him if Lance hadn't pushed him away. And the one time he spent the night in Lance's bed, after that fight with Britney ... Justin still woke up with the ghost of Lance's arms around him. Lance was always there for him, always.

Like right now, Justin thought. What the hell was going on here anyway? Lance said to keep calm, so he would. He'd stay calm. So they were kidnapped. So okay, he could deal with that. As long as Lance was here with him, he could deal with that. "Lance?" he whispered in the darkness. He could feel Lance against him, could hear his steady breath, but he wanted to hear his voice, he wanted to hear his thoughts. "Talk to me. What are you doing?"

"I'm thinking," Lance replied.

"About?" Justin wanted to know. Lance sighed. Tell me, Justin prayed. Don't just say nothing, tell me what you're really thinking about. Tell me you're not trapped inside this van. Tell me in your mind you're back at the hotel taking a shower or home in Mississippi in the spring or at a club somewhere, just please tell me what you're thinking. "Lance?" Justin prompted. "What are you thinking about?"

"You," came the reply.

Justin felt a silly smile pull at his lips. "Really?" he asked. Well, no, he thought, he just said it to make you feel better, of COURSE he's thinking about you, this is LANCE, he doesn't LIE to you. Why would he lie? "Are you also thinking about how we can get away?"

"Maybe," Lance said, shrugging. "I'm thinking that I'm hungry."

"Me too," Justin said. As if to emphasize the point, his stomach growled restlessly. He had only eaten a bowlful of Cheerios all day, and he was famished. "You think they're going to starve us to death?"

Lance laughed bitterly. "God," he said, wiping his face with both hands. "If so, just shoot me now."

"Do you think we'll stop soon?" Justin asked. Shouldn't they be running out of gas right about now? "Where do you think we are?"

"Out in the country somewhere," Lance said. He stared straight ahead at the opposite wall and Justin watched the way his eyes glistened in the darkness. "The road's changed, can't you tell? It sounds different driving over it. And we haven't seen any headlights for a long time. We're miles away from everything, I think. I don't know. We could be anywhere."

Justin twisted his wrists absently, trying to work the tape loose. "No one will ever find us," he whispered.

"Don't think that," Lance replied. "We're going to be okay. We have each other, don't we?"

"Yeah." Justin frowned as the van began to slow. The crunch of gravel beneath the wheels was loud in the darkness. "Lance --"

"Shh." Lance covered Justin's hand with his, squeezing

reassuringly.

"We're stopping," Justin hissed, as if it wasn't obvious.

"I know."

Justin leaned forward, trying to see out of the windshield. A large wooden house loomed into view, its pale siding washed in the van's headlights. Dark windows stared blindly as they approached, and when the van stopped and the headlights winked out, the house seemed to disappear into the night. Marie turned around and glanced back at them. Seeing Justin, she gave him a tight smile and said, "We're home."

Whose home? Justin wondered as she climbed into the back of the van. David slammed the driver's side door as he exited. "Close your eyes," she commanded. Justin stared up at her, a blank look on his face.

"Do what?" he asked.

"Close your eyes," she said again. When he didn't obey, she sighed and turned to Lance. "Can't you tell him to listen? It'll be easier for you both if you just listen to me. Please." She ran a nervous hand through her straight hair and said, "You don't want David to come back here."

Lance nodded. "Justin, it's okay," he said, and to prove his point, he closed his eyes. Marie sighed again, relieved, and bent to tie a black bandanna around Lance's face. It was wrapped into a thick band and covered his eyes completely. As she tightened the knots keeping it in place, Lance said, "Justin, really, it's okay. See?"

Justin frowned. He didn't like the thought of being blindfolded. But if Lance said it was okay ... Marie stepped over to him and he swallowed hard. "Are you going to kill us?" he asked.

"No," Marie replied. She smiled at him as if to reassure one of them that she was telling the truth, but Justin wasn't sure if that smile was meant for him or for herself.

"Are you going to starve us?" he asked. He was really very hungry now, and he'd let her blindfold him if she'd just promise him something to eat.

"Justin," Lance sighed, and when Justin glanced at him his heart wrenched in his chest to see Lance hunched over, his hands tied, his eyes blinded. Anger flared through Justin. I'll get you for doing this to him, he thought wildly, even though his own hands were tied and there was nothing he could do. He glared at Marie before clamping his eyes shut. If nothing else you'll pay for making him this weak.

"You'll get something to eat soon," Marie said. She tied the blindfold around his head with nimble fingers, and then she helped him stand. He had to stoop over slightly to avoid hitting his head on the roof of the van, but he heard the back doors squeal as they opened and then rough hands were on his waist, helping him down to the ground. Grass crinkled beneath his shoes, and gravel scuffed

softly when he shuffled his feet.

His knees buckled as he finally stood upright, but when Lance stumbled into him, Justin kept himself steady so he would have something to lean on. "I'm right here," he whispered.

"Good," Lance whispered back. His hands touched the small of Justin's back, sturdy and strong in the darkness.

"Come on," David barked, and Marie guided them away from the van and out into the night.

* * *

"Step up," Marie instructed, watching the two blindfolded men stumble up the short run of stairs leading to the porch. "Five steps. Step, step, step, watch it!" Lance tripped on the top step and staggered into Justin, who tried to catch himself before he rammed into David's back. "I said watch it!" Marie cried. "Jesus Christ, I told you --"

"Shut up," Justin growled. Even with the blindfold covering his eyes and his hands tied, the boy had spunk. Marie couldn't imagine how she would ever stand as proud as he did if the tables were turned. "Just shut up, will you? We're doing the best we can. You don't have to be hateful --"

David slapped Justin's cheek with the back of his hand. The smack of skin on skin was loud in the night air, deafening almost, and David hissed, "You shut up, dickhead. You don't talk to her that way, do you hear me? Do you?"

"Oh God," Marie groaned. This wasn't part of the plan, was it? This stubborn streak in the boy, his friend -- none of this was part of the plan. Justin pressed his lips together until they almost disappeared, a thin bloodless line of anger, and Marie saw his hands clench into fists, and then he raised his chin haughtily, he raised his chin, what on earth was he thinking? He was tied and blindfolded and David had a gun for Christ's sake, didn't he fucking realize the position he was in? When she saw David's lip tremble in that all too familiar way he had before he completely lost it, she stepped between the two men and whispered, "David, this isn't --"

Lance spoke up, his deep voice soft and low. "You asshole," he swore, and Marie felt a sliver of fear pierce her heart at the conviction in his voice. "Touch him again and I'll kill you myself."

David laughed, a taunting sound, but Marie placed a hand on his chest and sighed. "David, stop it. Stop it now." God, it wasn't supposed to be like this, was it?

He glared at her until she had to look away. You win, she thought, biting the inside of her cheek to keep from pouting. Okay? You fucking win. So let's just get inside already and get this shit over with.

It had all been David's idea in the beginning, hadn't it? Just some shit they were talking one day when the two of them were

smoked out on weed and had they done a 'shroom or acid, too? She didn't know. She didn't think so but she never remembered anymore what they did sometimes. It was a week after her aunt died, leaving her this big ass house out in the damn sticks, an old wooden farmhouse that Marie needed like she needed a hole in her head, it was miles from civilization, back in the woods off a little country road and she didn't want this house, she wanted the money, she needed the money, and she got stuck with this rambling old house instead. She could sell it but that would take too long -- she needed the money now. God, when had things gotten this bad? She had credit cards maxed out in her name, in David's name, in her dead aunt's name, she couldn't help it if they sent them to the house, could she? She had loans for the van, for the junior college she went to, for the damn drugs David favored like candy, loans that she couldn't pay and she had no money, no job anymore, not after they tried to garnish the measly wages she made down at the deli waiting tables. And David wasn't any help -- he couldn't hold a job for more than two days before someone or something pissed him off and he never went back. So how were they supposed to make it? At least now they had a house, the electric and water paid through the next few months thanks to her aunt's foresight, but what would happen when that small nest egg ran out? What the fuck would happen then?

So she had said, just joking of course -- of course -- that they should kidnap someone, hold them for ransom, bail their asses out of debt and then hightail it out of the country, go to Mexico maybe, or Canada, somewhere they couldn't be found. Who would pay a high ransom, though? Who could afford what they wanted? Someone famous. And in the checkout line at the grocery store Marie saw the latest issue of Teen People and thought one of those boyband kids would be the perfect person to kidnap, wouldn't he? Everyone loved them, everyone -- and who would pay the ransom? The fans, if no one else. The parents, the record company, somebody. They'd raise a fucking collection fund on the Internet if nothing else. She mentioned it to David and after one too many Generation Xer films, they concocted a plan that would've made Oliver Stone proud.

But something went wrong, she mused, staring at the bleached floorboards of the porch while David unlocked the door. He led the way inside, turning on a lamp as she guided the two men into their parlor. Something went wrong and now we don't have just one boy but two, and what the fuck are we supposed to do with two? "Take them upstairs," David commanded, plopping down onto the battered couch.

Upstairs. The attic. At least that was part of the plan. "Come on," Marie whispered, taking Justin's wrists in her hand. He pulled them from her grip and she sighed wearily. A livid red mark scarred his cheek where David backhanded him, and Marie twisted her fingers together to keep from touching the welt. "Please," she sobbed, choking back tears that rose unbidden to her eyes. She didn't need this right now.

"Come on," Lance whispered, and Justin moved forward hesitantly. Oh yeah, Marie thought bitterly, taking Justin's wrists again, and this time he didn't pull away. Listen to HIM. The blind

leading the blind. But who the hell was she to him? An evil girl, drugged him and stole him away. At least Lance was listening to her. At least he understood the situation.

If only he'd explain it to her, too.

David caught her arm as she passed. "Take this," he said, thrusting the gun into her hands.

"I don't want it," she said. She hated that gun. She didn't need it.

"Take it," he persisted, and the gleam in his eye left no room for argument.

"Fine." Marie snatched the gun from him and checked the safety. How could she tell when this thing was on? She'd shoot one of the guys accidentally and then where would they be? Fucked. Tugging on Justin's wrist, she pushed him ahead of her and caught Lance's hands as well. "Come on."

There were nineteen steps leading up to the second floor -- Marie had counted them dozens of times, and the two men navigated them without too much trouble. From the landing she could see down into the main room below, and fuck David for sitting on his lazy ass and not helping her do this. "David," she called, leaning over the banister. Justin and Lance stopped, unsure of where to go, what to do. When David looked up at her, she asked, "You think you can get us some food? These boys are hungry."

"Shit," David growled, hoisting himself up. As he headed for the kitchen, Marie turned away, a satisfied smirk on her lips. We're in this together, she thought, leading the blindfolded men down the carpeted hall to a locked door at the end of the landing. Remember that, David. Who thought a kidnapping would be more fun than a bank robbery? You. So this is your show as well as mine.

The key to the door was an old antiquated skeleton key that Marie kept on a chain around her neck. She held the gun in one hand while she removed the chain with the other. When she turned it in the lock, she could hear rusty tumblers fall into place and the door pushed open slightly on its own accord. Inside an unlit stairwell led to the attic, and Marie hadn't counted these stairs. Every time she left the attic, it was in a hurry, because the creaking steps and dark passage terrified her. She could imagine falling through the stairs and breaking an ankle and crying for help but no one would hear her, and she didn't like that image one bit. "These stairs are rickety," she cautioned, guiding Justin to the first step. "Be careful."

Justin snorted, a derisive sound in the cramped darkness, and Marie wanted to push him up the damn stairs. The nerve of this boy. Ugh. No wonder David slapped the shit out of him. But then Lance was there, stepping up behind Justin, so close that Marie didn't have a chance to do something as stupid as shove Justin out of the way. Up, up, up, the stairs stretched away, and Marie followed the two men as they trudged up them. Finally Justin stopped. "There's a wall here," he said, a what now? tone in his

voice. God, he was infuriating.

"It's a door," Marie explained, pushing her way past them. The skeleton key opened this lock as well, and there was a deadbolt on the outside, a shiny new lock David bought at K-Mart and put up once they decided they'd hold their hostage up in the attic. It was nice up here, Marie reasoned as she pushed open the door and led the way inside. Unfinished, with large dormer windows so far from the ground that only a fool would jump out. It would be too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer, but it was only March so the temperature shouldn't be too drastic up here. Just in case, though, she had a huge pile of old blankets and afghans stacked on the futon mattress they tossed in one corner. It was a good thing the mattress was queen sized, since they'd picked up one more boy than anticipated. There was a small bathroom up here, a dingy tub and small sink and toilet, a cloudy mirror. A small dormitory refrigerator, stocked with milk and tea and water; a few cabinets filled with snacks and cereal and whatever she thought Justin might like to nibble on; a battered TV with a Playstation and a few random games scattered about; a stereo and some CDs. All the comforts of home, she thought as she undid the blindfolds, first Lance's, then Justin's.

"Dinner?" Lance asked. Marie thought he was taking this all in stride really well, and she was sorry he had to get caught up in the whole mess. Fuck, she thought suddenly, staring into his green eyes that sparkled like crystals. Her stomach sank to her knees. What the fuck are we doing? What the hell happens now?

Justin glanced around the room, a scowl on his face. "Are you going to take this tape off?" he asked. Damn, he was annoying.

David will tell me what to do next, Marie thought, and a little of the panic fled as quickly as it had come. Let David think about this. It was his idea. "Scissors are in the medicine cabinet," she whispered. "I'll bring your food in a little bit. There's some snacks --"

"What the fuck are we doing here?" Justin exploded, and that was unexpected. Marie got the gun up between them as he took a step closer, but when he saw her finger twitch on the trigger, he stopped. "What's going on? Can't you tell us that at least?"

"We need money," she said.

Lance laughed bitterly. "This is all about money?" he asked. Shaking his head, he said, "I can give you money. How much do you need? We don't have to go through this."

You're right, she thought, leveling the gun at Justin's chest, we don't. But when she looked into his blue sea eyes and saw the anger, the pain, the hatred curled there, she knew it was too late. There was no going back now. Fuck ... "Just please," she whispered, shifting her gaze to Lance. He was easier to look at -- there wasn't any anger in his face, no hatred, nothing evil hidden inside. He was just confused and concerned and she could understand that. She could appreciate it. "Just go along with this, okay? We won't hurt you, I promise. We won't starve you --"

"He hit me," Justin fumed, and Marie swore his cheek pinked a shade darker. "He fucking hit me, Marie. You don't think that hurt?"

"I'm sorry," she whispered, backing up to the door. She had to put some distance between herself and them, she just had to. "I promise I won't let him up here again. I'll bring your food, there's stuff to do, games and music and TV -- no cable, but you can pick up something, I'm sure. It's only until we get the money, then you're free to go. Only until then --" She felt the hallway stretch out behind her and without looking she stepped down onto the first step. "It's only 'til then."

And she slammed the door, throwing the deadbolt and turning the key and running down the stairs two at a time, terrified because Justin's blazing eyes burned in her memory, and Lance's steady stare followed her every move. What the fuck were they going to do now?

Best of Intentions
Chapter 4
by NSyncGrrl

The scissors were in the bathroom, where Marie said they would be. Lance found them behind the cloudy mirror above the sink. They were blunt children's scissors, as rusty as the metal shelves inside the cabinet, and his fingers barely fit into the handles, but he sawed at the tape between Justin's wrists with them in the hopes that they would eventually cut through the thick strapping. Justin watched the scissors intently, a slight frown on his face, and Lance knew he was angry. Hell, he was livid, and he was barely holding his rage in check. Lance wondered if he'd fly off the minute his hands were free -- he could see him now, throwing a typical Timberlake tantrum, banging on the door and jiggling the doorknob and screaming at the top of his lungs for Marie to get back up here and open this damn door now, let him out now ... Lance didn't want to see that. He wasn't happy about this whole situation but he was going to wait it out. Something was bound to happen. He just had to be prepared, he had to be ready, and he had to keep his wits about him.

Because Justin was close to losing his.

The scissors bit into Lance's fingers, leaving red welts as he cut into the tape. Justin leaned down closer, watching intently, and his shadow blocked out the single bare bulb overhead. "Justin," Lance said, "I can't see. You're in my light."

"Sorry," Justin muttered. He sighed. "Can't you hurry up?"

"I'm trying," Lance countered. "Jesus, Justin, it's not like you've got someplace else to go."

Suddenly Justin twisted his hands, trying to break the tape, but he only managed to get the scissors stuck to the adhesive. As he moved his wrists, the scissors pinched Lance's fingers. "Justin, stop it," Lance admonished. When Justin tried to untwist the tape, Lance snapped, "Justin! Dammit, stop it already, will you?"

"Lance, get it off --" Justin started, trying to twist his wrists in the opposite direction.

Lance shook his fingers free of the scissors and stepped back in disgust. "You cut it, then," he said. God, couldn't Justin see how hard this was for him? Couldn't he understand what kind of situation they were in? "Fuck, Justin, cut the damn tape yourself, okay? Because you're not helping here."

Justin bit his lower lip and studied Lance for a long moment. Lance looked away so he wouldn't have to meet that steady gaze, that what did I do now? look that Justin had perfected until Lance could just think of it and he'd apologize, because he hated to see Justin upset and he'd do anything to make him smile again. But he doesn't have to know that, Lance thought bitterly, trying to shuck the tape off of his own wrists. And he can drop this attitude

because like it or not, we're stuck here and we're stuck here together and I'm not going to put up with this. I can't. I just can't. He was strong enough as long as Justin didn't start in on this pissy act, and then he wouldn't be able to stop himself from falling for it. He wouldn't be able to stop himself from wanting to kiss away the pouts and smooth away the pain, and he didn't want Justin to know that his careless kisses meant more to Lance than he ever let on. Because what would happen then? Justin would take advantage of it and if they got out of this -- when, he corrected himself, when we get out of this, we're going to get out of it -- then Lance would be crushed when Justin simply walked away. With all of his might Lance yanked on the tape, trying to tear it, but it was resilient and didn't budge.

Finally Justin sighed and said, "Lance, don't. You're going to hurt yourself --"

"I want it off," Lance said, grimacing as he stretched the tape to its limit, but it still didn't break. "Fuck this shit."

"Stop it!" Justin cried. Lance let his hands fall back together, raw and achy but still bound, still useless. He felt a pricking in his eyes and a trembling in his lip and promised himself he wouldn't cry, not here, not now, not when Marie was coming back with dinner and Justin was standing right here ... Justin raised his arms and lowered them over Lance's head and shoulders. Pulling Lance close, he hugged him in a tight embrace, rocking back and forth slightly as if to reassure him but of what, Lance didn't know. Lance held his own arms against his chest, pressed between the two of them, keeping them apart. With his lips against Lance's ear Justin murmured, "It's going to be okay, Lance, I promise. It's going to be fine." Lance let Justin's gentle words and soft breath erase the cramped hours in the van and the naked wooden beams, the harsh light, the emptiness of the attic surrounding them. He reminded himself that at least he was alive. At least he was here, with Justin, and not with the guys and worried shitless because Justin was gone. At least he had that to be thankful for, because if he hadn't come back to the hotel and hadn't gotten mixed up in this whole affair, he honestly didn't know what he'd do or think or how he'd get through not knowing where Justin was or if he was okay. He just didn't think he could do that.

Lance pushed Justin back and wiped at his eyes roughly. "Well," he said, taking a deep breath, "let me get this tape off." With a quick glance at Justin's face, so close, so damn close, Lance ducked out of his arms before he could even think about how kissable Justin's lips were, or how flushed his cheeks looked in this stark lighting, or how his eyes sparkled and shone and danced in the sway of the bare bulb overhead. Taking the scissors again, he attacked the tape furiously, trying to ignore Justin's scent, a sharp mix of cologne and sweat and fear, trying to ignore Justin's closeness like a razor, dangerous and barely sheathed.

As Lance worked the scissors through the tape, Justin rested his head on his friend's shoulder, and that didn't help matters now, did it? No, not one bit. Lance bit his tongue to keep from saying anything but Justin's breath curled beneath his collar and tickled along his neck and if he said anything now Lance just knew his lust and desire and every damn facet of his soul would ring through in

his voice, loud and clear. So he kept quiet and didn't shrug Justin away, much as he told himself he wanted to, because who was he kidding? He liked this closeness, this sudden dependence upon him, and the fact that the others were a million miles away made this moment more meaningful, didn't it? Lance thought it did. Because they couldn't be interrupted and the guys wouldn't talk and joke and Justin wouldn't pull away -- "There," Lance said as the scissors finally sliced through the tape.

Raising his head from Lance's shoulder, Justin ripped the tape from his wrists and flinched as he tore at hair and skin. He rubbed his sore wrists vigorously and said, "Your turn. Give me the scissors."

Lance held out his hands. Taking the scissors from him, Justin began cutting into the thick tape, holding Lance's hand in his as he worked. Lance watched the open-close motion of the scissors intently, trying to take shallow breaths so he wouldn't smell Justin's sweet scent. How do you do it? he wondered as Justin cut through the tape. How do you make me feel like this? The scissors were gummy with adhesive but Justin kept going, driving them into the tape angrily. "This sucks," he breathed as he worked.

"I know," Lance sighed. He didn't have to ask what Justin meant -- everything sucked. The tape, the way it pulled at his skin, the way the scissors refused to cut it, the hunger rumbling his stomach, and did he mention the fact that they were kidnapped? That sucked, too. In fact, that sucked big time. "How much money do you think they want?" he asked.

"I don't know," Justin said softly. His hand was warm and soft against Lance's, and Lance curled his fingers around Justin's palm and squeezed gently. "How much money do you think we're worth?"

Lance laughed. "It depends on who they ask," he said. The scissors snipped the end of the adhesive and Justin ripped at the tape, pulling it away from Lance's wrists with one hand as if afraid to let go with the other. Despite the sticky residue clinging to his skin, Lance thought this was the best he'd felt all day, and maybe that had something to do with Justin's hands rubbing the life back into his wrists. His hands were strong and warm and Lance didn't want him to stop touching him ever. "If they ask our moms, they'll get any amount they want."

"If they ask your mom," Justin pointed out. With a small grin he added, "If they ask my mom, she might say just keep him."

Smiling, Lance said, "Then Britney would pay the ransom, I'm sure." He didn't want to think about it but it was the truth, wasn't it? Justin was with Britney. So this touch means nothing to him, Lance reminded himself. Just like his kisses. Keep that in mind.

But Justin shook his head. "You kidding?" he asked. "Hell, she'd pay it and then make me pay her back."

Lance raised his chin and looked into Justin's lazulite eyes. Was there something there? You're fooling yourself, he thought. Before he could stop himself, he whispered, "Then I'd pay it."

A small line furrowed Justin's brow as he studied Lance.
"Really?" he asked.

"Yeah," Lance replied. He would pay it, any price. Why lie about it?

"How much?" Justin wanted to know. When Lance didn't answer immediately, he prompted, "Lance? How much would you pay for me?"

Raising his eyebrows, Lance countered, "What do I get for my money?"

The shocked look that crossed Justin's face was worth the pounding of his heart, and Lance let his smile stretch a little wider. So you have nothing to say to THAT, do you? he thought smugly. Should he be smug? Damn straight. He had every right. He had never asked for the kisses and if Justin didn't know how they made him feel, maybe it was about time he began to clue in.

Behind them the attic door opened and Marie stepped inside the room, a large pizza box in her arms. "You guys get that tape off okay?" she asked. She had changed out of the maid's uniform and now wore an old tattered t-shirt and a pair of faded jeans. As she set the box down on the floor, Lance saw the gun stuck into the waistband of her jeans. So much for not wanting the weapon, he thought. Hadn't she said that to David?

"Fine," Justin said, clearing his throat. When he stepped out of the bathroom, Marie stepped back towards the door, her hand on the handle of the gun.

Eyeing them warily, she said, "I hope you guys like pizza. It was easier than cooking."

"Pizza's fine," Lance said, following Justin.

Marie reached behind her for the door. "Enjoy," she said.

"Yeah, right," Justin snorted, but when he opened the box and the scent of hot cheese filled the room, Lance thought maybe there were worse things they could be eating. And he was starving.

Marie left as they dove into the food, the turning of the key in the lock like a nail driven into wood.

* * *

When the pizza was gone and the box empty, Justin expected Marie to come back. He wanted her to come back -- he wanted to ask her how long they were going to be locked away in this dingy attic like a bad secret; he wanted to know who they asked to pay the ransom; he wanted to know if the note had been sent, if arrangements had been made, if they were going to be able to leave soon and go home and forget all about this nightmare already. But as the night stretched away around them and Lance busied himself with stretching the blankets out over the futon, Justin realized she wasn't coming back. He listened at the door and

didn't hear any sounds on the other side -- the dark hallway was as silent as it was empty. Turning, he watched Lance spread out an afghan across the thin mattress tossed into the corner of the room and smiled unconsciously as he watched his friend's shirt pull across the expanse of his back. They were alone -- alone. They were held hostage but they were together, weren't they? At least they had that. Sighing, Justin asked, "Do you think the windows are sealed shut? Maybe we can try them."

"Maybe we can wait until the morning, okay?" Lance asked. He pulled off his shirt and glanced over at Justin, still standing by the door. In the naked light his bare chest looked peachy and smooth and Justin wanted to touch the muscled skin. Would Lance get upset if he asked? Would Lance push him away and tell him no? Justin wasn't sure. "Right now I'm just tired," Lance was saying, and he frowned at Justin as he pulled back on his undershirt, hiding his chest from Justin's view. "Maybe things will be clearer in the morning, you know?"

"Yeah," Justin whispered. They just needed to sleep on this. Right now everything was still a whirlwind but in the morning it would be different. They would know what they had to do. Escape, Justin thought and yeah, they had to do that, but in the morning they would be able to think about everything in perspective. They'd be able to see out of the windows, see where they were, and plan out how to get out of here. As Lance unzipped his jeans, Justin turned away, but he could see Lance's reflection in the opaque windows as he stepped out of his pants, his boxer briefs a bright white in the glass, and damn but Lance had nice legs, strong and sexy... don't think that, he told himself, closing his eyes. Don't think it, don't THINK it, Justin, because you've got to sleep in the same bed with him and you know he doesn't want you lying there thinking of him and wanting to touch him but DAYum, he looks fine.

As Lance slipped beneath the heavy pile of blankets, Justin flicked the light switch, plunging the room into darkness. Outside the glassy windows a smattering of stars illuminated the night sky and the moon shone like a round platter, orange and full and suspended above the black stalks of bare trees. We're miles from anywhere, Justin thought as he slipped out of his own pants and shirt. No one knows where we are. Hell, WE don't even know where we are. Cool air prickled his arms and legs, drafted through the opening in the front of his boxers and caressed his chest. In socked feet he padded over to the mattress and crawled beneath the blankets, where he felt safe and warm despite the fact that this was a strange bed, a strange home, under strange circumstances.

Lance lay on his back, staring at the ceiling, and Justin rolled over to watch him blink. In the close darkness he was just a shadow on the other side of the bed, but the mattress was small enough that Justin's arm rested alongside Lance's body, a gentle press of flesh that made Justin fist his hand to keep from touching his friend's leg. Ducking his head against Lance's shoulder, Justin whispered, "What if we have to stay here forever?"

"Nothing is forever," Lance replied, his deep voice low and soothing.

"Nothing?" Justin wanted to know. He found that hard to believe. When Lance simply shrugged, Justin continued. "The stars are forever. The sky, and the sun, and the moon." Letting his fingers brush along Lance's hand, he added softly, "Love. That's forever."

Lance laughed and rolled away. With his back to Justin, his voice was muffled as he asked, "Is it, Justin? Is that what you tell Britney?"

"I don't love her," Justin replied, frowning. "I mean, I do, she's my friend, but we're not like that. Lance --"

"You're always on the phone with her," Lance pointed out. "You two are inseperatable when she's around. Hell, you told the world you were dating --"

Justin grinned, remembering the way she had reamed him about that one. Scooting closer to Lance, Justin rested his head against Lance's back and wrapped his fingers around Lance's elbow. His skin was so soft, so impossibly soft beneath Justin's touch. "She didn't like that too much, did she?" he whispered. She laid into him then -- who do you think you are? and we aren't dating anymore and why couldn't you admit it before until he got pissed and hung up on her. They had been dating, but he wanted to keep it under wraps, the world didn't need to know, and she just kept talking about it and dropping hints and he avoided the are you guys an item? question until he just had enough of it and he let it tear them apart. So that wasn't forever -- most days it wasn't even anything he missed very much. With Britney he had to be strong all the time, he had to be the perfect boyfriend, and heaven help them if he got pissy or angry or pouty -- she didn't like that. She didn't want that. Justin secretly believed she had to be the diva all the time, the high and mighty, the world turns around me and you better remember it one, and he was sick of it. He wanted to be bitchy sometimes. He wanted to throw a fit. He wanted to scream and shout and cry and let someone else deal with it all, let someone else hold him and kiss him and tell him everything would be alright.

Like Lance did that night the two of us fought, Justin thought, closing his eyes and pressing closer against Lance's back. His friend stiffened beneath his touch. Lance let me cry and he held me tight and he kissed me -- he held me while I slept and why can't that be forever? This feeling of safety, this closeness, this excitement coursing through his veins and thickening his loins and making him warm, making him calm, making everything right for one time during this whole crazy day. He'd like this forever. He listened as Lance's breathing evened out, and beneath his forehead Lance relaxed. "We're not dating," he whispered. "She's a friend, Lance. That's it."

Lance sighed but didn't speak. In the darkness around them the beams creaked slightly, the house settling as the wind picked up outside. It lashed the windows and rattled the panes, and Justin snuggled closer to Lance. At least he didn't pull away. Quickly Justin kissed his back, pressing his lips against the cottony t-shirt his friend wore and just breathing in the heady scent of cologne and sweat and Lance. Squeezing Lance's elbow, Justin leaned

against Lance's back, closed his eyes, and willed himself to sleep.

Best of Intentions
Chapter 5
by NSyncGrrl

"Marie."

She rolled over at the sound of her name but it was early -- too early, really, it had to be. After a night like last night she needed to sleep and she wanted to dream away the rest of the world and the fact that they had two men locked in their fucking attic, she just had to sleep that one off.

But David wouldn't let her. "Marie," he called again, and when she didn't respond this time he slapped her leg, high up on the thigh so the smack of skin was loud in the quiet bedroom. "Marie --"

"I'm up," she mumbled, pushing herself up to show him she was awake. See? she thought, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. "Christ, what time is it?"

"We're fucked." David pushed her legs aside and sat down on the edge of the bed, and when she managed to focus on his face, fear flooded her system like a splash of cold water, waking her up fully because he was scared, it was plain and clear and David was never scared and now he was, something had terrified him and what the fuck were they supposed to do now? Tossing the morning paper onto the bed, David grimaced and said, "Front page. And we haven't sent the note yet. We didn't even think of the damn cameras --"

"Cameras?" Marie asked, frowning. Cameras? What was David talking about? She picked up the paper and frowned at the blurry picture on the front page. "What --"

And then it hit her, and her heart froze in her chest like a block of ice. It was a grainy shot, poorly lit and obviously a screen grab, but it was the van, their van. It must've been taken in the hotel garage because the back doors were open and David stood to one side with his hands shoved into his coat pockets. Where the gun was, Marie remembered. She herself stood beside him, holding onto the edge of the linen cart, and Lance had his back to the camera but it was definitely him. Any teeny worth her weight in make-up and bubble gum would be able to see that. "They know," David said as Marie read the caption beneath the photo. "They don't know our names yet," he continued, "and they're not treating this as a kidnapping, but they say it's suspicious and we're wanted for questioning."

"We have to ditch the van," Marie sighed. There was nothing else to do, was there? Her mind whirled in a million directions at once. It's suspicious ... that meant they didn't know what Lance was doing in the security film -- he hadn't told his friends where he was going and they didn't know who the girl and guy with the van were and they didn't know where Justin was, so it was all very

suspicious. Marie wondered how much they'd offer for more information. Maybe enough to turn David in, her mind whispered, but she shook the thought away as she folded the paper. They were in this together -- she was in the picture, too. Tell them he held you at gunpoint ... no, they were in this together. That meant until the end.

The end. Whenever that would be.

Looking up at David with wide eyes, Marie asked, "Don't we have to ditch the van?"

"Yeah." David ran a hand nervously through his long hair and sighed. "We have to get rid of it and find another vehicle. I'm going to cut my hair --"

"Your hair?" Marie asked. God, she thought bitterly. Has it come to this? She loved David's hair. "David --"

"You'll cut it," David said in that no-nonsense tone of his that didn't leave room for further discussion. "Short, and I'll bleach it. We'll cut your hair, too. Dye it black."

Marie shook her head. "Black? No, wait --"

Gripping Marie's biceps in his viselike hands, David squeezed her arms and growled, "Marie, they know. They fucking know. And they'll see us. Hell, our picture's in the goddamn paper, for Christ's sake. You go into town for food and they'll pick you up in a heartbeat, girl. Don't you understand? Don't you realize --"

"Yeah," Marie said, trying to twist out of David's grip, but he didn't let go. Slapping his hands away, she cried, "I know, David, okay? I know. I realize and I know." Where he had held her, her arms throbbed, sore and achy. Rubbing the tenderness away, she pouted and said, "I know already. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea --"

"Well no shit, Marie!" David cried, standing. With the back of his hand he swept the bedside table clean, dumping the alarm clock, the book she was reading, the lamp, all of it onto the floor where it clattered together noisily. "No fucking shit. We've got two guys upstairs and what the fuck do we do now, huh? Let them go? Tell them we're sorry, it was all a big mistake, don't turn us in?"

"They might not," Marie said softly. Well, she didn't think Lance would. Justin, maybe. That boy was just hateful. But Lance wouldn't, not if she begged and pleaded and maybe cried a little bit, too. "Or we can drive away and unlock the door --"

"No," David replied. He kicked at the clock on the floor and something shattered inside with a small sound like glass breaking. "We aren't giving in, Marie. We're not giving up. We've come too damn far ..."

He trailed off, and Marie bit her lip to keep from crying. With guarded eyes she watched him pace the room, his brow crumpled in thought. "What are we going to do?" Marie ventured to ask. Tell me, she prayed. Tell me, David, and I'll do it. As long as you're with me, I'll do anything you say. "You want me to cut your hair?"

Should I go buy some dye?" When David didn't respond, Marie choked back a sob and asked, "David? What do you want me --"

"I'm thinking," David barked, and Marie shrank back against the pillows. Good morning to you, too, she thought bitterly. This wasn't part of the plan, was it?

* * *

When Lance woke up and rolled over to find Justin curled against him, it took everything he had to extract himself from the warm cocoon of blankets and arms. But he couldn't lie there, he couldn't look at Justin like that, sleeping and peaceful and so unaware, so innocent, so trusting -- he couldn't lie there and see those curved lashes and kinked curls and not do anything. You're only friends, he reminded himself as he stood up on the mattress and stepped over Justin's sleeping form. Friends and nothing else, nothing more, despite whatever it is YOU want and whatever it is HE plays at when he's being all snuggly and kissy and what does he think when he's doing that shit anyway? What does he think I'M thinking? Lance didn't know. He couldn't imagine what Justin thought when they kissed. He kissed me last night, Lance thought, making his way through the chilly attic room to the small bathroom. Just a peck on the back but it was a kiss, his lips on me, and what was he thinking then?

Did he really want to know?

Being as quiet as he could, Lance washed up in the bathroom, wiping down his arms and face and studying himself in the mirror. His eyes were a little bloodshot, his chin a little scraggly, his hair disheveled and thick as it stuck out around his head. Running water into the tiny sink, he splashed his hair and smoothed down the errant strands. You look good, he told himself as he dried his face with a threadbare towel, for someone who's been abducted.

Out in the main room, a long counter lined one wall. Wooden cabinets flanked the countertop, their hinges protesting loudly when Lance opened the doors. Last night had been too much and he hadn't taken time to check out his surroundings -- he just wanted to sleep and maybe everything would look brighter by the light of day. Now he found that the cabinets were well stocked, their shelves filled with boxes of cereal, bags of chips and pretzels, bottles of soda -- they looked as if they belonged in a college dormitory, not up in the attic of an old decrepit house. Someone did their research, it seemed, because here was Justin's favorite cereal, bowls set aside to be used when he wanted something to eat, spoons and cups and napkins and salsa for the chips, milk in the small fridge, bottled water and canned drinks and iced tea, of all things. Iced tea, and sweet at that, Lance found when he poured himself a cup. Working quietly, he filled two bowls to almost overflowing with cereal. Setting one bowl aside, he poured milk into the other and made his way to the battered television Marie had pointed out the night before. No cable, she said. Well, Lance thought, clicking the TV on, let's see what we can pick up. As the picture slowly came to life, he sat down on the floor, the bowl of cereal in his hands.

He kept the volume down until he could barely hear the sizzle of snow on the screen. Then he flipped through the channels, but the only one he found that had any picture at all was a local station playing a run of cartoons this early in the morning. Just what he wanted to see. No news, no special reports, no we interrupt this broadcast ... but in all honesty, who was he kidding? The guys probably hadn't even noticed they were gone yet. Well, JC would be angry about the interview, but he would've lied, made up something to cover their absence. And Joey would've said they just decided to take a small sabbatical, so what if they didn't tell anyone? They were fine and would be back soon. Chris would be the only one who would think to call their parents.

And when Mrs. Bass was asked if Lance was home and he wasn't, then the police would be called.

By that time, what? The poison Marie used on Justin would be long gone. Did she flush it down the toilet? Did he ingest it all? How had she given it to him in the first place? And what had she used exactly? Lance didn't know, but there seemed to be no ill effects, and when he looked over at Justin, still sleeping beneath the mountain of blankets and afghans and quilts, he wondered if the stuff was out of his system yet. He hoped so. He didn't think Marie knew what she was doing and he thought maybe the majority of this whole scheme was David's plot anyway, she was just a puppet on his string, but if she hurt Justin ... well, that would just be the last straw. He couldn't deal with that. He wouldn't deal with it. He thought he could handle most anything as long as Justin was okay.

Stirring his cereal into the milk, he ate a spoonful and turned his attention to the TV, but he wasn't really paying attention to it. Out of the corner of his eye he still watched Justin, and before long he felt a steady, unblinking gaze on him. Turning, he saw those piercing blue eyes, the rumpled curls, and he choked down the mouthful of cereal stuck in his throat. "Hey," Justin mumbled, burrowing deeper into the blankets.

"Hey yourself," Lance replied. God, he thought, watching Justin stand on the mattress and stretch languidly, you just don't know what that does to me, seeing you like this. As he reached for the ceiling, Justin's shirt rode up slightly, exposing a sliver of pale skin above his boxers. Lance forced himself to look away, concentrate on the TV, ignore that glimpse of smooth flesh and the leonine roar that escaped Justin's throat and remind himself they were locked in this attic together, he had to remember that. He didn't know how long they would be trapped here but he couldn't let his emotions and feelings and lust get the best of him. Whatever happened, he wanted Justin as a friend -- he needed that. So he could reign in his desires and tell himself he didn't want more and pretend that Justin's pretty pout didn't move him like it did. Diving into his cereal to distract himself, Lance said, "Breakfast's on the counter."

Shuffling across the room, Justin picked at the cereal in the bowl and asked, "Do we have any milk?"

"In the fridge." Lance could hear Justin rummaging around in the small refrigerator. Then Justin plopped down beside him, shoveling cereal into his mouth, and Lance watched his jaw as he

chewed. "Did you sleep well?" he asked softly.

Justin shrugged, glancing from the TV to Lance and back again. "Alright," he admitted. Quietly he added, "I like sleeping with you."

Now what's THAT supposed to mean? Lance wondered. "Well," he said, because what else could he say? He finished his cereal and drank down the milk remaining in the bowl, all too aware of Justin watching him swallow. Then he leaned back and propped himself up on his hands, and concentrated on Pokémon or Digimon or whatever it was they were watching through the blizzard of static on the TV. When Justin finally looked away, Lance let himself study his friend. In the early morning light his skin looked tawny, his arms fuzzy with smooth, downy hair, and his curls askew and bushy. The curve of his spine, each individual nub barely visible in a bony arch beneath his t-shirt ... it was all Lance could do not to run a hand down Justin's back. This is going to be hard, Lance told himself. Sleeping in the same bed, spending every waking minute together, no one else to talk to, no one else to see, nothing to do but watch a snowy TV and play video games and just look at each other ... no one else to talk to, Lance mused. Something in that phrase struck an odd chord within him, vibrating something he wasn't sure about, something he didn't quite remember.

Changing the subject, Justin asked, "Have you checked the windows yet?"

"I just woke up," Lance pointed out. He already knew it would be futile -- he couldn't imagine jumping from this height but he didn't want to say that to Justin. He wasn't going to crush his only hope. "I'll look at them in a little bit, okay?"

Nodding, Justin said, "I don't like this TV. The picture sucks."

Lance sighed. "I know," he said.

"This cereal is soggy," Justin added. He stirred the contents of the bowl, frowning.

"Justin --" Lance noticed the way his friend's lower lip trembled slightly, and he sighed again. He's scared, Lance reminded himself, and this time he did reach out and touch Justin's back, his skin warm beneath the thin cotton t-shirt he wore. Rubbing a lazy circle around Justin's shoulder blades, Lance smiled sadly and said, "Oh God, Justin, I know this is hard. I'm not thrilled about it, either. Hell, they weren't even after me -- I just got caught up in the whole affair." Sitting up, he draped his arm around Justin's shoulders and rested his head on his friend's back. "At least we're here together. At least you don't have to do this alone, you know?"

"I know," Justin whispered. He set down the bowl of cereal and buried his head in his hands. "I just want this to be over with, Lance. Is that too much to ask? I just want to go home."

"Me too," Lance admitted. Cautiously he eased his arms around Justin's waist, and when Justin didn't pull away, he dared to hug Justin against him, a gentle embrace that yearned to be so much more but Lance wouldn't let it. He wouldn't think that way. He wouldn't.

Justin sighed. "If only we could call someone ..."

No one else to talk to ... Shit, Lance thought. Yesterday morning he sat in the hotel lobby, waiting for Justin to come down, and when 7:30 rolled around and he hadn't shown up, what did Lance do? Called him on his cell phone. Which he didn't answer. So Lance had, what? Turned off his own phone and pocketed it, got into the elevator, went upstairs. And ran into Marie, and David, and got kidnapped along the way ...

I put my own phone in my coat pocket, Lance remembered. As he stood, Justin looked up at him. "Lance?"

In my pocket ... Lance had set his clothes on the floor last night, at the end of the mattress, after he undressed. His jeans, his button down shirt, his blazer jacket. Crossing the room, he dug into the pocket of the jacket, growing frantic for a moment when he couldn't feel anything but silky lining. And then ... "Jesus," he whispered, extracting his cell phone. Why hadn't he thought of it before? Like yesterday in the van? Or last night?

When he held up the phone, Justin laughed. "You're joking," he said, his smile lighting up the small room. "Lance, why didn't you say anything? Like Justin, I have a phone?"

"I forgot about it," he admitted. He flipped open the phone and pressed the power button. Please, he prayed. Please be fully charged despite the fact that I didn't plug you in last night. I didn't have you on all day long so please work for me now, okay? Is that too much to ask? Just please work for me now. The LED display lit up and Lance let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. "It works," he breathed.

"Thank you, Lord," Justin whispered. He pushed himself up from the floor and hurried over to where Lance sat on the edge of the mattress. Sitting down beside him, Justin leaned against Lance's arm, his hand on the mattress behind Lance, his entire body pressing against him in a maddening way that made the fact that the phone worked pale in comparison to the warm touch. "Call Josh. Or Joey. Or Chris. Or 911. Call somebody."

"Hold on," Lance said. He pressed the talk button and placed the phone to his ear. "It's nothing but static," he sighed. Fuck. He knew it was too good to be true.

Justin frowned. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Static," Lance said again. He thumbed through various channels but all he heard was a shrill white noise through the receiver. "We're too far out for it to work."

"Fuck." Justin's hand found its way around Lance's waist, and then he was hugging him tightly, burying his head into Lance's chest and he smelled so good, the scent of his cologne still lingering around him, his hair still clean, faintly perfumed with whatever shampoo he used the day before. "Lance, this sucks."

THIS doesn't, Lance corrected mentally, easing an arm around Justin. Our being stuck here sucks and the fact that the phone

doesn't work sucks, and there's no cable and THAT sucks, but this doesn't suck, Justin, this holding you, this sudden closeness. This doesn't suck at ALL.

"What do we do now?" Justin wanted to know. His voice was muffled and his breath hot against Lance's chest.

"We wait," Lance replied, turning off the phone. No use wasting the battery. He slipped it back into his pocket and held Justin close.

Best of Intentions
Chapter 6
by NSyncGrrl

The windows were painted shut. Lance squatted in front of one of the large dormer windows, his arms leaning on the sill, and rested his head in his hands. Painted. Shut. As in not opening any time soon. As in painted. Shut.

He didn't want to tell Justin that.

Justin, who was sitting in front of the TV dressed only in his jeans and the t-shirt he slept in, looking so damn adorable in the reflection on the window pane. Justin, who was yelling at the stupid video game he was playing because he couldn't get past the first level and it was pissing him off. At least he's taking out his frustrations, Lance thought. He didn't like the despair and desperation he had seen in Justin's eyes after they discovered his cell phone wouldn't work. At least that wasn't there anymore. It had been replaced with anger because Justin couldn't seem to shoot the T-Rex with the pistols and he couldn't remember the weapons code for the first Tomb Raider game, and Lance told him to put in another game, stop playing that one, it was getting him riled up and Justin told him to leave him alone so Lance took him up on that one, didn't he?

Since then he had ignored Justin and his yelling and his ranting and his Damn you, Lara and Fuck you, raptor ass shouts. He took inventory of what all they had in the cabinets, and the toiletries he found in the bathroom, and the cold stuff in the fridge. He paced the tiny room until he knew it was thirty-seven steps one way, forty-two the other. The wall with the door was painted an ecru that might have at one time been white, but it was yellowed and peeling now. The wall that the bathroom was cut into was brick. The other two walls were naked wood and that's where the windows were, five in all -- two directly across from the wooden door, three on the adjacent wall.

Then he concentrated on getting the windows open. Only to find they were painted shut.

Behind him, Justin cursed and threw the controller at the TV. Lance glanced back and watched his friend fume. "Having problems?" Lance asked. He didn't think Justin wanted to know just how big their problems were.

"Fuck this," Justin pouted. He kicked at the Playstation to turn it off and then twisted the knob on the TV so hard, Lance was afraid it would pop off in his hand. "This fucking sucks, Lance."

"Tell me again," Lance muttered, turning back to the window. He stared at the thick white ridge between the sill and the pane, where there should by all rights be a thin crack but no, there was only paint. And more paint. Dried and rubbery and too stubborn to break apart when he tried opening the window.

Justin threw himself down on the mattress and buried his face in his pillow. Lance spared him another glance and then pushed himself away from the window. In the bathroom cabinet he found the scissors they had used to cut the tape from their wrists, the dull blades still gummed from the adhesive. Back at the window, he was all too aware of Justin's gaze on his back as he sawed at the paint with the scissors, trying to cut through the thick latex, but to no avail. Finally he leaned his forehead against the cold glass and stared outside. There was a small roof directly below the window, just about four feet wide, and then green grass sloped away from the house, a steep incline that ended in a rocky ravine thick with trees and shrubs. Lance didn't favor jumping from the roof only to slide down that hill and land in the muddy creek below, breaking his legs in the process. So he might as well give up on the windows -- on this side of the room at least.

As he crossed to the two windows on the other wall, Justin asked, "What are you doing?"

"Checking the windows," Lance replied. He felt Justin's gaze on his legs when he bent over, his jeans pulling along the back of his thigh like a second skin. These windows were painted shut as well, and when Lance ran the scissors down the paint, the blunt edge left a gray mark but that was it. Placing his head against the glass, he saw that the fall from this side of the house was unbroken -- just three stories straight down, no roof, no trees, nothing but that slope again, only here it wasn't grassy at all but ragged with stones that would cut and bite and fuck but why should he bother with the windows at all? They couldn't escape from here, not unless they grew wings, and Lance didn't see that happening any time soon. "Fuck," he muttered.

"That bad, eh?" Justin asked. He rolled onto his back, crossing his hands beneath his head as he watched Lance stab at the wooden wall with the scissors.

Lance carved a short line into the wall and laughed. The damn scissors cut into this soft wood but couldn't break a seal of paint? Go figure, he thought, setting the scissors on the window sill. "I think we shouldn't rely on the windows as a means of escape," Lance said, nodding sagely.

Justin sighed. "Fuck," he whispered. Because he had nothing else to do, Lance laid down beside Justin, who turned and looked at him closely. "So what do you think we should do?" he asked.

Lance shrugged. Give up, he wanted to say, but he couldn't do that, not to Justin. "I don't know," he said softly.

Justin's fingers curled around his until he held Lance's hand in both of his. "How much of a ransom do you think they're looking for?"

"I don't know," Lance said again. He liked the feel of Justin's hands on his.

"Well," Justin said, sighing, "who do you think they'll send it to?"

"What, the ransom note?" Lance shrugged again. "I don't know."

Justin squeezed his hand. "I didn't say do you know, Lance. I said who do you think. I'm just trying to make conversation." Pouting slightly, he added, "There's nothing else to do. Just talk to me, okay? God, Lance --"

"Okay," Lance interrupted. "Fine. I don't know who they'll send it to, Justin. I can't even imagine who they'd think would pay to get us back."

"Maybe JC?" Justin suggested. Laughing, he said, "He'd pay it just to kick our asses for not showing up yesterday."

Lance laughed at that, and Justin curled against him, resting his head on the pillow beside Lance's own. "I don't think they'd send the letter to JC," Lance said. Justin was close, so close, so damn close ... his breath tickled Lance's cheek and his fingers entwined with Lance's own as Lance swallowed thickly. "Maybe," he started, but his voice faltered and damn Justin for doing this to him. Damn him. Clearing his throat, he tried again. "Maybe they'll send it to Johnny."

Justin didn't reply. Lance knew he was watching him, he just knew it, and when he turned he found himself staring into those deep eyes and wanting to drown. Two seconds before Justin leaned closer, Lance knew what was coming. And he couldn't find the strength to pull himself away before Justin's lips brushed against his with the softest of kisses.

"Justin --" Lance cautioned before he was silenced with another kiss, this one more insistent, more demanding. Justin squeezed his hand reassuringly, and his other hand caressed Lance's cheek as his lips pressed against Lance's own. Like a dying man gasping for breath Lance opened his mouth, and Justin licked between his lips, tasting sweet and sugary from his cereal earlier that morning. "Justin, no --"

"Why not?" Justin breathed. "No one's here, Lance. No one knows ..."

Lance shook his hand free from Justin's and pushed his friend away. That was the point, wasn't it? No one knows ... These were just more of Justin's careless kisses, his convenient love, his right here, right now gratification. Lance didn't want that. He wouldn't put up with it. When Justin tried to snuggle closer, Lance shoved him back. "I said no."

Justin's lip trembled, and fuck that, fuck his little boy act that he knew did horrible things to Lance. Fuck it all. "But why --"

Without answering Lance rolled off of the mattress and stormed across the room. Eighteen long strides later, he slammed the bathroom door, locking it before sinking to the floor. He leaned back against the closed door and pulled his knees to his chest. Fuck, Justin, he thought, crossing his arms on top of his knees and burying his head in his hands. Can't you understand that I don't want you just right now? That I want you forever? He promised

himself he wouldn't cry. He would be strong -- for both of them, if necessary. He'd have to be.

* * *

Marie ran her hands through her newly dyed locks and frowned at the person looking back at her in the mirror. That girl wasn't her -- that girl with the black hair chopped to her chin, her skin pale and wan, her eyes large dark circles eclipsing the rest of her face. That couldn't be her. She wished David was here to reassure her that yes, that girl with the pansy eyes like bruises, that girl staring back at her from the mirror, that girl was herself. But David was in town, getting rid of the van and finding something else for them to drive, and she wasn't supposed to know the details so she didn't. She stayed behind and dyed her hair and cut the ends off and now she didn't recognize herself, and when was he coming back? How long did it take to ditch one vehicle and steal another?

Out in the living room, she clicked on the TV and froze when she saw 'N Sync fill the large screen. It was footage from the Billboard Awards show late last year, and the announcer was talking about how big their album is, how they're supposed to be in the studio working on their next one, and how two of the band's members, James Lance Bass and Justin Randall Timberlake, have suddenly disappeared. I know where they are, Marie thought, suppressing a giggle as she sat down on the coffee table. The image on the TV changed, and a policeman stood at a podium, at a press conference of sorts. Behind the cop, the remaining three members of the group stood with wild hair and bloodshot eyes. They didn't even pretend to smile when the camera panned across them -- JC had a frantic look about him, and Joey's eyes were so sad and full of pain that Marie almost choked, and Chris looked downright evil, as if he could see her sitting here and he knew his friends were upstairs, and the only thing keeping him from reaching through the screen to shake the truth from her was the policeman in front of him, talking to the press and answering the same questions over and over again. "We found a substance ..." the cop was saying, and Marie groaned.

Fuck, she thought, clicking off the TV. Should've flushed that damn sugar down the toilet, dumped it in the sink, SOMETHING, instead of just leaving it out there for anyone to find. She'd hear it from David now. But what could the police possibly learn from it anyway? It was a prescription drug, something she found in the bathroom medicine cabinet after her aunt died, blood pressure pills that surely hundreds of people took every day. Fifteen pills were left in the bottle, and she crushed them up until the grains were as fine as sugar, so there were no fingerprints on them, no discriminating features. It wasn't an illegal drug. It wasn't even an unusual drug, just an MAO inhibitor or something like that for blood pressure. Not uncommon at all.

So it was odd that it was in the sugar. So what? They'd never trace it to her. They couldn't -- the prescription had been filled months ago, when her aunt was still alive, and who's to say she didn't finish the pills on her own? Who's to say that Marie was the one who crushed them up and stuck them in the sugar bowl for

Justin to eat? Marie didn't even have the bottle anymore -- she threw it out when she emptied it and who knew where it was now?

The crunch of tires on gravel cut into her thoughts, and Marie raced to the window, her heart pounding in her throat. They know, her mind whispered. They know, CHRIS knows, he saw you that morning, didn't he? You were dressed as a maid but he saw you and he didn't remember until he saw the security camera footage and now he knows it was you and he hates himself because he didn't stop you, like he could've even KNOWN then --

But when she pulled back the curtain it was only David, driving an old battered Toyota the color of dirt, and she cursed herself for letting her imagination run wild. As he came into the house, she ran to him and sighed. "Oh Jesus, David, they know, they found the pills and they know --"

"Calm down," David said, frowning at her, and Marie took a deep breath to do just that. Calm down, okay, she could do that. "It's just blood pressure medication, Marie. A million people take it every day. They don't know it's us."

"You're right," Marie said, relieved. David was right. Seeing the bag he carried, she asked, "What's that?"

"Dinner," he said. He pulled out two long hoagies, wrapped in white deli paper, and handed them to Marie. "Go feed our friends."

Taking the offered sandwiches, Marie asked, "David? What did you do with the van?"

"Got rid of it," David replied. He pulled two more sandwiches from the bag and set them on the coffee table. Marie frowned as he sat down on the couch -- he looked like a different person now with the short hair that stuck up from his head in uneven blonde spikes. This wasn't the David she knew, the man with a quick temper and harsh words but whose hands and lips were soft when they touched her. This was a different man, a harder man, carved of steel or stone and not soft, not tender at all. Glancing up at her, he asked, "What?"

"I'm scared," she whispered. "David, this isn't us. I'm not me anymore, you aren't you --"

He sighed. "Marie, just feed them, okay?"

Marie nodded. "Did you mail the letter?" She meant the ransom note. They had typed it up on the computer, printed it out in Times New Roman and folded it into an envelope while wearing latex gloves Marie stole from the drug store. It was a page long, just a quick note saying they had the guys from 'N Sync and they wanted a quarter of a million dollars for their return, and because they didn't know what else to do, Marie suggested they mail it to the Washington Post. The disappearance happened in DC; the police and reporters there would be expecting the note to show up eventually. And it would make the paper -- that was the big thing. It would be in print and all of the other papers around the world would pick it up and the outcry would be fanatical, someone would have to pay the ransom, they'd have to. The plan was to mail the

letter from within DC so that the postmark wouldn't be a clue to their location, but they had forgotten to mail it yesterday after they left the hotel. So David said he'd drive as far as he could and then he'd drop it off, but with that crappy car outside Marie didn't think he'd get very far. As he unwrapped his sandwich, she asked, "David?"

"Yeah, I mailed it," he said, biting into his hoagie. "Go feed them, Marie. We'll talk about it later, okay?"

"Why not now?" Marie wanted to know. David was hiding things from her now, wasn't he? He wasn't telling her things she needed to know, like where the van was, or where he mailed the letter from, or what he did when he was in town. He wasn't telling her any of that.

David shrugged. "Because you don't need to know right now."

Marie sighed. Well then, that's all she was going to get, wasn't it?

* * *

He hates me, Justin thought, staring at the wooden beams stretching above him. Lance had been in the bathroom now for how long? Justin didn't know. Fifteen minutes, maybe twenty, maybe an hour. Without anyone else in the room with him, time lost all meaning. He wasn't sure if it was even moving forward anymore -- maybe time was standing still, or slipping backwards, and maybe it was yesterday again, or tomorrow already, he didn't know. He wouldn't know until Lance opened the door and came back into the room.

But he wasn't going to do that, was he? No. Because somehow Justin managed to piss him off. Was it the kisses? Justin didn't know. He couldn't imagine it was because they had kissed before, hadn't they? That time he was drunk, and Lance pushed him away. And that time Britney pissed him off, when he came to Lance because he was sick and tired of being the one in charge, the one in the spotlight, the one who was strong when he wasn't, not really. He didn't want to be strong. He wanted someone to take care of him and hold him and let him just cry out all of his frustrations, and Lance did that. So why wouldn't he do it this time? Justin needed him now, more than ever, and Lance just pushed him away again.

Justin couldn't figure out why.

He knew Lance liked him -- how could he not see that? Lance didn't hide it very well. It was in the way he watched Justin as if biding his time, waiting for an opening. And Justin thought he gave him that opening, every time they were together. He waited. He flirted with Lance to show that he was interested. He tore down the walls he built around his heart and soul, the walls the cameras saw. He threw away the image of that cocky, self-confident man who was growing up in the public eye and let Lance see the frightened boy he was inside, begging to be held and loved and kept safe. And

Lance never once took the bait. He'd let Justin touch him innocently, he'd let him smile and wink and flirt, and every once in a while he'd let Justin kiss him or hug him or hold him a second longer than necessary, and then he'd push him away.

Why?

Maybe it was Britney. Maybe Lance thought they were together, but hadn't Justin told him they were just friends? Didn't he believe that? Hell, even Britney knew how he felt about Lance, and she spent too many hours on the phone trying to convince him to just tell Lance how he felt but he couldn't. He just couldn't. He tried showing him with kisses and touches and every single time Lance said no. He didn't say I don't want you, he didn't say Justin, I'm not that way, or even I just want to be friends, but simply no.

Maybe it was the others. Whenever they were with the group, there was an unspoken dynamic, and Justin was at the center of it. He didn't want to be, but he was. Because he was the youngest, and the girls liked him, and he always talked too damn much in the interviews and always sang lead on all the songs. So up went the walls, painted with the façade of Justin Timberlake, superstar. And maybe Lance didn't like that persona. Maybe Lance really liked the person inside those walls, the scared little boy who didn't want to grow up because he had never really had a chance to be a kid yet. Maybe it made him mad when Justin pretended to be that superstar and he blamed the others for it.

But the others weren't here, were they? No. And Lance was still mad at him. So maybe he thought Justin needed to be stronger. He could do that, if Lance wanted it from him. Maybe he wanted Justin to come up with a solution to this problem -- maybe he wanted to lean on Justin for once. Justin didn't know how he'd carry both of them but if he had to, he would. For Lance. Justin would do it if Lance asked him to.

If he'd only open the bathroom door.

Best of Intentions
Chapter 7
by NSyncGrrl

When the key turned in the lock, Justin pushed himself up and hoped it was Lance opening the bathroom door, even though he knew it wasn't. It was Marie, her hair chopped short now and dyed a hideous black, and as he watched her lock the door behind her, he wondered what she would do if he just walked over there one of these times and pushed her out of the way. Walk through that door and continue down the stairs and out to that van and just drive away. He could do that. What was stopping him?

Lance, he reminded himself, glancing at the bathroom door, still closed like an accusation. He couldn't leave Lance behind, even to go and get help. He wouldn't. Marie looked around the small room, juggling two large subs wrapped in deli paper cradled in her arms. "Where's Lance?" she asked. No hello, Justin. No nice to see you today. Just where's Lance?

Justin stood up and pointed at the bathroom door. "In there," he said, coming closer. He noticed the gun shoved into the waistband of her jeans and wondered what she would do if he just grabbed it. Would she apologize for this whole affair? Let them both leave without further incident? He didn't know. Pointing at her head, he asked, "What's with the black?"

She sighed. Setting the sandwiches down on the counter top, she shrugged and said, "You know they know."

"Know what?" Justin asked. He leaned back against the counter and studied her. Was that fear he saw in her eyes? Who knew? Knew what?

"Your friends," she whispered, picking at the paper wrapping on one of the sandwiches. "The press, the police. They have a tape of us leaving the hotel."

Hope blossomed within Justin's chest. "So they know who you are?" he asked, excitement lacing his voice. "They know where we are?"

Marie laughed. "Don't get your hopes up," she said. She turned and leaned against the counter beside him, as if they were the best of friends and this was just another day spent together in her kitchen, shooting the shit and talking about old times. Only this wasn't a kitchen, it was an attic, and Justin wasn't here because he wanted to be. "They don't know much at this point," she explained. "Once they get the note, then they'll know. Then they'll be able to send us the money and we'll let you guys go and ..." She shrugged. "Then it'll be over."

Justin stared at the gun at Marie's waist. The handle rested against the flat of her stomach, her shirt bunching slightly behind the dull metal. "Do you really think it'll all end that easily?" he asked, but his voice sounded distant to his own ears. The gun ...

Shrugging again, Marie said, "Hopefully." She glanced at the bathroom door. "How long is he going to be in there?"

"He's mad at me," Justin admitted, and before Marie could ask why, he reached for the gun. The handle was warm and lightweight in his hand, and the barrel pulled free from her jeans easily -- almost too easily. The look of surprise that crossed her face was worth the terror pounding through his blood, though, definitely worth that. Suddenly he felt giddy and high and forget that he didn't know how to click the safety off, now he had the gun. Now he was the one in control. Leveling the barrel at her, Justin held the gun steady in both hands and tried to keep his voice from shaking as he said, "Well, this changes things, doesn't it?"

"Fuck," Marie whispered. She backed away slightly, her eyes trained on the gun aimed at her. At her -- Justin had it aimed at her. "Justin, this isn't --"

"Isn't what?" he asked, and yes, his voice was a little louder than it needed to be in this tiny attic room, wasn't it? He didn't care. "Isn't what, Marie? This isn't part of the plan? Give me the key."

Marie swallowed, a dry click audible between them. "No," she said.

Now that was unexpected. Justin blinked in surprise. "No?" he asked. He had the gun, didn't she see that? So she had to give him the key ... she just had to, didn't she? "Marie --"

She reached out and grabbed the gun's barrel with her hand, a bold move Justin didn't anticipate, and when she twisted, the gun almost came free from his hands. Almost. But then he tightened his grip and tried to pull away. How dare she grab the gun from him! How dare she --

Marie leaned against him, trying to push him away, trying to get the gun loose. As she backed into him, struggling with the gun, he leaned over, wrestling to keep his grip on the weapon. "Marie," he snarled, frowning. This wasn't right, this courage in her, this sudden ferocity, not when he was the one who wanted the gun.

"Give it back," she hissed through clenched teeth, digging her nails into the soft flesh of his hands. "Justin, give it back. Give it --"

The bathroom door opened, and Justin looked up to see Lance watching them fight over the gun, anguish and horror painted across his face. "You two stop it," he said in disgust. "Justin, let go of the gun."

"But --" Justin started. Marie stepped on his socked foot, her sneaker crushing his toes until he stumbled away. "Fuck," he growled, and as she shoved the gun into her jeans again he pushed her into the countertop. "You bitch --"

"Stop it!" Lance cried again, stepping between them. "Jesus, Justin, do you want her to have David come up here? Do you want to explain to him why you two got in a fight?" Justin bit his lip to keep from saying anything, but he glared at Marie over Lance's

shoulder as she straightened her shirt and ran a shaky hand through her dyed hair. Lowering his voice, Lance said, "She's got the gun now. Just let this go."

"I was trying to help," Justin muttered, unable to meet Lance's steady gaze. He watched Marie as she circled around them warily, heading for the door. Part of him considered lunging at her, just to make her jump, but the anger in Lance's eyes -- the anger at him -- that was too much to bear. He didn't want the damn sandwiches now. He didn't want the gun, and his sudden courage faded as quickly as it had bloomed. He just wanted to lie down and pretend he was a million miles away from here, someplace where Lance wasn't mad at him and he wasn't kept locked away like a dirty secret. Someplace safe. That's where he wanted to be.

When Marie locked the door behind herself, Lance asked softly, "What was that all about?"

"I was only trying to help," Justin said again. He felt an ignoble pout begin to pull at his lips but he couldn't stop it. Tears pricked his eyes and he just wanted this all to go away -- was that too much to ask for? Crossing his arms in front of his chest, he turned away and sighed. "I thought we could escape --"

Lance laughed, a scary sound so out of place in this situation. What was there to laugh about? "Justin, don't you get it?" he asked, and Justin shook his head because no, he didn't get it. He had the gun and Lance told him to let go and he didn't know why. He couldn't even begin to fathom why Lance stayed locked in the bathroom most of the afternoon so how was he supposed to understand why getting the gun from the girl holding them prisoner was a bad thing? Quietly, Lance asked, "Do you think she comes up here alone?" When Justin shrugged, Lance continued. "She's just one woman. You and I both could overpower her, easy. She should send David up here but she doesn't. And have you stopped to wonder why?"

"No," Justin whispered. He hadn't given it much thought.

"Because maybe David is at the bottom of the steps," Lance explained. "Maybe he's waiting for her to return." As that concept sank in, he added, "So if we did get out this door, who's to say he's not waiting for us down at the other door? And what would stop him from shooting us then?"

Justin sighed. Lance was right -- he was always right. "I never thought of that," Justin admitted.

Reaching out, Lance ran his arm around Justin's shoulders, a warm, heavy touch that made the moment real. He had held the gun in his hand ... suddenly Justin felt his body shivering uncontrollably, and he hugged himself tighter, willing the shakes away. "What if that gun was loaded?" Lance asked softly. He leaned closer, until his lips were just inches from Justin's ear, and Justin let himself be pulled into an easy embrace. "What if it went off when you two were fighting for it? God, Justin, don't scare me like that. Do you think I could make it if you got hurt? Do you think I'd want to?"

"I was only trying to help," Justin said again. Taking a deep breath, he leaned his head against Lance's shoulder and sighed. "I always fuck everything up, Lance. I'm sorry. I'm sorry you got mad earlier and I don't know what I did to piss you off but please don't leave me again. I don't want you to leave." He looked up at Lance and fought the urge to kiss his friend's neck, because no matter how much he wanted to taste that soft skin, he didn't want to lose Lance again. He knew they were just friends, and if that was all they would ever be, he'd learn to live with it. He would have to. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

"Justin," Lance began, and then he hugged Justin closer. "I just ... I don't know. I just don't know."

"I thought you liked me," Justin whispered.

"I do," Lance replied. "God, Justin, I do like you. But I don't want to ..." He sighed. "I don't want to screw around here and fuck up our friendship, okay? You mean more to me than that."

You mean more to me ... Justin tried not to let the words excite him, but they did. "Sometimes," he confessed, talking low so Lance had to strain to hear him, "I don't want to be who they want me to be. Sometimes I just want it all to go away. I just want to hide and I want someone to hold me and keep me safe. Hell, I want that all the time. I don't want to be alone, and I don't want to be strong. I want someone to be strong for me. Is that a bad thing?"

"No," Lance whispered. His hands rubbed Justin's arm, tracing slow patterns that left trails of fire in their wake. "It's not a bad thing if you can find someone who wants to do that."

With his heart hammering, Justin admitted, "I want that someone to be you." For a long moment neither of them spoke, and time seemed to stop around them. Justin heard the slight breeze outside rattling the windows, the faint creak of a footstep floors below them, the steady drip of water in the bathroom sink. "Lance?" he ventured. Maybe it hadn't been the best thing to say, though it seemed like at this moment it was the only thing to say, the only thing he could say, and even if Lance never spoke again, part of him was glad he had said it. Because it was true. He wanted Lance to keep him safe. He wanted this warmth he felt now, here in Lance's arms. He wanted this security, this feeling as if he were a little boy and the world was going to be alright because Lance said it would be. He never wanted that feeling to end. "Lance?" he asked again, turning to look up at his friend. "Talk to me. Please --"

And then Lance leaned down, his lips closing over Justin's, and maybe it had been the right thing to say, after all. Because now Lance was kissing him, his mouth warm and damp and sweet, his fingers caressing Justin's chin and his arm holding Justin tight, and Justin's knees grew weak as Lance ran his fingers through Justin's hair and kissed him tenderly.

The rest of the world fell away as Justin eased his arms around Lance's waist, giving into this moment and this kiss and this man who made him feel loved and safe and secure just by holding him in his arms.

When night fell, draping its indigo cloak over the trees and inking the windows, Lance crawled beneath the blankets and burrowed into his pillow, waiting for Justin. Waiting ... God, how long had he waited? He didn't know. He had lost count of the hours and the days and the months he spent, watching Justin and waiting for some sign that the way he felt for his friend was returned. The hints hadn't been enough, the brief kisses, the quick hugs. He wanted to hear the words spoken out loud, he wanted to see them in Justin's eyes and hear them fall from his lips. And until he admitted that Lance was what he wanted, that Lance was all he wanted, then Lance was going to hold out and wait.

And it finally paid off.

Justin was in the bathroom, brushing his teeth and getting ready for bed, and they were still locked in this attic but things were going to be okay now. Things were going to be fine. Because Justin said he wanted him to be there, and Lance swore that he would. And when they got out of this -- not if, but when, because Lance fully intended to get out of this whole mess as soon as possible -- when they got out of it, he'd make sure that this wouldn't be just a heat of the moment deal.

The bathroom light clicked off, plunging the room into darkness, the only light a dim glow that came from the storm clouds roiling outside the windows. Lance saw Justin's faint outline as he crossed the room, and then the mattress shifted as he slipped between the covers. Planting a damp kiss on Lance's forehead, Justin snuggled up against him and whispered, "It's going to rain." His breath smelled minty and fresh, and when Lance kissed him, he tasted of toothpaste and mouthwash.

"It's going to storm," Lance corrected, his voice low. It had already been raining for some time now, a faint patter that pelted against the windows like sand. Wrapping his arms around Justin, he pulled him against his chest and sighed into Justin's curls. Together they stared at the ceiling, watching faint lightning play across the wooden beams, flickering in the cloudy night. This felt right, holding onto each other like this, Justin in his arms and so close against him. As thunder rumbled in the distance, Lance hugged Justin tighter and whispered, "We'll get out of here, Justin. I promise."

"I know," Justin replied. He curled his hands around Lance's arms and cuddled closer to him. They fit together so perfectly, their bodies curved together like they were halves of one whole, broken apart when the heavens were created and tossed to earth in separate souls, only to mesh together again now, here in this attic, in the midst of this storm. "When we get back," Justin whispered, "I want you to stay with me, Lance. I want this ..." He entwined his hands in Lance's and squeezed gently. "I want to feel this safe all the time. Promise me that too?"

"I'll promise you anything," Lance murmured. He kissed the tender skin behind Justin's ear. Outside the wind picked up,

whipping around the house with a sudden savagery that made the comfort of the covers seem warm and cozy. When the clouds opened and rain lashed against the windows, he closed his eyes and breathed in Justin's clean, crisp scent, the faint sound of Justin's steady breath the only thing that mattered right now.

* * *

The next morning Marie stared at the coffeepot on the stove and willed it to percolate. He took the gun, she thought, touching the cool metal handle that rested against her stomach. It still shocked her. That son of a BITCH took the GUN. What would David say to that?

She didn't know, but she had a feeling it wouldn't be anything nice. So she hadn't told him about the incident.

Because then he would get mad. He would want to know why she let her guard down around the men. Or why she lingered in the room. Or why she wrestled Justin for the gun when it could've gone off in the fray.

Except that it wasn't loaded, she reminded herself. The coffeepot began to whistle, and she removed it from the burner. It hasn't been loaded since the day before, David, since you gave it to me and made me take it. You know I hate guns. So I took out the clip and emptied the bullets and they're in the top drawer of the table by my side of the bed. That way there would be no accidental misfire. There couldn't be.

But Justin didn't know that, and when he pointed the gun at her, the smug look of confidence on his face, the look of triumph, was simply too much. For a split second she considered letting him win, letting him keep the gun and giving him the key and letting it all be over with already.

And what would David say? They were in this together. She had to think of him.

So she had to get that gun back. But she didn't say anything, and David never had to know.

In the still morning air she heard the front door slam, and she busied herself with pouring two cups of coffee. As David walked into the kitchen, she glanced up at him and smiled tentatively. "Well?" she asked.

The padded feet of a chair screeched across the tiled floor as he pulled it out to sit down. "I don't want any coffee," he said.

Marie frowned but poured the steaming black liquid back into the coffeepot. "Did they print the note?" she asked, taking a seat opposite his at the table.

"Front page," David said. He watched her try to read the headlines without turning the paper around, and then he sighed. "Take it, Marie. You can't read it upside-down."

Carefully, Marie took the paper and scanned the letter she and David had composed together. To whom it may concern ... When had she typed those words? Two days ago? A week? A lifetime? She didn't think anything of it at the time -- they were just a way to start the letter -- but now when she reread them Joey Fatone's eyes opened in her mind, full of anguish and torture that she had put there with those words alone. Quietly she whispered, "So they got it."

"Yeah," David said, watching her closely as she read. We assure you, he is fine ... at the time they wrote it, they hadn't planned on catching two men. Just one. Just Justin. Whom I would've killed by now if it wasn't for his friend, Marie mused. If Lance wasn't there, if she had to face that arrogant boy alone every day, he'd starve. She'd never go up there. And the gun would be loaded, no doubt about that.

She continued to read. The words looked foreign to her, but they were hers. Quarter of a million dollars ... because she and David argued over how many zeros were in the figure. We will contact you shortly ... because they didn't really know how they would go about collecting the ransom without anyone catching them. She hoped David was thinking about that one now. No harm will come to him ... to either of them, Marie amended in her mind before setting the paper aside. "Well?" she asked, sipping at her dark coffee. "What now?"

David shrugged. "I sent another letter," he said, fumbling to light a cigarette. When it lit, he took a deep puff and let the smoke out slowly, the thin white trail curling lazily around his head like a halo. "Telling them the details."

Marie stared at him for a long moment. Finally she said, "I thought we were going to write that together."

"I don't want you to get too involved," David said. He stared past her at the kitchen sink, refusing to meet her gaze.

"We're in this together," Marie pointed out. "Dammit, David, I'm already involved."

Shifting his angry eyes towards her, he growled, "I'm trying to protect you, Marie. The less you know, the easier it'll be for you if we get caught. Jesus, don't you trust me?"

I don't know, she thought, studying him, do I? This was a stranger in front of her, a blonde man with short hair, not the David she fell in love with, the David who promised to see this through with her to the end. Together. That was the key word, wasn't it? They were doing this together. They were doing it because they wanted to be together.

And now he was keeping her in the dark about everything. He mailed the first letter without her. He wrote the second one without her, and mailed it, too. He dumped the van and she didn't know where; he picked up a car and she didn't know where -- she didn't know anything anymore, did she? Just what the press knew, just what the newspapers said. "David --" she started, but he cut her off.

"You don't, do you?" he asked.

Marie sighed. "David, it's not --"

"You don't trust me, Marie," he said, the accusation in his voice a slap in the face. "Fuck, I'm doing this for you. I'm doing it all for you. And what do I get in return?"

Marie bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling. "I just want to know --"

Reaching across the table, David grabbed a fistful of her dyed hair and pulled her up from her chair. Marie whimpered as he leaned into her face, and this wasn't the David she knew, with these hard hands and this evil snarl. This wasn't anyone at all, she didn't know who this was, just a stranger who'd kidnapped two men and now held the three of them hostage, herself included. "I'm doing this for you," David whispered, and she closed her eyes to block out the blazing emotions she saw in his fierce gaze. "All for you, Marie. Remember that."

"I will," she whispered. As he stormed off, she sank back into her chair and thought maybe he knew about the gun after all, because it was shoved into the waist of her pants and he hadn't let that put her in control of the situation, had he?

Best of Intentions
Chapter 8
by NSyncGrrl

When Lance awoke, he didn't want to open his eyes. He didn't want to let go of this dream where he was holding Justin in his arms, their legs tangled together, the hard press of his friend's morning erection lying against his inner thigh. But then Justin shifted in his sleep, resting his knee low against Lance's belly, right into his bladder, and damn but he needed to use the bathroom. Right now.

Carefully he eased his arm out from under Justin's body, heavy with sleep, and when he climbed over his slumbering form, Justin snuggled into the warm spot Lance left behind, digging himself deeper into the blankets and sighing into Lance's pillow. Crisp, cold air prickled Lance's skin as he stood, and he hurried to the bathroom. He didn't want to waste any time out of that bed if he didn't have to -- someone needed to keep Justin snug and safe and warm, didn't they? And that someone was him -- Justin told him that. Finally.

Finally.

No more late night chats with Britney over what happened between the two of them earlier that day. Justin told him as they fell asleep last night that Britney knew the way he felt for Lance, had tried to bolster his courage and get him to tell Lance about his feelings, but he never really knew the words to say or the time to say them. So he stuck with flirting and he never realized Lance didn't see what he meant by the kisses and the touches and if he had only known it would be this easy, he would've told Lance sooner. As he fell asleep in Lance's arms, he said he wished he had told him sooner.

Me too, Lance thought, rinsing his hands in the sink. He slicked back his sleep tousled hair and winked at his reflection in the mirror. But at least you told me now, Justin. At least we can make up for lost time. And just think of all the days to come, all the mornings we'll wake up together, all the nights spent in each others' arms.

If they ever got out of this damn attic.

Back in the main room, Lance looked longingly at the mattress where Justin slept, curled beneath the covers like a little boy. A baby boy, Lance thought, smiling slightly. MY baby boy. And he better not forget it. I won't let him. But when he started for the mattress, his stomach rumbled slightly, and maybe it wouldn't hurt to get something to eat, would it? He could sit on the end of the mattress and eat it and he wouldn't have to be too far from Justin, would he?

Quietly he poured himself a bowl of cereal. He clicked the TV on for something to watch -- maybe there would be news on today.

Something to tell him what was happening beyond those windows, on the other side of that locked door. Turning the TV sideways until it faced the mattress, he stepped over Justin's legs and sat cross-legged by his friend's feet, bowl in hand. As he crunched on a spoonful of cereal, Justin stretched beside him, waking slowly. "Lance?" he murmured.

"Right here," Lance replied. On the television a reporter was talking about the cars backed up on the beltway, and Lance wondered what it would be like if rush hour traffic was the worse problem in his life. He thought it would be wonderful. "Sleep well?" he asked, glancing back at Justin.

Justin grinned and curled his toes, burrowing them beneath Lance's leg. "Like a baby," he said. "Now come back under these blankets and hold me."

"After I eat," Lance said, laughing. The pout on Justin's face was kissably tempting. "You want a bowl of cereal?"

"I want you," Justin said. "Lance, don't you want to --"

A publicity photo of 'N Sync flashed across the TV. "Shh," Lance said, jumping to turn up the volume. Justin sat up beside him as Lance sat back down.

"Appear to have been abducted," the reporter was saying, and their photographs filled the screen. "This letter arrived at the Washington Post offices late yesterday, demanding a ransom of a quarter of a million dollars."

Justin scowled. "Is that all we're worth?" he asked. "They could've at least asked for half." Lance laughed. "I'm serious," Justin persisted. "Don't you think we're worth half a million? Together?"

"I think you're priceless," Lance admitted. Grinning, Justin took Lance's hand in his and kissed the back of it, his lips leaving behind a smear of Chapstick on Lance's skin.

On the TV the footage of their HBO concert broke away to show a young male reporter outside of their hotel, and Lance turned his attention back to the screen. "I'm outside of the Watergate Hotel," the reporter explained, "where in just minutes the remaining members of the pop group will hold a press conference. If you'll join me inside ..."

"God," Justin whispered, squeezing Lance's hand. Lance didn't know if he wanted to see this or not. He couldn't imagine how his friends were coping.

Inside the hotel, Chris, JC, and Joey sat at a long table. None of them looked as if they had slept in the past week -- dark shadows rimmed their eyes, their clothes were rumpled and their hair disheveled, their faces haggard and unshaven. Chris glared at the camera, leaning back in his chair with his arms crossed defiantly. He wasn't paying a ransom to nobody, that much was certain. Beside him JC ran a hand nervously through his wild hair, frowning at the reporters and dodging the questions as best he could. Yes,

the police were following several leads. No, he couldn't discuss them. Yes, he hoped his friends were alright. No, he didn't know who could have done this. Yes, no, yes, no. Answers they probably spent the last few hours perfecting. And beside him Joey held his head in his hands, his fingers furrowing his cheeks, pulling his face into an exaggerated frown that was painful to look at. The anguish in his eyes, the disbelief, the despair ... Lance swallowed thickly and looked away. He couldn't stand to see that pain in Joey's eyes. Joey, who was always carefree and laughing. Who was born to laugh. Who looked now as if he'd never laugh again.

"I hope they're seeing this," Lance muttered angrily. Marie and David -- he hoped they were watching and could see what this was doing to their friends.

* * *

It was almost too much to bear, the sadness in the way the remaining three members of 'N Sync sat hunched over the conference table, the pain in their eyes that they tried to hide, the anguish shining through in every word they spoke, every move they made. Marie leaned as close as she dared to the TV, staring at those three faces until all she saw was each individual fleck of color on JC's lips, each tiny pore on Chris's cheeks, each opalescent facet of Joey's eyes. Those eyes haunted her -- in all pictures she had ever seen of the group, Joey was always laughing, always smiling, those brown compassionate eyes like a puppy's, crinkled into half-moons of mirth. And now he looked as if he would never smile again, and it broke Marie's heart to see the emotions swirling in the depths of his deep eyes, so dark, so shadowy, like bruises that would never heal.

On the screen JC struggled to keep his composure as reporters bombarded them with questions. Marie flopped back on the couch -- this whole thing was ridiculous, wasn't it? Was a quarter of a million dollars really worth all this hassle? All this worry lining their faces, all this sadness dragging them down? Marie didn't think so. Fuck, her problems were nothing compared to this. It was only money. For the price of two boys up in her attic? For the price of the ache she saw in Joey's eyes? She didn't think anything was worth that.

And where was David? Why wasn't he watching this? He needed to see what their little scheme was doing to these people, he needed to see how it was affecting them. Couldn't he see what they had done? But he didn't tell her where he was going anymore, did he? His plans no longer seemed to include her. Weren't they in this together?

But after dropping off the paper this morning, he left. Vanished. She didn't know where he had disappeared to or why he didn't take her with him. Someone had to stay behind, he would've told her. To do what? To watch over their prisoners? They were up in the attic and Marie had no intentions of going up there again, not unless she absolutely had to. Not after that incident with the gun.

Damn that boy. The audacity! Ugh. Marie glared at the

television reporter in disgust. She was sick of these questions -- they didn't know who they were dealing with, so why did they keep asking the same things over and over again? They didn't know that Marie was watching right now, that Justin and Lance were upstairs locked away and probably watching the news, they didn't know shit. So where did they get off hounding these poor boys like this? What gave them the right to bring that scowl to Chris's face, or that sheen of sweat along JC's brow, or that pout to Joey's lips? I put that there, Marie thought, frowning. What gave ME that right? She didn't know. Was this enough? The terror, the uncertainty, the fear? Or was there something more they needed before this could all be over? The money, she reminded herself, but was that even really an issue anymore? She didn't think so. If she never saw a penny of the ransom money, she'd die happy. She didn't want it now. She'd hate herself too much if she ever spent it.

Because each dollar bill would have Joey's face on it, with those haunting, hunted eyes that pierced her soul and made her just want to crawl on her knees and beg for his forgiveness. Here, she'd say. Have Lance back. Have Justin back. Gift-wrapped ... on a silver platter, even. Just stop staring at me and stop blaming me and just please, just PLEASE smile again, please?

On the TV, the press conference was winding down. JC was saying again that he hoped his friends were all right, that they appreciated the show of support from the fans, all the prayers and the flowers and the cards ... God, Marie thought, it's not just them we've hurt, it's the whole fucking WORLD. We've stolen the sunshine from the sky and hidden it away and the fans are crying, these guys are crying, their FAMILIES and FRIENDS and even God HIMSELF is probably crying, and it's all our fault.

As the remaining band members rose from the table, Marie leaned forward to click off the TV when Joey grabbed the microphone and looked into the camera, into her eyes, into her soul. Somehow he looked through the TV and saw her, she had no doubt about that. He could see her and his eyes filled with tears and his voice broke as he sighed, the sound filling her with an empty hollowness that ached as if she were stuffed with shards of broken glass and crumpled autumn leaves. "Please," he whispered, and God, it almost killed her when his voice cracked. "Just please let us know they're okay. Whoever you guys are, just somehow let us know that, please?"

JC led Joey away from the flashing cameras and sudden buzz of questions as Chris glared at the reporters, daring them to follow. "Just please let us know" ... Marie sighed. She could do that at least, couldn't she? If it took even just a little bit of that pain away, she could do that. For him.

* * *

When the news shifted to the current situation in the Middle East, Justin clicked off the TV. He didn't want to hear any more bad news today, not after watching his friends struggle to keep their composure in the face of all those questions. Jesus, didn't the reporters know that there was nothing to say? Nothing new to

report? Why did they have to keep it up? It was almost as if they thrived on the tragedy of their disappearance, they feasted off of the bitter emotions oozing from JC and Chris and Joey ... poor Joey! God, when he all but begged for some proof that they were alright, Justin almost cried. And Lance was close to tears himself, Justin could see the shine in his eyes he tried to turn away to hide. Fuck Marie, Justin thought, kneeling in front of Lance. He took his friend's hands in his and pressed Lance's palms to his lips. Fuck David. Fuck both of them for putting us all through this. "Lance?" he asked softly. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Lance sighed. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "If only we could call them," he whispered, frowning. He looked at their fingers, entwined together, and Justin squeezed Lance's hands gently. "If only we could let them know we're okay ..."

"I know," Justin murmured. Fuck Marie for making you look like this, Justin thought, this sad, this alone, this helpless. Sitting up, he brushed his lips against Lance's in a tender kiss. Then, placing one hand on the back of Lance's neck, he pressed their foreheads together and stared into Lance's lucent green eyes. "God, Lance, believe me. I know. If only that damn cell phone worked, you know? If only --"

"Let's try it again," Lance said, determination strengthening his voice, and because Justin didn't want to kill the hope he saw deep within Lance's eyes, he nodded eagerly. Yes, they could try it again. It wouldn't work, Justin knew that, but it might. There was a chance that it might, wasn't there?

Justin retrieved the phone from the pocket of Lance's blazer. With Lance leaning over his shoulder, he turned the phone on. The small display lit up, a promising sign, but when he pressed the talk button, only static filled the receiver. "Fuck," he muttered, switching channels. One of them had to work, didn't it?

"Justin," Lance started, but Justin waved at him to be still. This phone would work. He just knew it would. From far away he heard a quiet scratch of metal on metal, a sound he thought he should recognize, but he didn't want to take the phone away from his ear because one of these channels had to be something more than just static and empty air. "Justin --"

Suddenly an open line clicked through on the phone, and he turned to Lance, a grin already on his lips. "I got a line out," he said, excited. They could call the guys! They could --

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," Marie cried, and Justin looked up to find her glaring down at him. When had she come in? "You guys have a fucking phone? What the hell --"

"It doesn't work," Lance said quickly, but Marie snatched the cell phone from Justin's numb fingers before he could even think of holding onto it. "Marie --"

"Fuck this," Marie snarled, folding the phone up angrily. The hinge clicked so hard, Justin wondered if she didn't break the damn thing. When had she come into the room? And just when the phone

worked ... "I was going to call your friends," Marie was saying. Her cheeks were pink with rage, her eyes blazing like twin suns. As she spoke, her voice took on a scared, shrill sound that reminded Justin of nails screeching across a blackboard. "I was going to let you talk to them and tell them you're okay but I guess you've already done that, haven't you?"

Lance sighed. "Marie, the phone doesn't work. It hasn't worked. Don't you think the police would be here already if it did?"

She shook her head. "Fuck that. Fuck it all. You had a phone and my God, if David found out ..." She left the thought unfinished. Scowling at Justin, she pointed the phone at him and said, "You got a line out, didn't you? Justin?" When he didn't say anything, she lashed out with one foot and kicked him in the thigh. The toe of her shoe sank into his soft flesh but he stifled a cry. "Didn't you?"

As she pulled back her foot to strike him again, Lance stood up and pushed her away. "Stop this," he said. Justin looked up at her from around the safety of Lance's body and saw indecision and embarrassment warring on her face. What did she have against him? Why did she hate him so? When she glanced down at him, Lance said, "Marie, right now. You kick him again, and I don't care if you have a gun or not, I'll hurt you myself, I promise."

Her lower lip trembled. "Fuck you both," she muttered.

"Take the phone," Lance said. "Take it and leave. Please."

Justin watched as she turned and left the room, slamming the door in her wake. When she locked the door behind her, Justin wrapped his arms around Lance's waist and hugged him close, his head resting on the round curve of Lance's buttocks, his hands just above the slight bulge at his friend's crotch. "I had an open line," he whispered.

Lance's hands rubbed along Justin's arms in a comforting gesture. "I know," he replied.

* * *

"I had an open line" ... Justin's words echoed in Lance's mind as he laid on the mattress, staring at the ceiling. An open line. So they could've called the guys. He should have checked the phone again instead of just assuming it wouldn't work this far out. He should've at least tried, and now Marie had his phone and their only hope, and it galled him to know that if he had only tried one more time, maybe he could have gotten an open line. Beside him Justin lay on his stomach, his arms folded beneath him, and he studied Lance with a slight frown on his face. "I'm sorry she took the phone," he whispered.

Lance sighed. "It's not your fault," he said. It was his own fault for not trying the phone sooner.

"But I should've been paying attention," Justin said softly. "You tried to tell me she was coming and I didn't listen. I'm sorry."

"Well, that's okay," Lance said. What else was there to say? No use getting mad about it now that it was over and done with and there was nothing he could do. He didn't feel like getting angry about it. After watching that press conference, he didn't feel like getting worked up about much of anything right now.

For a long moment Justin studied him, and Lance stared at the wooden beams above them and tried not to think of anything at all. He was tired of thinking about escaping, since it was obvious they wouldn't be leaving this attic any time soon. He just wanted to close his eyes and forget about everything but Justin lying so close beside him that his arm rested along Lance's side. Finally Justin sighed. "We're not getting out of this, are we?" he asked.

"We will," Lance promised. Somehow he'd make sure they did. Somehow.

Sniffing, Justin asked, "Can I tell you something?"

"Sure," Lance said. He glanced at Justin out of the corner of his eye, and from this angle Justin looked so cute curled into himself, his eyes as dark as the sea before a storm. The comfortable silence that stretched between them was the only good thing to come out of this whole sordid affair -- at least there was that. And he'd suffer through it all again just to hear Justin say he wanted Lance to be with him. "What's on your mind?"

Scooting closer, Justin pushed himself up on one elbow and leaned over Lance. He trailed one hand across Lance's chest, a gentle touch so light, it almost tickled. "I know we just hooked up," he breathed, his lips brushing against Lance's forehead, "but I just want to let you know that I really want to make love to you."

Lance swallowed against the sudden lump in his throat. Now that was unexpected, wasn't it? And damned if the words, breathed so low, so softly, so earnestly, damned if they didn't stir his blood and thicken his groin and talk about an instant hard-on ... if Justin only knew what he could do to Lance with that tone of voice! He'd use it all the time and never want for anything ever again. "Lance?" Justin sighed, plucking at Lance's nipples through the thin t-shirt Lance wore. "I didn't mean --"

"Right now?" Lance managed to get out. True, it had only been a day but they had been friends forever. Didn't that count for something?

But Justin simply laughed, a tinkling sound like bells pealing on a clear day. Kissing Lance's cheek tenderly, he swirled his fingers down Lance's stomach, tracing lazy circles until he picked at the waistband of Lance's boxers. "Not right now," Justin giggled. "Marie might come in, you never know ..." He trailed off as he kissed down the curve of Lance's jaw.

True, Lance thought, but suddenly that didn't matter anymore. Marie didn't matter, the guys didn't matter, nothing mattered but Justin's lips pressing against his hungrily and Justin's hand drifting lower until his fingers encircled the hard shaft hidden in Lance's shorts. As he squeezed gently, Lance moaned into Justin's mouth, Justin's tongue slipping between his lips with a sweet taste that

promised so much more. Then Justin released his hold and his hand eased back up Lance's stomach, across his chest, until he cradled Lance's chin between his fingers. Lance's groin ached from Justin's brief touch. Pulling Justin on top of him, he cupped Justin's buttocks in both hands as he hugged him closer and lost himself in his friend's eager kisses. "But later," Justin promised, "when we get out of this ..." His voice trailed off into quiet kisses.

We WILL get out, Lance swore to himself. He would see to it.

Best of Intentions
Chapter 9
by NSyncGrrl

When David returned, Marie was sitting on the bottom step of the staircase, the phone cradled in her hands. She had scrolled through the numbers listed in the cell phone's address book and now she could call anyone she wanted, JC or Chris or Joey, Johnny too, and Britney, and LeeAnn. What some people wouldn't pay for these numbers! Why hadn't she thought of that before all this started? She could've just played the maid and stolen this cell phone, or Justin's, or somebody's, and posted the numbers on the Internet, charged a minimal fee, sold them on eBay, something, and none of this would've ever happened. Justin would be in an anonymous hotel room miles and miles away, Lance would be somewhere else, somewhere other than her attic, David would talk to her instead of just walk into the house and head into the kitchen and not even glance her way, and Joey's pain-filled eyes wouldn't haunt her every waking thought. "David?" she called out.

She heard the refrigerator slam shut, and then David muttered, "What?"

"Where have you been all day?" she asked. Please don't brush me off, she thought as he walked back into the foyer. When he stopped in front of her, she looked up at him with glistening eyes and waited. Please just tell me, David. Please let me know what's going on with us and I'll just throw this phone away and I'll do whatever you ask, just please don't ignore me. Please don't do that.

But David wasn't answering her prayers anymore, was he? He pushed past her and headed upstairs. "I've been out," he said simply.

"No shit," she replied, turning to watch him walk away. "Where were you?"

"Out," he said again. "Jesus, Marie. I'm just --"

"Doing this for me," she interrupted, rising to her feet, "I know." Without waiting for his reply, she crossed the foyer and threw open the front door.

"Marie, stop this shit," David said. "Where are you going?"

"Out," she replied. Two could play at this game, couldn't they?

Behind her, David hurried back down the stairs. "Marie," he started, but she pulled the door shut between them and raced out into the night. Fuck you, David, she thought, running down the graveled drive. You have the damn keys, you know I ain't going nowhere, you KNOW I won't leave you alone with those boys, but you can at least tell me where the HELL you go to anymore, where you go to get away from it all. Don't you think I want to get away too? Don't you think I want that more than anything else right

now?

When she didn't hear the door open behind her, she slowed to a walk and risked a glance back at the house. No sign of David. Well, fuck him. At the end of the drive, where the small stones gave away to the dirt road that led back into town, she stopped and squatted on the ground. Out here the trees were thin, lining the road like sentinels standing guard over her, their bare limbs stretching like ink stains into the night sky. Turning the cell phone over in her hands, she pushed the power button and stared at the small display screen as it lit up. Where do you disappear to, David? she wondered as she scrolled through the names in the address book until she found the one she wanted. Before she could think about stopping herself, she pressed the send button and put the phone to her ear. Far away another phone began to ring. Why can't you tell me that?

She heard a soft click as someone answered the line. Faint music filled her ear, haunting strains of something she couldn't quite place, and for a split second she almost hung up. It would be so easy -- just press the power button and turn the whole damn thing off. Her finger brushed across the button when a sad masculine voice sighed and her heart shattered within her chest. "Hello?"

"Joey," she breathed. Mother of God, this was Joey on the other end of the line, she was talking to Joey heaven help her Fatone and that was almost too much for her to bear. She closed her eyes and saw his open in her mind.

"Who is this?" Joey asked. "Kelly?"

"Marie." She sighed. "You don't know me --"

"Where'd you get this number?" Suspicion curled into Joey's voice. "Marie who?"

Picking at the stones at her feet, Marie said, "I saw you on TV today. I know where your friends are."

Silence. Talk to me, Joey, she pleaded silently. David doesn't talk to me but maybe you will. Maybe you'll want to hear what I have to say. "You're the girl on the tape," he said softly. "With that guy, and the van, and Lance -- where's Lance?"

"He's okay," Marie replied. "He and Justin are fine. I just wanted to let you know that --"

"Let me talk to him," Joey demanded. "What did you say your name was again? Marie? Let me talk to Lance myself and see --"

"No," Marie said. The front door of the house opened, a squeak in the night, and she saw David in the doorway, outlined by the light from inside. "You have to trust me. He's fine. They're both fine."

Joey sighed. "Marie --"

When he said her name, it brought a smile to her face. But then she heard the grind of bootheels on gravel and dammit but David

was coming to get her. "I have to go," she whispered into the phone. David was closer now, she could hear his approach like the steady click of a deathwatch beetle. "Don't tell anyone I called, or David will get pissed, but they're okay, Joey. Trust me."

"Marie, wait --" She clicked off the phone and thrust it into her pocket quickly. As David approached, she stood up and smiled shakily at him. They're fine, she thought. Trust me, Joey. Please.

* * *

Lance stood at the counter, snacking on some pretzels, when Justin came out of the bathroom dressed in nothing but a thin white towel draped around his narrow waist. His hair curled wetly around his forehead, his arms were dark with damp hair, and he had a wicked scowl on his face as he tossed his jeans onto the floor. "You know," he said, running a hand through the mess of curls on his head, "why do I even bother taking a shower, Lance? All I do is put on the same smelly clothes when I get out. What's the use?"

"If you didn't," Lance pointed out, leaning back against the counter, "I wouldn't let you sleep with me at night. You'd stink."

He smiled at the slight grimace on Justin's face. "I stink already," he replied, pouting slightly. Such the prima donna at times, Lance thought, smiling wider. God, Justin, you're so cute when you get like this. "Do you think Marie would wash our clothes? At least once?"

Lance shrugged. "Maybe," he said, stuffing another pretzel into his mouth. He crunched on it while he watched Justin kick at his clothes strewn about on the floor. They wouldn't get any cleaner that way, would they? "Just ask her, Justin. Next time she's up here --"

"She hates me," Justin pouted. Well, that was true, wasn't it? Justin didn't seem to be Marie's favorite person in the world right now.

As Justin bent to scoop up his clothes, Lance watched the way the small towel pulled taut against Justin's buttocks, admiring the stretch of terry across hidden skin and damn but that made Lance's groin ache something fierce. When Justin stood, Lance reached out and caught the edge of the towel in his hand. Pulling Justin closer, he lowered his voice and asked softly, "What would you wear while your clothes were in the washer?"

One look at the lust smoldering in Lance's eyes, the need, the desire, the want, and Justin let the clothes in his hands fall to the floor. Leaning into Lance, he pushed him against the counter, his own erection hard against Lance's crotch as his hands snaked around Lance's waist. "Maybe I'd wear nothing at all," Justin murmured, kissing Lance tenderly. Now that was a good idea, one of the best Lance had heard in a long time. "Maybe I'll never wear anything ever again. How does that sound?"

"Very inviting," Lance replied, running his hands up Justin's bare, damp chest until he eased his arms around his friend's neck. "Maybe you should think about that. Maybe even this towel is too much ..."

"Maybe," Justin whispered. His lips closed over Lance's gently before kissing along the curve of his cheek to nuzzle against Lance's neck. Tugging at the waistband of Lance's jeans, Justin asked, "What about these? They're a bit much, too, don't you think?" His fingers slipped around to the front of the jeans where they fumbled with the button, thumbing it open before sliding down the zipper. Carefully, Justin eased his hand into Lance's pants, rubbing along the stiff length straining against the fabric of Lance's underwear. Biting gently on Lance's earlobe, Justin pressed into him until Lance moaned slightly, the ache in his groin throbbing in Justin's eager hand. "Why don't we just get rid of all these extra clothes now?" Justin suggested, breathing into Lance's ear.

"Good idea," Lance sighed, arching away from the counter as Justin pushed down his jeans. Suddenly he didn't care if Marie walked in on them, or if anyone outside could look in through the uncurtained windows and see them pressed together so intimately, because he wanted Justin something awful, he wanted this boy in his arms, sighing his name into his ear and kissing along his neck, his hands cupping Lance's buttocks and his crotch rubbing against Lance's and damn but he wanted him now. As Justin's hands slid into his underwear, cool and damp against Lance's skin, Lance reached over and clicked off the light, blinding them with darkness. Justin kissed his neck hungrily, his hands caressing beneath Lance's butt, pulling him closer, holding him tighter, until the towel and boxers between them were too much and Lance thrust into Justin's hips, moaning as his erection rubbed along the hard plain of Justin's body. "Justin," he breathed. He had to get out of these shorts now or he really would have to ask Marie to wash them in the morning. And he didn't relish that thought at all.

Stepping back, Justin tugged at Lance's boxers. He knelt on the floor as he pushed them down past Lance's knees, and before Lance could stop him, could even think to say anything at all, Justin took his hard cock in one hand and licked the weeping tip. As his hot tongue swirled down, taking Lance's length into his mouth, Lance grabbed fistfuls of Justin's hair with both hands because this, oh God this was more than he ever even hoped for, it felt so right, so good, so amazing that his knees buckled and only Justin's hands around his hips held him upright. Justin's tongue danced along his hard erection, his lips soft and his breath feathery where it fanned against Lance's heated skin.

"Oh God, Justin," Lance gasped, thrusting into his friend's mouth over and over again while Justin sucked at him, his lips and tongue and hands doing wondrous things to his body, bringing him to the edge of desire and passion. Lance couldn't stop himself from bucking into Justin, arching back against the counter to get inside, further in, as deep as he could into that hot, dark mouth that kept teasing him and sucking and licking and never giving up until the world exploded in a rush that left Lance so weak and spent that he collapsed into the safety of Justin's strong arms. As his legs straddled Justin's, the thick hardness of Justin's own erection

pressing up through the towel he wore, crushing against the hidden skin between Lance's legs, their lips met in the darkness. Justin tasted slightly salty with Lance's own juices, a sweetness that made Lance harden again. Cradling Justin's face in both hands, Lance kissed him tenderly, suddenly unable to get enough of him.

"I know this is sudden," Justin breathed, hugging Lance close. "I know this is too much, too soon, but God Lance, I can't deny this. I can't pretend I don't feel this way for you." His lips trailed down Lance's neck until he kissed the hollow of Lance's throat. "We might never get out of this damn place and you'll never know that I think of you all the time. You'll never know how much I want you if I don't tell you now." Lance moaned as Justin kissed him again. "Is it too early to say I love you?"

"No," Lance whispered. It was never too early. Not when he had wanted to hear the words all along. "I've always loved you, Justin. God, you just don't know ..." His voice trailed off as Justin silenced him with another kiss.

* * *

Beneath the covers, Justin cuddled against Lance's chest, secure with his friend's strong arms around him. This was what he wanted, this safety, this feeling of forever. Lance's chin rested on the top of Justin's head, his breath ruffling Justin's curls, his arms hugging him close. "Lance?" Justin whispered. His voice sounded loud in the night.

"Hmm?" Lance murmured. He rubbed Justin's back gently, tracing small circles into his skin.

"I'm glad this happened," Justin said softly as he clung to Lance. "I could've done without the kidnapping part, and I still want clean clothes, is that too much to ask?"

"No," Lance replied, laughing.

Justin grinned. "But I'm glad this happened. You and me. So maybe things aren't so bad, you know?"

"I know," Lance agreed. Sighing, he added, "I just wish we could call the guys, let them know we're okay. God, the look on Joey's face ..."

"Yeah," Justin whispered. He closed his eyes against the memory that rose in his mind, the guys at that press conference, Chris's anger, JC's resolve, Joey's sadness that cut to his bone like a knife. Did Marie see that? Did she even know what she was doing to their friends? If she had only seen Joey's eyes when he pleaded to know how they were doing, there was no way she could sleep tonight. She would call him up, let him talk to them, she wouldn't have taken away Lance's phone because the look on Joey's face was too much for anyone to bear, too much for Justin, even, and it made him mad to know that tonight Joey was crying himself to sleep because he didn't know where they were and they were really doing alright. That pissed him off royally, and to block the image

from his mind he snuggled closer against Lance. He wanted these strong arms, this even breath, this feeling of safety to make him feel better, make him feel as if everything was fine.

Everything was fine, despite a few little details. Like the fact that they were locked in this attic. And Marie took away Lance's phone when they finally got a line out. And Joey was so damn sad.

But other than that, everything was okay. Because Lance was here, holding him tight, and the world could crumble, the stars could fall, the sun could never rise, and Justin would still be safe and warm. And that was all that mattered anymore.

* * *

Marie found the morning newspaper on the kitchen table when she came downstairs. Sometime before dawn, David had slipped out of their bed and even though he tried to keep quiet as he dressed, she woke up anyway. Lying there in the pre-dawn darkness, her back to his side of the bed, she stared at the wall and told herself it didn't matter where he was going, he wouldn't tell her anyway if she asked. He didn't even kiss her goodbye when he left. Well, fuck him, she thought bitterly, trying to convince herself that she didn't care, not anymore. But she couldn't get back to sleep after she heard the slamming of the door, a distant sound loud in the empty house, and when she finally couldn't take it any longer, she stumbled out of bed only to find the paper on the table. When had David come back? Where was he now?

Without picking up the paper, she read the headline and her blood froze in her veins. "Oh my fucking ..." Her voice trailed off. David's second letter had reached the newspaper already, and it was printed word for word on the front page. "David?" she called as she read his demands for the ransom delivery.

At three o'clock in the afternoon ... no police. "Yeah, right," Marie muttered. Police were always on the scene for these things, didn't David know that? Hell, they had seen enough of the movies to know how kidnappings worked. You never say no police, David, Marie admonished. You KNOW that's when they get called in.

Downtown, the letter continued. Of course it would be downtown. In the midst of traffic, even. Leave it to David to make a scene. And all the bystanders and civilians and pedestrians, all the curious thrill-seekers who showed up, they would just work to his advantage, wouldn't they? No one would dare shoot him, not with so many innocent people around. And now that everyone knew when and where, they would all be there, everyone in town, all the news crews, the television stations, the reporters -- he'd get away with the money in broad daylight, make the headlines, make the late night news, and pull it all off because he'd be in the public eye and for a brief moment he'd be invincible. God, just what you need, Marie thought grimly. A taste of immortality. And how are we supposed to live after this is all over with, David? Tell me that. How are we supposed to make it through day after day without THIS in our lives?

Marie scanned the rest of the letter. David asked that one of the guys in the band make the delivery -- a quarter of a million dollars in small, unmarked bills. You've read too many books, David, she thought, frowning. How would he know if the bills were unmarked, anyway? What exactly did that mean? The sound of bootheels on the hardwood floor startled her, and she looked up as David entered the kitchen. He held the pistol in his hand, the barrel pointed towards the floor. "You really think this is going to work?" she asked by way of hello.

David glanced at the paper and shrugged. "It has to," he said. "This time tomorrow we'll be on our way to Acapulco, Marie. All of this will be behind us. You'll see."

"Maybe," she muttered. She doubted it would be that easy. As David pulled out the pistol's clip, she turned towards the counter. She needed some coffee now, something thick and dark and strong enough to stop her hands from trembling.

David frowned at her. "Where are the bullets for this?" he asked. When she didn't answer immediately, he asked, "Marie?"

"I took them out," she whispered. Without looking at him, she bit her lower lip and sighed. "You really think this will all be over tomorrow, David? Can you promise me that?"

"I can try," David replied. Well, that was all she could ask for, wasn't it?

Best of Intentions
Chapter 10
by NSyncGrrl

Justin awoke to Lance's arms still holding him tight. It was such a pleasant sensation, Lance's body curled into his, his friend's hands clutching him close, the steady breath and heaviness of limbs that came with sleep ... I should wake up first every morning, Justin thought, looking up at Lance's closed eyelids and slightly parted lips. With gentle hands he caressed Lance's chest, snuggling further into his friend's arms until they tightened in sleep. Closing his eyes, Justin listened to the rhythm of Lance's heart beat against his ear and despite everything that had happened over the past few days, he wouldn't give this up for anything else in the entire world. Marie could offer them freedom now, unlock the door and never look back, but if it meant leaving this behind, these sweet moments, this safety, this love, then Justin would say no. He'd lock the door to keep it from escaping. He wouldn't let it escape.

And when they did get out of this mess, he wouldn't let Lance just drift away. He'd keep him close and never let him go. But he didn't think that would be much of a problem, since Lance felt the same way. Justin could taste it when they kissed, he could feel it in the strength of his friend's arms around him. Maybe he'd suggest to Lance that they stay hidden away here forever, away from everyone that might try to tear them apart or come between them. If it was just the two of them for the rest of their lives, Justin didn't think he would mind it at all.

As long as the others knew we were alright, he reminded himself. There was that. He hoped the guys knew they were okay. They had to know that, didn't they?

Lance shifted beside him, his knee brushing against Justin's crotch just slightly, but the touch was enough to change the direction of his thoughts and thicken his blood. "Lance," Justin breathed. He didn't want to be the only one awake anymore. He wanted Lance to talk to him, to touch him, to kiss him and love him and he wanted him to wake up now. "Lance?"

Murmuring in his sleep, Lance burrowed his head into the pillow and hugged Justin closer. Justin grinned and, watching his friend's face closely, licked the dark areola surrounding Lance's nipple. Lance's face clenched as Justin licked the nipple erect, the tiny guttural sound that escaped Lance's throat making Justin's heart race. "Wake up, Lance," Justin sighed, blowing on the damp nipple. Lance moaned louder, and Justin giggled at the sound. "Lance," he whined. Poking at Lance's stomach, he sang, "Wake up, wake up, wake up."

"Justin," Lance groaned, and then the syllables were lost in a sigh as Justin's lips closed over his pinked nipple again. His hands fisted in Justin's curls, pulling him closer as he arched his back, pressing his chest against Justin's mouth. "I'm trying to sleep ..."

Justin laughed. "Are you really?" he whispered, his hand straying to Lance's groin, where Lance's budding erection told Justin that maybe Lance was more awake than he thought. "Get up, Lance. I'm bored."

Smiling, Lance opened his eyes and asked, "Oh, so you want me to entertain you?"

"Is that such a bad thing?" Justin wanted to know. In the early morning light, Lance's eyes looked clear and translucent, as if they were windows that opened into his very soul. Propping himself up on one elbow, Justin rolled Lance over on his back and kissed his nose. "You're beautiful in the morning," he whispered, his lips lingering over Lance's to savor the taste of his friend's sweet mouth. "I'm going to wake up beside you every morning and kiss you conscious."

"I'll never get enough sleep," Lance complained, but his smile told Justin he was only kidding.

Kissing him again, Justin squeezed his hardening cock and murmured, "Is that a problem? If you don't want to sleep with me --"

"I'm not saying that," Lance corrected quickly. To prove his point, he caught Justin in a tight embrace and kissed him tenderly. "I can live without sleep."

Justin snuggled against Lance. "Just not without me, huh?" he asked. God, he loved this. This cozy time, this quietness between them, this man holding him close.

"Exactly," Lance replied. They lay tangled together for a few moments, listening to the stillness surrounding them, when suddenly Lance said, "I gotta pee."

"Way to kill the mood," Justin sighed, giggling.

Lance laughed. "I'm sorry," he said, kissing the top of Justin's head. "Let me up, baby boy. I'll be right back, I promise."

"Okay." Justin rolled away as Lance stretched languidly. Baby boy, Justin thought, his eyes widening as Lance kicked away the covers to reveal the length of his golden, naked body. I like that. He couldn't tear his gaze away from the dark hair swirled around Lance's hard erection, and as Lance sat up, Justin pouted. "I might not let you go."

"I have to go," Lance said, standing. The sunlight from the windows lit up his body, surrounding him like a halo.

As he stepped off of the mattress, Justin reached up and wrapped his arms around Lance's waist. "Come here," he growled, pulling Lance to him. He rested his head against the small of Lance's back, his chin on the soft curve of his friend's butt, and he cupped Lance's erection in both hands. "I'm not letting you go."

"Justin," Lance laughed, trying to twist away. "I'll be right back."

With a quick squeeze, Justin released him. "Okay," he sighed, flopping back to the mattress. Pulling the covers over himself, he watched Lance trot to the bathroom. Damn, he was sexy. Just watching him made Justin hard.

At the doorway, Lance turned and blew him a kiss. "Be right out," he promised, and Justin felt a silly grin tug at his lips. He'd have to tell Lance he loved him when he came back to the bed. He'd have to kiss him and hold him and whisper the words over and over again just to make sure he never forgot them.

Part of him hoped Marie didn't come up to the attic today, not to bring them lunch or dinner, because he didn't feel like getting dressed at all. He'd just spend the whole day in bed with Lance and that would be enough. We'll have to make sure we get these times when we're back with the band, Justin thought, waiting for Lance to return. These moments of just the two of us. I'm not giving them up -- or HIM -- for anything.

* * *

When Lance came out of the bathroom, he took one look at Justin curled beneath the covers and smiled at those dark blue eyes peeking out at him. "You're so damn cute," he said, crossing the chilly room quickly. As he approached the mattress, Justin held the blankets open for him.

"Get in," he said, and Lance crawled into the warmth of Justin's arms. Wrapping the blanket around them both, Justin sighed and said, "I love you."

"I know," Lance replied, laughing at the slight frown that crossed Justin's face. Rolling on top of him, Lance pushed Justin back into the mattress and thrust his hips against Justin's, their erections rubbing sweetly together. "I can feel how much you love me, Justin," he said, wiggling his hips to keep Justin aroused. "Have I told you I love you, too?"

"Not yet," Justin moaned, closing his eyes at the sensations flooding through him.

Lance kissed his eyelids. "I do," he whispered. "I love you." Kissing down the curve of his friend's nose, he breathed, "I've been thinking of how we can get out of here."

"How?" Justin asked, his hands clenching on Lance's buttocks, and Lance knew Justin wasn't really listening to him. He was losing himself to their touches and the kisses and he didn't care if they never escaped. I have that effect on him, Lance mused, kissing Justin's lips hungrily. Me. It was an exciting rush to know that the one he always wanted now wanted him just as badly. "Lance ..." Justin moaned, his name a breathy gasp between them.

"We'll break the windows," Lance murmured against Justin's throat. His friend's skin was so soft beneath his lips, his curls rough like raw cotton in Lance's hands. As he moved against him, rubbing their stiffening members together with a delicious press of flesh, he

whispered, "We'll break the glass and then climb down. There has to be a drainpipe on the side of the house, or a tree close by, or something. We'll wait until we're sure David is gone. Marie won't stop us --"

Justin shifted beneath him in rhythm with his own slow motions, his hands gripping Lance's butt and thighs tightly. "I'm not getting dressed today," Justin announced. "So we'll have to wait until tomorrow to escape, okay?"

Lance smiled down at him. "Why aren't you getting dressed?" he asked.

Opening his eyes, Justin grinned up at him and said, "Because my clothes are dirty. Remember?"

"Oh yes," Lance replied. He propped himself up on one elbow, leaning on the pillow to one side of Justin's head, and touched the tip of his friend's nose with one finger. "So you're not getting dressed until they're clean?"

"Exactly," Justin said, nodding to emphasize his point.

Lance smiled at the images that came to his mind -- Justin sitting naked in front of the TV, eating his cereal; the look on Marie's face when she brought their lunch and found Justin walking around in the buff. Now that was a nice image. "Do you want me to wash them for you?" Lance asked. He had been toying with the idea of rinsing the clothing out in the sink, maybe use a little shampoo to freshen the scent. It would take all day for them to dry but they had all the time in the world to just lie here and enjoy each other's bodies, didn't they?

Justin shrugged. "Maybe I want you to get me breakfast," he said, trailing his hands up Lance's sides until his thumbs rubbed over Lance's nipples. "I'm hungry."

"For cereal?" Lance asked, kissing Justin's forehead tenderly. "Or me?"

"Both," Justin replied. "Can't I have both?"

Lance laughed. "You can have anything you want," he replied. "Rule number one -- Justin gets what Justin wants."

"I think I like that rule," Justin said, giggling. Picking at the nipples that stood beneath his touch, he added, "Rule number two -- whatever makes Lance happy makes Justin happy."

"Rule number three," Lance said, thinking. His stomach growled, and he couldn't think of anything cute to say because now he was hungry. They could pick this up after breakfast. "Let me get some cereal and I'll think about rule number three."

As he started to push himself up, Justin hugged him and said, "Rule number three is that we never sleep apart."

"Justin," Lance said, frowning. This would end, he knew that. This cuddling, this closeness -- once they were back with the rest of the world and this was all just a memory, it would be over. And

he had kept Justin at bay for so long because he was afraid of losing something like this, wasn't he? Even just talking about it now might be too much. It might take away what he didn't want to let go of just yet. "Maybe we can talk about this later --"

Justin sat up as Lance extracted himself from the blankets. "We can talk about it now," he said, watching as Lance tugged on his boxers, lying on the floor beside the mattress. "There's nothing really to say, Lance. When we get out of here, nothing changes between us. None of this disappears."

Lance shrugged as he headed for the counter. Filling two bowls with cereal, he remembered the other times Justin had fooled around with him -- the drunken kisses, the teary night. In the morning Justin had simply crawled out of bed and walked away. No apologies, no sorry about that, no let's just be friends, okay? that Lance could at least cling to and use to define who they were to each other. But it was too late for any of that, wasn't it? Because Justin had said he loved him, not just after he got off last night but this morning, when sex wasn't an issue, and Lance had said he loved him back, because he did. And that changed things now. "What about the guys?" Lance wanted to know.

As he poured milk into the bowls, Justin laughed. "What about them?" he countered. Lance brought the bowls over to the mattress, where Justin sat with the blankets draped strategically across his crotch. "They don't have to know. If they do, who cares? I don't. I'm not going to wake up alone every morning just because Chris or JC might have something to say about it. That's not going to change the way I feel."

"How do you feel?" Lance asked, sticking a spoonful of cereal into his mouth. He chewed thoughtfully as he watched Justin eat. "We said the L word but is that what you really feel, Justin? Or is it just something we're saying to each other because we're alone and we're scared and horny and don't know what's going to happen next?"

A scowl marred Justin's angelic features. "Is that why you said it?" he asked.

"No," Lance said softly, meeting his friend's deep gaze. "I said it because I mean it. I love you, Justin. I do. I just don't want to lose you as a friend if things don't work out between us."

For a moment Justin studied him, the frown on his face furrowing his brow, until fear filled Lance's heart and he wanted to scream just to get the pained expression in those dark blue eyes to change. And then Justin broke into a wide smile, pure sunshine on a cloudy day, and he dove into his cereal with renewed gusto. "Things will work out," he said, the conviction in his voice strong and clear. "We'll get out of this, Lance, and we'll be together, and fuck anyone who gets in our way. I love you and I don't care who knows it. I'll tell Marie the next time she comes in here. She can tell the whole world, for all I care. I love you."

Lance laughed, relieved. Eating his own cereal, he said, "I don't think Marie's the type to tell the world anything. She's pretty good at keeping secrets, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah," Justin sighed. "I wish she'd at least tell someone we were okay. I hate knowing that everyone's so damn worried and we're just sitting up here, right as rain, you know?"

Lance nodded. He knew. He wondered how much longer they would be locked away in this attic -- was the ransom going to be delivered? Had someone agreed to pay it, even? He just wish they knew something. He'd have to ask Marie when she brought their lunch -- he wanted details, something more than just what the TV told him. I'll have to ask her before Justin tells her he's in love with me, he thought, grinning at Justin. Otherwise she'll go into shock and I'll never get anything out of her.

And he'd have to get Justin dressed. Or Marie would never come back ... talk about going into shock. And like it or not, she was their only link to the rest of the world right now. Until we get free, he amended.

* * *

A little after noon, David told Marie to get her shoes on. "Where are we going?" she asked, slipping on her coat. They had three hours until they had to meet the other band members downtown. Three hours until showtime. She felt as if she were stuck in quicksand, struggling to get free, trying to walk and getting nowhere, just sinking lower and lower with every step she took. Three more hours, she thought, following David out to the car. Even though the boys were locked in the attic, Marie felt the need to lock the front door behind her, just as an added precaution. Three hours 'til they're free, until WE'RE free, and why do I feel as if I'm heading for a showdown at high noon in the middle of town? Please God, if You're listening and if You're still answering my prayers, please let this end smoothly. That's all I'm asking at this point. Not even that it ends well, or in our favor, but just smoothly. For all of us. "David?" she asked, sliding into the passenger seat.

He thrust the gun into her hands and started the car. "Into town," he said.

Well, no shit, Marie thought. "The boys need lunch --"

"They won't starve," David replied, backing out of the gravel driveway. "In a few hours the police will have the whole downtown area roped off. They'll be looking for anyone coming in or out, stopping each car that passes and looking for anything suspicious. I want to be in place before that happens."

Marie bit the inside of her cheek and watched the woods rush by them as they drove. "We're doing this together?" she asked softly. Finally they'd be doing something together. That was the plan, wasn't it? Then why didn't it make her feel any better to know that David would be by her side when this went down?

But David shook his head. "I'm going to collect the ransom. You're going to stay out of sight, do you hear me? Keep the gun aimed on me, cover my back. Can you do that?"

"Yes," Marie whispered. If David asked her, she could do it.

"If anything goes wrong, you run," David instructed. Glancing over at her, he frowned. "You got that? Run. Don't look back, don't wait for me, just get back to the car and get the hell out of there, you hear me?"

"Yes," Marie said again, her voice stronger this time. She could do that. She could run. But ... "I don't want to leave you behind, though."

David grinned. "I'll be right behind you, I promise," he said, resting one hand on her knee. "You just get to the car. Don't wait for me. I'll get a ride back to the house, trust me."

"Okay," Marie said, nodding. She could trust him. This all started with that trust, didn't it? "Let's say it goes well," she said. It would go well, she just knew it would. "They give you the money. Then what?"

David concentrated on the road, and the radio played low between them. Just when Marie was sure he wouldn't answer, he cleared his throat and shrugged. "We'll take the money and let the boys go." Marie nodded again. That made sense. They'd unlock the attic door, maybe, and get into the car, drive as fast and as far as they could, until they ran out of road. The boys could use the phone to call their friends, and everyone would live happily ever after. Especially the two of them. On a sandy beach somewhere, under the hot sun, and she wouldn't spend the money, she'd leave that to David. She wouldn't touch a dime of it until Joey's eyes stopped haunting her dreams.

Maybe she could finally be free of the sadness she had caused him when his friends were finally set free. She hoped so. Because the rest of her life was too long to live with the memory of the pain she saw in his face every time she closed her eyes.

Best of Intentions
Chapter 11
by NSyncGrrl

Downtown. A busy fountain outside one of the museums -- something large, something in plain sight, something so painfully obvious that Marie didn't know how David hoped to pull this off. Undercover cops patrolled the area, trying to keep a low profile, but Marie could spot them a mile away with their clean cut suits, pressed jeans, ironed t-shirts, and academy regulation haircuts. No police, David's letter had read. Your friends will not be with me when you deliver the ransom ... We will release them once we have the money and we get away safely. Marie was still not quite sure how that would work. She leaned against the wall across the street from the fountain, close enough to a group of girls her own age to look like one of their friends, but far enough away so the girls themselves didn't give her nasty stares.

By one o'clock, the majority of traffic had been rerouted, and most of the civilians crowding the entrance to the museum craned their necks to see if they could see anything at all. Thrill-seekers, Marie thought, frowning. They don't even know what they're looking for but that doesn't stop them. What would they do if they knew the nondescript man with the short, slicked back hair and Ray Ban sunglasses sitting on the edge of the fountain was the author of those letters in the paper? David just blended in with the crowd -- from where she stood, Marie could see him talking idly to a teenaged boy with a skateboard. She half expected him to ask if he could take the board for a spin, just for kicks. No one knew he was the mastermind behind this inept scheme; no one knew the two youngest members of 'N Sync were in his attic. OUR attic, Marie corrected, glancing down at her watch. It was quarter to three, and the streets were getting more crowded as people parked their cars and ambled around aimlessly, waiting for something to happen.

Finally, something did.

A minute after three o'clock, a long, black limousine eased to a stop in front of the museum. Marie pushed herself away from the wall, letting the crowds carry her closer to the fountain. When someone jostled her, she patted the gun in her coat pocket reassuringly, making sure it was still there. Soon, she told herself, getting as close as she dared to the limo. The door opened and a large black man got out. One of the band's bodyguards, Marie suspected, for all the good he had been back at the hotel just a few days ago, when this all started. Then JC climbed out behind him. One of the bandmates, David's letter had said, not specifying which. Just one. The others must stay in the car or at the hotel. He didn't want to feel intimidated or threatened by all three guys at once, Marie thought. And JC was the least intimidating of the trio remaining. This will all be over soon.

In his hands, JC carried a large black briefcase. God, Marie thought, tentatively leaning against the back of the limo. A tall girl in front of her blocked most of her view, but she could see David

stand as JC approached. It was all too surreal -- suddenly the sky was too bright, the shush of the crowd too loud, the distant sound of traffic a dream she couldn't seem to shake away. She glanced at the tinted window of the limo and thought she saw Joey staring back, but that couldn't be, could it? He couldn't see her, not through that darkened glass, and she sure as hell couldn't see him. But she felt his sad gaze on her nonetheless, and the gun in her pocket hung heavy against her thigh. Wildly she considered pulling out the cell phone from her other pocket and dialing him up, just to say hey, turn around, look out the window ... can you see me, Joe? Can you see me looking in?

It sounded like a stranger who asked, "Do you have the money?" David's strong voice carried across to her easily, and she fought back the urge to laugh. When had she fallen out of the real world and into this Wonderland where everyone spoke in snippets of dialogue from bad Clint Eastwood movies? Couldn't David see the briefcase? Didn't he know the money was inside? Just take it and run, she thought, but when had David ever listened to her?

She shifted against the limo, trying to see the expression on David's face, but there was too much distance between them. She could just see his profile, mostly hidden by his sunglasses. She could see JC's expressionless face, a mask he wore to keep his composure because there were reporters in the crowd, cameras and police and fans, and he had to make it look cool, he had to look calm and collected despite the fact that two of his best friends were held at this man's mercy -- he had to play his part. Holding the briefcase out between them, JC said, "It's all here. Where are they?"

"Safe," David replied. He reached for the briefcase, his hand closing over JC's, but JC didn't let go. "My partner is with them," he said, and Marie marveled at how easily the lie flowed from David's lips. "You give me the money. I leave. They'll be released. That's the way it works."

"What if I don't believe you?" JC countered, and Marie closed her eyes in frustration. You don't HAVE to believe him, she fumed. Just give him the money and you'll get your fucking friends.

David laughed. "Do you have much of a choice?" he asked.

Marie leaned on the trunk of the limo, wondering what JC thought about that. Suddenly a glint of steel caught her eye, and she looked across the fountain to see one of the plainclothes cops pull out his service revolver. Oh God, she thought. Oh fuck, oh please, oh no DON'T make me have to cover him, please God PLEASE don't make me have to shoot, not today, not now, not EVER but sure as hell not today. As the cop raised the revolver -- slowly, so David wouldn't see the motion, he was too busy gauging JC's reaction anyway, too busy trying to wrest the briefcase from the other's grip -- Marie could just see it now, David lying on the sidewalk, his blood splattered bright in the afternoon sun, the briefcase fallen, money flying away like errant birds on the slight breeze. She couldn't stand that image, her dreams dying on cold concrete, the splash of the fountain drowning out the world. Before she could stop herself, she pushed the girl in front of her aside and cried, "Watch out!"

JC whirled towards the sound of her voice. The crowd shrank away from her, from the girl who dared to speak, who dared to get involved. In that instant David grabbed JC's arms and now there was a gun in his hand, the barrel pressed against JC's temple, his voice ringing out into the afternoon, telling everyone to step back, put down their weapons, he'd shoot this boy, he would, he fucking would ... and now things were going wrong, weren't they? This wasn't part of any plan, this look of terror on JC's face, David's hand behind JC's neck, pinning him in an awkward position as he held the gun to JC's head. With crazed eyes, David scanned the crowds, looking for her. "Marie?" he called out.

"Oh God, no," she whispered, bumping into the limo. Glancing around, she did see Joey now, his face staring at her through the dark tinted window, his eyes wide circles of disbelief because he knew now, he had a face to put to the voice and he recognized her, he fucking knew ... before David even shouted for her to run, she was already tripping through the crowd, pushing her way through the people blindly, shoving them aside in her haste to get back to the car. Now that was part of the plan. That part she knew.

The gun slapped against her hip as she ran. The car was just a few streets away. She'd get in and tear out of town and get back to the house. She'd wait for David there.

He'd tell her what to do then. Hadn't he said that? He'd get away and meet her there. And THEN this will be over, she thought, rushing through a dark alley, her lungs burning for air. It HAS to be.

* * *

When noon came and went with no sign of Marie, Lance thought maybe she was just running late. She'd get to them by one, surely. Or two. Or maybe three. She'd definitely bring them something to eat by three.

But she didn't. And by 3:30 Lance was starving. Justin sat on the mattress, refusing to dress in even a pair of boxers, because he didn't want to put on dirty clothes, and how childish was that? Well, Lance admitted, fixing himself another bowl of cereal to curb his appetite, I don't mind it. He's got a cute ass and a sweet smile and he can sit around naked forever if he wants to, but what will Marie have say? What indeed? She wasn't even there, Lance was almost sure of it. He spent almost a half hour holding his breath as he listened against the door, and he didn't hear anything out in the main part of the house. Not a foot shuffle, not a floorboard creak, nothing. He thought maybe they were alone in the place. Locked in an attic and forgotten like discarded toys. But it was getting late, and he hated to admit it, but he was getting worried. About Marie, mostly, but also about them.

Because what would happen if she never came back?

"Maybe you should put something on," Lance said, digging into his cereal. Leaning back against the counter, he watched Justin,

grinning at the bright smile and disheveled curls. The blankets were draped around his waist but that was it. Lance wondered if Justin even cared if Marie never came back. But then who'd do his laundry? Lance mused, crunching on his cereal.

"I'm fine," Justin replied. He stared fixedly at the TV, lost in a cheesy soap opera because it was the only thing on that they could pick up without too much static on the screen, and Justin seemed hell-bent on pretending that he was interested in it. But Lance could see the quick, furtive glances his friend cast towards the closed door every now and then, so maybe Justin was a little bothered by Marie's absence, too. Maybe he was losing himself in the TV to keep his mind off of where she might be or if she was ever coming back. Looking up at Lance, Justin added, "You're only wearing a pair of jeans."

"I know," Lance said, "but at least it's something."

Pouting, Justin asked, "Can I have some cereal?"

Lance shrugged. "Come and get yourself some." He smiled as he watched the indecision play across Justin's face.

Finally Justin said, "I'm not dressed yet. Can you bring me a bowl?"

Lance winked. "I'd like to see you come and get it," he said, grinning wolfishly.

With an exasperated sigh, Justin stood up and let the blankets fall from his body. Damn, Lance thought, swallowing his cereal as Justin trotted towards him. Letting his gaze linger on the patch of darkened hair at his friend's crotch, Lance thought maybe he wasn't hungry for cereal anymore. If Marie wasn't coming back, if they'd never get out of here, what was stopping him from crawling into the bed again and taking Justin up on his I want to make love to you statement from the day before? Justin wrapped his arms around Lance's waist, pressing his body against his friend's, his naked chest warm along Lance's bare arm. Resting his head on Lance's shoulder, he sighed and said, "Marie's not coming back."

"Yes, she is," Lance said as Justin eased one leg around his, snuggling closer. "Get dressed and I'll get you some cereal."

"Give me yours," Justin said, the petulant tone in his voice bringing a smile to Lance's face.

Lance laughed. "Say please," he commanded, scooping up a spoonful of cereal. He held it up for Justin and waited.

When Justin opened his mouth, Lance pulled the spoon away. "Please?" Justin asked sweetly, and Lance stuck the spoon between his lips, pulling it free slowly.

As Justin grinned at him, Lance touched the tip of his nose with the end of the spoon. "You're cute," he whispered, kissing the drops of milk from Justin's lips. "Now get dressed."

"No." Justin smirked and opened his mouth for more. As Lance fed him another mouthful of cereal, he added, "You like me naked."

He pronounced it nekked, and the way his eyes lit up dared Lance to disagree. Leaning closer, he lowered his voice and whispered, "Let's eat the rest of this in bed, okay?"

"Good idea," Lance whispered back. It was an excellent idea, actually, and he led the way to the mattress, waiting as Justin slipped beneath the covers before easing himself down beside him. Justin curled into his lap, leaning back against Lance's chest and hugging the blankets to his neck to watch the television as Lance ate. Placing the spoon against Justin's lips, Lance said, "Maybe Marie knows you aren't getting dressed. Maybe she's afraid to come up here and see you naked."

"What's scary about that?" Justin wanted to know. He took the spoon into his mouth, eating the cereal. "I think I look good --"

"Apparently," Lance interrupted, grinning at the frown that crossed his friend's face. "You'd get dressed if you thought you looked funny --"

"I don't look funny," Justin cried, turning to look up at Lance. Thin lines creased his forehead as he studied him, not quite sure if Lance was only teasing or not. "Lance, do you think I look funny?"

Lance kissed Justin's forehead to smooth out the wrinkles. "I think you look gorgeous," he replied softly. "And you better get dressed before she comes up here because I don't want her to see you naked. I don't want her thinking wicked thoughts about you."

Justin laughed at that. "Marie?" he asked, turning back to the TV. "The only wicked thoughts she has about me are different ways to kill me slowly. She hates me, remember?"

Before Lance could respond, the words Special Report flashed across the TV screen, and the picture changed to a reporter standing amid a large crowd. "We're here on the scene," the reporter said, the wind blowing her hair in her face, "of what has quickly become a hostage situation. It started as a ransom delivery, but somewhere along the way, something went wrong."

"Oh fuck," Justin muttered, sitting up. On the screen they could see David -- his hair was short and blonde now, but Lance would recognize those hard eyes anywhere. He held onto JC as if he'd never let go, his arms interlaced with JC's, one hand holding a gun pressed against JC's temple. "Jesus Christ, Lance, he's got Josh --"

"I see that," Lance said. Fuck. When had things deteriorated to this? Where was Marie? Why couldn't she have picked up the ransom? Setting the cereal bowl aside, he wrapped his arms around Justin's waist and hugged him close, his eyes riveted to the screen. Fear shone brightly in JC's eyes, filling Lance with a helplessness he couldn't fight. Fuck you, David, he thought, sighing into Justin's shoulder as his friend held onto his hands tightly. God, please, leave JC out of this. Please.

* * *

Every station played the same broadcast, the same reporter,

calmly explaining the situation, speaking in dry tones as if reading the ingredients on a box of cereal. Marie flicked through the stations, looking for some music, a commercial, a weather report, anything to take her mind off of David and JC and the money she left behind. As she fiddled with the radio buttons, she kept one eye on the rear-view mirror, but no one followed her. Not yet.

Leaning over, she tried another station. The car pulled to the right and she quickly jerked the steering wheel to the left, trying to stay on the road. Stay calm, she told herself, but the voice inside her mind sounded hysterical and not anything like the David she used to know, the David who spoke quietly to her and kept her sane. Stay calm, Marie. Get to the house and things will be okay. David will get away, he'll get the money, it'll be okay.

On the radio, she could hear the soughing sounds of the crowd gathered by the museum, the murmurs, the soft sobbing, an undercurrent beneath the reporter's words that made it all so much more real to her. She had been there -- she knew what the crowd looked like, she knew the faces and knew that this wasn't some person in a studio somewhere, reading a report fresh off the AP wire. This was real. And David was in the midst of it. Somehow he'd escape though, he had promised her that.

Suddenly a loud popping filled the car, a rapid sound like backfire, and Marie slowed, scanning the road around her. Nothing. No one for miles around -- she was alone. And it wasn't her car making the sound, she was sure of it. It was -- "The suspect is down," the reporter cried, and now there was emotion in that gray voice, now there was color in the broadcast, draining away from the world around her to fill the hurried words. "I repeat, the suspect is down. Joshua Chazez is safe, his friends are leading him away, but the suspect is down, fallen by a sniper's bullet --"

Marie felt her blood turn to ice, and with numb fingers she clicked off the radio. Down, she thought, her lower lip trembling as her mind struggled to comprehend the implication of that one word. Down. As in shot. As in dead. David. Down.

Fuck. So he wasn't going to meet her at the house after all. He couldn't. He was lying on a cold concrete sidewalk amid a cheering crowd, and why wasn't she there by his side? Weren't they in this together? Down ...

She had to get back. To the house. To the boys in the attic. Somehow she had to get back home and then she could think about this. Then she could figure out what to do. Because David was gone and he wasn't calling the shots anymore, was he? It was up to her.

Up to her.

Brusquely she brushed away hot tears that spilled down her cheeks and blurred her vision. With both hands on the wheel she concentrated on the lines on the road and told herself she had to get home.

Best of Intentions
Chapter 12
by NSyncGrrl

Because he was listening for it, Lance heard the distant crunch of gravel as a car pulled up to the house. He held Justin in his arms, the two of them lying on the bed beneath the covers, Justin now dressed in a pair of jeans. Lance himself had pulled on a white t-shirt, and Justin's bare back was warm through the thin cottony fabric where it pressed against his chest. When he heard the faint slam of the front door, he kissed the nape of Justin's neck and whispered, "She's back."

Justin shivered. "I wonder what happens now," he replied softly. Together they had watched the news on TV -- they saw David fall from a wound in the hip, JC rush back to the limo, the crowd shouting wildly with relief. They hadn't seen Marie at the scene but surely she knew what occurred. How could she not?

Lance couldn't even begin to imagine what happened now.

* * *

Down. The word still reverberated in Marie's mind, bouncing around, looking for something solid to connect with. David. Down. She still couldn't comprehend it.

"I need to think," she said out loud to the empty kitchen. She needed to think. So she put on a pot of coffee and stared blindly at it, numb, her mind blank. Down, she thought. I have to think. David. Down. When the coffeepot began to whistle, a jangling noise that shook her out of herself, she removed it from the stove.

But the noise continued, a high jingle, a shrill ring. A phone.

Absently she retrieved Lance's cell phone from her pocket. Flipping it open, she pushed the talk button and, putting the phone to her ear, waited. Silence stretched out through the open line, filled only with a faint breathing. Finally someone asked softly, "Marie?"

Joey. She set the coffeepot down on the counter, scorching the linoleum. Hail Mary, mother of God, it's JOEY. "What," she said. She wasn't in the mood for questions.

A quiet sigh breathed into her ear, and she closed her eyes only to see his sad face in her mind. "What happens now?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" she countered. What happened with what? It was over, wasn't it? David was down ... it was over.

"My friends --" His voice broke off in a sob, but he composed himself and fuck him for being like this, for being an open wound oozing emotions that bled her heart and made her fingers tremble.

Clearing his throat, he asked, "Where are they?"

"Safe," she replied. She didn't have the money, but that didn't matter anymore, did it? Because she didn't have David, either. She pouted as she picked at the handle of the coffeepot. "David ..."

Joey sighed. "He's okay," he whispered, and hope skipped through her heart. Okay? she wondered. But he was down -- "Stable condition, the doctors say. A shot in the hip. He's fine, Marie. He's going to be fine." As he waited for the news to sink in -- he's fine, he's going to BE fine -- he added, "He's taking the blame. Says none of it's not your fault. He forced you to do it -- you weren't involved in any of it."

"But I was," she whispered. It was all for her, everything he did. The kidnapping, the ransom, the guns. Everything. For her. "We were in it together."

"Marie," Joey sobbed, and she could imagine the twist of his features, his face crumpling like tissues as he gave into the tears. "Please just let them go. Please tell me where they are. Please --"

"They're okay," she assured him, but her mind whirled with the things he had said. He's taking the blame, David's saying it's not my fault ... not my fault. And we were in this together.

"Marie --" She folded up the phone, cutting off Joey's words in midsentence. Leaving the phone on the kitchen table, she headed upstairs. They were in it together, weren't they? From the start.

And it would end that way. Together.

* * *

Justin pulled on a t-shirt as he watched Lance study the windows again. "We should break the glass," Lance was saying, and he punched at the thick pane to test it, but it only shook slightly. Shaking the pain from his hand, Lance frowned. "Maybe if we break it --"

"And what?" Justin wanted to know. He stepped over to where Lance stood, staring at the world beyond the glass. Easing his arms around his friend's waist, he rested his head on Lance's back and sighed. "It's hopeless, Lance."

"It's not," Lance assured him. He rubbed Justin's arms and sighed. "Fuck this, Justin. It's not hopeless. I know it's not." In a quieter voice, he added, "It can't be."

The sound of a key turning in the lock scraped through the room, and they turned as Marie entered. Her inky hair was pushed back from her face, her eyes dark and red from crying, her lips a thin line of determination. She held the gun easily in one hand, and Justin knew it was loaded now, he could just sense it, the danger curled in her fist begging to be released. As she locked the door behind her, she said, "I'm sure you've heard by now."

"I'm sorry about David," Lance said, and Justin tightened his

grip around his friend because he couldn't think of anything to add to that. What could he say?

Marie sighed. "He's okay," she said. "Your friend called to tell me that."

"Our friend?" Justin asked, frowning.

"Joey," Marie said, as if the two of them went way back, and she looked at Justin as if he were crazy, of course it would be Joey, who else would it be? A flippant remark rose to his lips but he bit it back. She had a gun, he had to remember that. And it wasn't hidden in the waistband of her jeans this time -- it was in her hand, coiled and loaded and ready to rumble. He had to keep that in mind.

Lance turned, putting himself between Justin and Marie. When Justin tried to release him, Lance held onto his arms tightly, unwilling to let him go. "What now?" Lance asked softly.

"Now we wait," Marie replied. With a wave of the gun, she motioned towards the bathroom. "In there."

For a moment Lance didn't move. Say no, Justin thought wildly. Say no and then we'll jump her and get the key and the gun and get out of here --

But then Lance stepped forward, towards the bathroom, and Justin followed him, and their chance slipped away. As Marie fell in line behind them, she pressed the barrel of the gun into the small of Justin's back and he almost stumbled from the cold, hard steel biting into him. Inside the tiny bathroom, Lance turned, pushing Justin behind him in an effort to stay between him and the gun. "Marie --"

Reaching into the voluminous pockets of her jacket, Marie extracted a pair of silver handcuffs. "Are those real?" Justin asked before he could stop himself, and of course they were real, they were right in her hand, why wouldn't they be real? What else would they be? He watched as Marie snapped the cuffs open. Before he could think of stopping her, she clamped one cuff around his right wrist. The metal was cold against his bare skin, and when he tried to pull away, it closed tighter around his wrist. "What are you doing?"

Marie ignored him and shoved the shower curtain aside, exposing the empty bathtub. Turning to Lance, she said, "I have the gun. It's loaded this time, and if you even try anything, I'll shoot him. You understand?" Lance nodded helplessly. "Step into the shower," she commanded, pushing Justin back. When he didn't move, she shoved the gun into his stomach and glared at him. "I'll shoot you now, I don't care. If you don't listen --"

"Listen to her," Lance said softly. With a glance at his friend and a small pout tugging at his lips, Justin stepped back into the tub. The porcelain was cold beneath his bare feet.

Reaching up, Marie draped the chain between the handcuffs over the shower curtain rod. Justin felt his arm tingle as he held it

up, waiting. "Come here," she instructed, and Lance stepped up to the bathtub. "Raise your arm." When he did as instructed, she shook her head. "The other one."

He raised his left arm and she snapped the empty handcuff onto his wrist. Then she dug into her pocket and pulled out a tiny silver key. As they watched, she opened the small mirrored cabinet above the sink and placed the key on the top shelf. Justin felt hopelessness flood through him -- how would they reach that? How would they ever get out of here now? With a sardonic smile, Marie left the bathroom, leaving the door open. In the other room, they could hear her unlock the attic door. "Marie?" Lance called out, fear rising in his voice. "You're not just going to leave us like this."

"Not for long," Marie promised. They heard the hollow echo of her footsteps on the stairs as she left.

For a long moment neither of them said anything. Time stretched away between them like the chain between the handcuffs that held them together. When Lance reached for the sink, the chain slid along the rod with a noisy clatter and Justin felt his arm tugged a little higher, but the sink was too far away. Lance couldn't reach it. As he sighed lustily, Justin ventured, "She left the door open."

"Fucking good it does us now," Lance exploded, and Justin shrank back from the sudden violence flashing in his friend's eyes. "We're cuffed, Justin." To emphasize his point, he pulled on the handcuff, yanking Justin's arm higher. "Fucking handcuffed."

Justin pulled back. "I know," he replied. "Jesus, Lance, don't do this to me. You're all I have left. You're my strength. You can't fall apart now."

"Why not?" Lance sobbed. He glared at Justin, tears shining in his eyes. "Why the hell not? I'm sick and tired of this shit. I just want it all to be over with already. I'm not going to do it anymore. I can't. I just can't ..." He sighed wearily. "Justin, I'm losing it," he whispered, wiping his hand across his face.

"I won't let you," Justin replied. He took Lance's chin in his free hand and, leaning closer, kissed his trembling lips tenderly. "I won't let you lose it, Lance. We've made it this far. Together we'll see it through. I promise." Caressing Lance's cheek with his thumb, Justin stared into those pale eyes and smiled sadly. "I love you. I do, Lance. Remember that."

Lance sighed. Rubbing the tears from his eyes, he whispered, "I'll try not to forget."

Grinning, Justin repeated, "I won't let you."

* * *

Marie left both doors to the attic open -- the one leading to the room above and the one at the foot of the stairs. She didn't know if Lance could reach the handcuff key or not, and she no longer cared. She just wanted it all to be over. She wanted it to end, and

she wanted to see David again. When she had thought he was dead, part of her died with him, and she wasn't even sure if she could get that back now. Her heart still felt hollow inside, empty and gaping like a canyon, and she was afraid that no one would ever be able to cross that span again, least of all herself. But she had to try. She had to make amends. She wanted this all to end, and David wasn't here so it was up to her now, wasn't it? They were in this together, despite whatever he said, whatever he wanted them to believe. She was just as much to blame as he was in this whole affair.

Downstairs she picked up Lance's cell phone from the kitchen table and turned it on. Scrolling through the address book in the phone's memory, she found Joey's number and repeated it to herself until she knew it backwards and forwards. She repeated it as she picked up the receiver to her own telephone, hanging on the kitchen wall. She repeated it as she dialed the number. Far away his phone rang -- once, twice, three times. She wedged the phone between her cheek and shoulder and picked at the gun's safety as she listened to the ring. Pick up the phone, Joey, she thought, waiting anxiously. She hoped he had caller ID.

Just as she was about to hang up and try again, he answered the phone, breathless. "Yes?" he asked, gulping for breath.

"Joey," Marie said. She felt as if they were old friends by now. "Let me tell you something."

"Marie," Joey sighed. "Oh God, Marie, please just tell me where they are, okay? Why can't you do that for me?"

Marie closed her eyes. "Listen." On the other end of the phone he fell silent. "I want to tell you something, Joey. David didn't do it alone --"

"So you said --"

"Listen," she said again, her voice taking on a hard edge. "It was for me. He did it all for me. The kidnapping, the ransom -- it was for me. And I helped him willingly. He didn't force me to do any of it."

Joey sighed. "I understand --"

"I want you to tell them that," Marie interrupted. She waited a moment to make sure he heard her, and then she asked, "Can you do that for me?"

"Sure," Joey replied. "I'll tell them you were in it together."

Marie sighed, relieved. "Thank you," she whispered.

"Marie," Joey asked carefully. "My friends ..."

"Get in the car," she commanded. The gun slipped from her fingers and clattered to the floor. "I'll tell you how to get here."

You can do this, Lance told himself as he inched closer to the sink. Justin thinks you can so you can. His fingertips brushed the smooth surface of the mirror. "Almost got it," he muttered, glancing back. Justin stood on the edge of the bathtub, balanced precariously on the tips of his toes, his right arm extended as far as he could stretch it over the top of the shower rod. "Just a few more inches," Lance said, stretching further. Every muscle in his arm ached with the strain, but he could just feel the edge of the mirror, he could almost pick it open. Almost ...

"Lance, I can't." Justin sighed, exasperated. "I can't stretch much farther." As if to prove his point, one of his feet slipped from the edge of the tub and he stumbled to one knee.

Lance's arm jerked back as Justin caught the shower rod in his hands. "Justin!" Lance cried, pain searing up his arm and across his shoulders. Lunging forward, Lance felt like a wishbone, pulled by Justin while he reached for the mirror. "Hold still, I almost have it."

"I'm trying," Justin said. "Jesus, Lance, this hurts --"

"I know," Lance said, trying to scoot a little bit closer. "Just a little more ..."

Suddenly something snapped overhead, and Justin tumbled into his arms as the shower curtain broke away from the wall. "Shit," he cursed, grabbing fistfuls of Lance's shirt to catch himself as he fell. Lance tripped back against the sink, the hard porcelain knocking his breath away. As he gasped, Lance doubled over, holding his stomach where white hot pain spread like wildfire across his skin. Justin's hands were cold on his arms and face. "I'm sorry, Lance. Oh God, I'm so sorry."

"I'm fine," Lance managed, breathing deeply. The frown and concern on Justin's face brought a smile to his lips, and he squeezed Justin's shoulder gently. "You broke the shower rod."

"Fuck the shower rod!" Justin cried, his eyes livid with rage. His hands ran over Lance's face and chest to make sure nothing was broken. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Lance said. "Really, Justin." He caught Justin's hands in his and smiled up into his friend's angry face. "Really. I'm fine."

Justin took a deep breath. "Okay," he sighed. Running a hand through his curls, he said it again. "Okay. Now what?"

"Now we get out of here," Lance answered, turning towards the mirror. He opened it and for one heart-stopping minute, his fingers fumbled with the key but didn't want to pick it up. Then he managed to slide it off of the rusted shelf and it was cold between his fingers, cold and real, and the faint click it made when he inserted it into the lock at his wrist was the sound of their freedom. As he unlocked Justin's cuff, he smiled grimly and said, "I hope she's not going to do anything drastic."

"Like what?" Justin wanted to know. He held Lance's hand tightly in his as Lance tossed the handcuffs aside.

"Like kill herself," Lance replied. He hoped she wasn't that desperate. She said that David was still alive, didn't she? So why did he get a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach when he thought of her last words? "You're not going to leave us like this," he had said. And her cryptic reply? "Not for long." Stepping out of the bathroom, Lance pulled Justin with him. "Come on."

In the distance they heard the tell-tale wail of police sirens. "She called the cops," Justin breathed. He stopped, tugging Lance back to him. His azure eyes were wide with a mix of disbelief and relief. "Those are police sirens, Lance. Do you think she turned herself in?"

Lance shrugged. "I don't know," he whispered, but his heart swelled as the sirens grew louder, coming closer, coming to rescue them. Only they were already free, weren't they? The door was open and they were together. They were already free. Squeezing Justin's hand, Lance said, "I guess this is over."

"No." Justin smiled and pulled him into a tight embrace. Kissing him tenderly, he whispered, "This, you and me, this is just beginning."

The sirens stopped abruptly. Lance heard the crunch of tires on gravel outside, shouts and heavy footfalls on the wooden porch at the front of the house, but all that mattered to him now were Justin's arms around him, Justin's lips on his. They would face whatever awaited them together.

Lance lost himself in Justin's sweet kiss, hugging him close. Together. He never felt so free.

The End