

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter One  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
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Hey, so I'm back. Just went on one of those temporary hiatus things. Did ya miss me? Of course you did. But don't worry, I'm going to fill you in on most of the stuff you missed, so it's really not that big a deal. Let's start off with how much you missed, shall we? Well, for starters, school's over now. Exams and final papers and all that stuff. We both did really well, if you care. And you know what, who knows, maybe you even do. Stranger things have happened. It's about mid July at the moment, so all in all it was about 6 weeks. That's about three weeks of school and three weeks of summer. Things have been really great, but not terribly exciting in the sense that anything of the new and different has occurred, so again with the not feeling too bad about missing out.

At the end of our last day, we all went out for a celebratory malt from Kildonan Place (you've gotta go to Kildonan Place, man! Malts from malls are always cooler), Kyle included. He'd been done his year for awhile by then, but he still felt like celebrating. It occurs to me that I've never mentioned what he's taking. Well it's really kind of funny. He's going to be a nurse. When he first told us, me and Celery couldn't stop laughing, just 'cause we kept thinking of that old Saturday Night Live skit with Mel Gibson and saying, "Kyle Vasskez - male nurse!" over and over in our heads. Anyway, he's done his first year now, and he likes it a lot, so that's cool. It's not like there's actually anything wrong with being a nurse if you're a guy, like, that's totally fine, but, whenever there's even the slightest opportunity to razz the hell out of Kyle - for whatever reason - you've got to take it. Jonas had fun with it when he found out too, so it's not like me and Celery are the only ones. I was talking about something completely different when I started this, do you know that? Oh well. We're all familiar with my near constant digression by now. Back to the matter that used to be at hand. All of us having malts in the parking lot of Kildonan Place, leaning against the Le Baron and generally making loiterers of ourselves. It was then that Celery asked me if I knew what we were going to do all summer. I told him I didn't. He grinned.

"But I do."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"So what are we going to do?"

"Everything."

That's basically what we've done too. Everything and anything that's sounded fun, interesting, or otherwise worth the effort. Many days have been spent at the beach (you probably don't think beaches when or if you ever think Winnipeg, but it gets insanely hot here in the summer, and beach is very necessary for survival). Many more days have been spent watching things. Movies, Celery skateboarding, Jonas and Kyle pretending to make out. That's moved into the realm of no longer freaking me out, so I don't even mind. It's pretty hilarious actually. But sometimes I honestly don't know about those guys. They still don't date much (Sam is basically history), and they are definitely in the freakishly close ranks. But that doesn't have to mean anything. Straight guys can have incredibly close friendships without becoming huge fags for each other. That really doesn't happen that often, or so I hear. Anyway. It's been a great summer so far. Much chillin and illian like a bunch of villains (who doesn't love gangster rhyming?), much fun, and a considerable amount of love.

This summer has been a good time to be me and Celery. The twins are at soccer camp, Kara being over at Sue's is pretty much a constant, some of the other bakers take time off so my parents are really busy with the bakery, and Kyle and Jonas know how to give us our space. If it's possible for us to have gotten any closer than we were six weeks ago, then we've done it. I think in total, since our last exam, he's spent two, maybe three nights at Their house, and the rest have been here. Even before that it was getting to be almost nightly. Kyle teases us about it some. Like, earlier into the summer, Cel was feeling kinda sick, and he was afraid I'd like catch it or something, so even though I told him I didn't care, he insisted on not spending the night. When Kyle found me alone in my room he was all, "Wow, this must be like the first night in weeks he hasn't stayed over." While playing up his exaggerated shock. Sort of an exaggeration, but not really. But it's like, not only do we miss each other like crazy, our sleeps are shit if they aren't shared. So for those reasons, plus like, summer, Celery's been showing up on way more than a semi-regular basis these days. I, personally, couldn't be happier. Oh wait, yes I could, if he stayed permanently. Yep. That would definitely make me happier. But I've explained why I'm not going to push for that and I'm sticking to that. A little too much pain for the possible gain.

The summer routine is pretty much the same as the school one, minus the going to school and doing homework. Sunday is still official family and Kyle and Jonas day, we're still mostly on our own Saturdays, and the rest of the week is spilt pretty evenly down the middle. A fun - though often confusing - thing about summer, is the way the days seem to run together. Like, I personally never know what day it is in the summer, except when someone suddenly informs me it's the weekend. And I do sort of have an internal 'it's Saturday' clock, but that's about it.

Alright, I think I've pretty much caught you up to speed, so, why don't you rejoin the present tense party.

Everything's pretty typical, it's Sunday afternoon, Jonas is over and Kyle's around. It's kind of rainy, so we're not at the beach. There's a movie on but no one's watching, it's just background to our conversations, insults, jokes, and goofing around. Every once in awhile Celery will do something way too cute not to merit one and I'll kiss him, which (no surprise here) causes Jonas and Kyle to protest loudly. That or, you know, they'll start making out themselves. Arms around each other and a lot of fake moaning, no actual lip contact. Somehow, this is all a part of their self-appointed duty as proud representatives of the straight community. If it wasn't all in fun, we'd have to kick their asses, but since it is, we fight back the best (not to mention most fun) way by kissing harder and more passionately the louder they protest. They've gotten to know just how long to push before a line is crossed and we lose ourselves in the kiss. If that happens we're out for 15 minutes at least. Mock whining and fake making out is only fun for so long.

Kyle is teaching Jonas the rules of some college drinking game (my brother, ladies and gentlemen! The drunk!) when Celery grins at me, and I know exactly what he's thinking.

"Dynasty shots?" I say, grinning back. He doesn't bother to say 'of course' but kisses me, which is what we always do when we've read each other. It's just so much fun we have to share the joy somehow and what better way is there? Before the love there was just a lot of grinning and the occasional knuckle connection, but I like this better.

"Jeez, the more time I spend with you guys the more sickening you are to watch," Kyle whines.

"Aww, you're just jealous," I accuse, my lips still half against Celery's.

"I know I am," says Jonas, with an out of place seriousness.

"What do you mean? I thought you were I-don't-really-want-to-be-in-a-relationship-right-now guy. Like you could have seen more of Sam - she's great!" He shrugs.

"Sure she is. Sam's a great girl and I liked her a lot, but she wasn't not forever material. She didn't give me the 'feeling'. That spark, you know? It was just a high school thing. We had fun together, but she was no soulmate. Half the time I didn't understand her when she's talking, never mind when she wasn't." Celery and I look at each other, both confused by this and at the same time profoundly glad we've found each other. It's something I feel all the time, the gratitude, the deep

appreciation, but the reminder that this thing we have is something few people ever get to experience really drives it home hard, making it seem all the more precious. Still, Sam is amazing. You'd think Jonas would have dug her more. She's not the kind of girl who deserves to be taken for granted. Or like, tossed aside. Dismissed as 'highschool' material only. But like, I mean, just because she's great, I guess that doesn't mean she's necessarily great for Jonas.

After Jonas and Celery leave (Debbie's stupid mother who she hates is visiting for the weekend, and he has to be around, even though no one will actually acknowledge his presence), before I even say a word Kyle goes into 'lesson mode' and says,

"Listen, this is something that I need you to understand okay, not all of us have had the freakish good fortune of exchanging produce with our soulmate at age six. It's not something that happens for everybody, so you've got to have some patience for those of us who aren't sure who we want or when or how or whatever. This whole love thing doesn't come as easy to the rest of us as it does for you and Celery,"

"Easy?!"

"Alright, calm down," he says, grinning. "I didn't mean it like that exactly. I know the road hasn't exactly been free from problems, the getting together part, but the knowing you loved him came easily enough, didn't it? You've always been sure of your feelings," I shrug, feeling my anger dissipate.

"Yeah, I guess you're right about that."

"That's all I was saying. Some people have a much harder time deciding what their feeling for another person is. It's confusing, so just cut him some slack, okay?"

"You got it, big bro." He cuffs me affectionately.

"Smart ass." And according to Celery, a pretty sexy one to boot.

I wait up for Celery until about 11:30, but finding myself surprisingly tired, and figuring he's just doing the good but unloved grandson thing, go to bed.

The second I open my eyes in the morning I have to immediately shut them again. If I hadn't, chances are they would have popped out of my sockets. I take a few seconds and then open them for the second time. Yep. I was right. There he is, just like a second before, lying asleep beside me. The beauty of him distracts me from his presence in general. Once I've snapped out of that (which took awhile, just so you know), I go back to

being surprised and a little panicky. He looks fine physically at least, so that's something. And yes, this isn't really all that of an unusual thing anymore, waking up with him in my bed, but when has rational logic ever stopped me before? The answer is never, and most of you actually got it. Good job. I try to calm down and let him sleep which turns out to be not all that hard, as I slip back into the very enjoyable activity that is staring dreamily at the one I love. By the time his eyes are starting to the rapid succession of blinks that always indicates his ascent into wakefulness, I'm almost totally at ease.

"Hey," I say, in my almost totally at ease voice.

"Hey," he returns and leans (I'm guessing unconsciously) in for a kiss. I meet him halfway. To hell with morning breath.

"So, um, you're here," is my statement/question once the kiss is finished. He smiles.

"Good to see you picked up on that."

"Any particular reason or just 'cause?." He's lying on his stomach, inches away, fiddling with the end of a pillowcase.

"I, like," he mutters shyly.

"What," he peeks at me, an adorably shy and embarrassed smile on his lovely face.

"I missed you. I couldn't sleep on my own last night. I tried, but I couldn't. Dinner and mandatory sitting in silence with everyone in the living room ended so late I wasn't going to come but I was so tired and I wanted to be near you so bad I caved in to myself and dragged my sorry ass over here." I beam.

"That's awesome. I'm really glad you came, I missed you too."

"You did?"

"Yeah. I kept reaching out for you in my sleep and then waking up 'cause you weren't there. Plus, it took me forever to get to sleep fully in the first place, even though I was really tired."

"I got here around 1:30 and it looked like you'd just nodded off."

"You walked over here at one in the morning?" He shrugs.

"Sort of,"

"Sort of?"

"I skated." I nod.

"Of course."

"So we've officially reached scary, huh? One half night away from each other is more than we can handle?" I shrug.

"I'm not too worried about it." He smiles, already moving closer.

"Neither am I."

It doesn't really matter that it's Monday, just that it's a weekday. That's the only thing that will in anyway affect what we do. Well, that and who's working. We all have jobs, but some of us more than others. Like, Celery works about three days a week at Boarders Anonymous, and Jonas about the same at the Polo Park Silver City. Kyle has roughly 4 shifts a week at the bakery, working downstairs either at the till or in the kitchen itself. Kyle actually likes it down there, in the thick of things, but yech, the heat. So far I've escaped that extremely hot and stressful fate, but there have been dark hints about me, downstairs, and the month of August. What I do now is really boring (but at least cool) stuff like filing and other office type stuff. Sure, I have to put up with guff from Kyle about being like too delicate and stuff to work in the actual bakery, but that doesn't change the fact that I'm not the one who's boiling on a semi regular basis. Boring, yeah, but it's really not so bad. Plus, I got to help with the design of the new sign we got last year, which was pretty cool. Both me and Kyle have been like, learning the family business or whatever since we were 15. That's the age when all Vasskez kids get put to work. The whole family always ends up pitching in around Christmas during the rush, which is by far the most insane period of the year, but it's not so bad in the winter. During 35 degree heat, the bakery is absolutely sweltering. Though, even in the winter I usually end up taking phone orders and helping Mom manage stuff. This has less to do with my being delicate than that I'm basically crap at the whole baking thing in the practical sense.

Anyway, none of us are working today, but I think I heard Kyle mention something about paint ball. Him and Jonas have already gone a couple times since the break. I personally do not understand the attraction of chasing people around and shooting them with paint, but I'm big on all that to-each-his-own stuff, so whatever. It's something for them to do just the two of them, and as they've been pretty much best friends since day one, it's a good thing for them to have. I don't exactly object to the alone time it affords me and Celery either. But, now that we've just enjoyed a very satisfying round of one of my favourite kinds of alone time, I'm ready to go out into the world a little.

After we've taken our shower I ask, "Wanna go skating for a few hours?"

"Yeah!" he says, grinning enthusiastically. There's a surprise.

"Okay," I say with my indulgent, loving boyfriend smile. We've already used up the coolest part of the day, but Celery's happiness is worth nearly perishing from heat exhaustion for. "You've got your board here, right?" He nods.

"Yup. I rode it over here, remember?" Oh right. "Where's yours?"

"I dunno, somewhere. I haven't ridden it for awhile,"

"You don't know where your board is, man?" he asks, in mock disapproval. Or at least, we're hoping it was only mock. I'm not really entirely sure to be honest. I shrug.

"It's probably in my closet, I'll go look," I race up the stairs to do just that.

For Celery, a board lasts for about every two months if he's skating all the time. Sometimes he won't even make it through the whole summer on the board he gets in spring. In the winter when he's only doing about a session a week at the Edge (that's Winnipeg's skate park), they'll go longer. He doesn't really like parks, but he's too hooked on it to go cold turkey the whole like 5 months of winter we've got down here. I need a new board maybe once a year. We both always buy our equipment at Boarders Anonymous, which for those people who weren't listening before is where Celery works during the summer, so we get discounts and stuff. Which seriously helps, 'cause decks and shit aren't exactly cheap. You can get a good one for like 80 if you're lucky. Celery's decks have to be pretty wide, cause he's so big and stuff, so his are usually more. His summer employment keeps him amply stocked, but like, he could work more if he wanted. When Celery's talking about skateboarding it's like his shyness magically disappears, and he's super knowledgeable, so he's a well valued employee. They'd take him all year round probably. But during school, he's mostly too busy with sports, and well, me.

"Got it!" I shout, heading back down the stairs, hoisting up my board for all to see. Celery's the only all, but so what.

"Great, let's go,"

So we go skate for a few hours, and somehow manage to avoid groping each other almost the whole time. Thanks for that sarcastic 'good job'. I really appreciate it. We're just starting to skate home when Celery catches a rock and gets thrown from his board. I've seen it happen to

him like a million times before, but watching him fall still freaks me out every time. Like, I'm just into the beginning stages of panic, and he's already up on his feet grinning, but still with the freaking. He gives me a quick hug, kisses my ear, and we get going again.

"Are you ever going to get used to that?" he asks, almost teasingly. The almost because he knows it genuinely upsets me, and Celery's much too nice to make jokes about my pain.

"No." I leave no room for debate. There's simply no hope. He falls, I get worried. End of story. The number of times I see it happen does not, nor will it ever, change that.

" 'Cause, I'm fine. I'm always fine." And I always freak. No matter how many times you fall or we have this conversation.

"I know," and he knows about that stuff up there, so I don't have to go repeating it to him.

"It's just.."

"I know. You hate to see anything take away from the purely joyful experience that is skateboarding. It doesn't. Really, it's all part of the fun,"

"You getting upset is part of the fun?"

"Sure. Or, no. Not the FUN, but the whole package. Like, you can't go to Disneyland without getting freaked out by those giant Mickeys and Tinker Bells. But you still go, and have fun, right?" If it was anyone else but Celery, I'd be getting a 'you're totally insane' look right now. He just nods.

"Yeah. I guess." It's no wonder I love him. I'm pretty sure no other person on the planet would have come up with that response. Never mind actually mean it. But that just goes to show you that nobody understands me like my boy.

We skate for a little while longer (we're taking the long, meandering route back) and suddenly we're nearing this corner where four guys are playing hackey-sack. I've never been any good, but Celery is. He really likes it too. It's like this mellow, skater sub-culture thing for him. For me, the major attraction is getting to say stuff like, 'can we join your hack?' and other sentences using the word hack. That's just pure fun. We get closer, and I realize one of the guys is Kaleb. I'm not sure how this will work. We could just skate by, or wave at least, and then keep going. I'm not really thinking joining this particular hack would be the right move. I look over at Celery. He's doing the blank stare



thing, but his eyes are doing a pretty good impression of the concrete, so yeah with the not stopping. Kaleb just waved though. We wave back. Uh-oh, he's calling us over. This has not good written all over it. Still, potential catastrophe or not, we get off our boards and walk over.

"Dudes!" He's tanned nicely, I notice. Damned good looking Kaleb who likes 80's movies and probably Buffy too.

"Hey, Kaleb," I say. Celery can't seem to choke out a greeting, but he nods at least. And in some countries that thing on his face could pass for a smile.

"How's your summer going?"

"Really good, yours?" His grin's like tripled in size. It's kind of a weird one too. All proud and gleeful and stuff, like a little kid's.

"It's been awesome." Hold on! Note dreamy tone! Note blushing of cute blonde fellow hack member!

"Yeah? That's great - done anything especially exciting or have you just been like hanging out?" More proud and gleeful. More blushing from blond fellow hack member.

"Um, well, exciting, I'd say." He scratches his forehead a little and then grins up at us again, like he's getting over his case of the shy. "Especially this one thing actually," he looks over at the blushing blonde, who ducks his head but still doesn't say a word. "Carrots, Celery, I want you to meet Shane, he's my boyfriend,"

"Dude," Shane reproaches in a voice so soft it's barely even a whisper. It sort of suits him though. He's not exactly girly, but everything about him is sort of gentle. But he gives off a really sweet, nice vibe. And he's very cute. I like him already. Celery is also clearly a fan. He may even be warming up to Kaleb.

"Nice to meet you, Shane," I say. I think if I tried to shake his hand or something it would probably like spook him, but I try to convey my sincerity in my smile and tone.

"Yeah," Celery speaks with a gentleness I don't possess, and with that one little word Shane totally relaxes. Maybe Cel's putting out shy guy pheromones or something, but whatever it is, it's done the trick on Shane.

"Wanna play for awhile?" Kaleb asks. Celery looks at me, and I shrug. Then he looks at the other two guys in the hack. They smile.

"The more the merrier, dudes," one says.

It's like, man, where did all the surfers come from? This the is fucking prairie here, people! Oh well. I say dude too sometimes. It's time to check my judgmentalness at the hack. You'll notice I've been saying 'hack' as much as possible. That's because it's so much fun! I told you guys that.

"Kay, cool." So Cel falls into the hack and they all do their mellow rhythm thing for awhile, but I stay on the sidelines watching. Happy to be watching. After a few minutes Kaleb breaks away from the others, and stands over by me.

"Wanna go for a quick walk around the block?" he asks me, grinning shyly now. I look over at Celery, and big surprise, his eyes are fixed on us. But here's the surprise part, there's no concern or turmoil in them, just your everyday curiosity. The way he'd look at me if I was talking to Jonas about something he couldn't hear, or Kyle. Definite getting of a major happy about that.

"Yeah, sure," I say. I smile at Celery, and he smiles and nods 'see you soon' back. Kaleb blows a sweet kiss to Shane, who gets all cutely embarrassed again, and then we start walking.

"He's pretty cute, dude," I say, letting Kaleb know right away what the topic of conversation will be, though, I'm sure that's why he wanted to talk in the first place.

"I know, and he's SO sweet, I really like him,"

"That's really great." He looks at me with all gravity.

"He's not rebound boy. I saw you looking at him, all concerned, like you were afraid I was going to break his tender little heart. But it's not like that. I'm not settling." He sneaks another shy grin at me. "I had to chase him for awhile," I laugh.

"How'd you meet him anyway?"

"He lives on my block. I just never really talked to him before 'cause he goes to a different school. I met his friends first, you know, those guys Matt and Aaron? The ones playing hackey-sack with us,"

"Oh yeah, right."

"Matt works with me at Pizza Hut and Aaron's his cousin. They all live around here though, and they're like really good friends. They're straight, but they have wicked gaydar - either that or I'm totally faggy. Anyway, they pegged me right away. I was a little worried when Matt up and said, 'so you're gay, huh, Kaleb' one afternoon, but they're totally cool. We get along great. Like the second thing he said after that was, 'cause if you are, I know this really cute

guy and I'm going to set you up.' That was like, it. The next thing I know, there's Shane. They didn't tell him what was going on, or even that I was gay, they just started inviting him along on all the stuff they were doing with me. Even though it was like a set up, I couldn't help but like Shane. And I was pretty much ready for that too, you know? Like, by the time I was ready to admit it was time to get over you, I was already nearly there, you know? That was the hardest part, actually saying to myself I had to give it up. That was more of a hurdle than getting over the feelings themselves after that, or like, that was when I started dealing with the fact that I was dealing with them. I know I'm probably making like no sense whatsoever, but I'm just trying to make you understand that I'm really serious about Shane. I think I might even love him, I don't know. It's a totally different thing than it was with you. With Shane, I WANT to fall in love, with you I had to do everything in my power for that not to happen. I only sort of succeeded too," He looks over me again. "Am I like boring you?"

"Not at all," I say, meaning it totally. I'm like riding the joy wave here. We might finally get to be friends! Plus you can just like HEAR the love in his voice when he's talking about Shane. It's so beautiful. Like, make jokes if you want, I know that's a dorky thing to say, but it's like true and stuff. Kaleb deserves to be happy, and I think he finally is. This is like make my week type news. "Please continue." He's all grin all the time.

"So like I was saying, set-up or not, there was no stopping the big like. He's so cute, I mean, the way he acts too. If you get to know him, you'll understand what I mean. He's nothing like you, or me," I don't comment. "But I love that about him. He like challenges me to be more sensitive and gentle. And he's SO shy! It took me forever to win him over. I knew he liked me, but man, did that take a long of cajoling to get out." He sighs, no other way to put it, blissfully. "But it was worth it. We've only been going out for like, I don't know - okay, that's a lie, I do - 8 days, but it's been so intense. The whole time before the actual event of getting together was supercharged too."

"When did you actually meet?"

"The day after exams finished, Matt brought him over after work. I think I fell right then actually, just seeing him in the doorway of my house, almost too nervous about meeting someone new to even step inside. The way he kept tucking his hair back and smiling shyly whenever I talked to him," more with the blissful sighing.

"Definitely not a random crush. I feel so insignificant in comparison," I'm actually joking about the fact that he used to like me! This couldn't get any better! Kaleb laughs.

"Well, you missed your chance, what can I say? I'm all Shane's now," that's one more sigh for the blissful big board. "For as long as he wants me."

We've just been circling the block, and we're back at the curb now, ready to stop I think. The second we're in view, two things happen. Or, the same one thing happens to two people. Celery locks me in a gaze that I swear is powerful enough to physically pull me over to him, and Shane does the exact same thing with Kaleb. We break the killer gazes with our boyfriends to grin at each other, and then we like lazily sprint over to them. I take Celery's hand, and Kaleb wraps his arms around Shane's waist. Matt and Aaron complain about gay love fests in the middle of the street and the further decline of public decency. It's a great moment.

We do a little more corner chilling before doing all the great to see you, see ya around stuff and skating off.

"Are you mad at me?"

"Mad at you?" he says, laughing. "Why, did you make out with Kaleb while you were on that walk?"

"No!" I say, hitting him with his hat. "Dummy." Instead of giving him his hat back, I keep it. Every once in awhile, I like to wear it. It makes me feeling like I'm wearing a part of him. "But, like, I left you with three total strangers, I know that isn't exactly your dream situation," About half way down the block I'd realized what I had done, and I almost doubled back, but the need to talk things over one final time with Kaleb had overridden that. I told myself it was just me doing the irrational freaking anyway, which probably wasn't worth going back for.

"It was okay. All we did was play, no big."

"Well, good." I'm not really all that surprised. Celery likes it so much 'cause he finds playing hackey-sack relaxing, so I figured the activity would counteract the strangeness of the people involved.

"How'd your talk go?"

"Great!" I say, finding my enthusiasm once again. "He's like totally in love with Shane, it's so cute." He nods, smiling.

"That was pretty clear. I think it's very kick ass. No more unrequited for him either - that's for sure. It was really sweet, the whole time we were playing, you could totally tell how distracted Shane was, waiting for Kaleb to come back. It wasn't even that he was worried or anything, he just didn't seem to be able to stand not

being in Kaleb's presence," remind you of anyone?

"You know he's you, right?"

He laughs a bit, but then he says, "Yeah," both serious and happy. He turns on his board, a little ahead of me and we're face to face. "Just like Kaleb's you,"

It may sound weird, but that's pretty much the way it is. You must have noticed the freakish similarities between us. I've even been like trying to point them out to you, you know, to help the slower ones. And it doesn't take much to see Shane's a smaller, slightly shy, Manitoban surfer dude version of Celery. I feel a heavy sense of peace. It's all as it should be now. I'm here with the rest of me, with my other half, and now, finally, Kaleb's found his. And when it comes to boys like us, we need our Celerys and Shanes desperately. They make us happy and they make us complete, and if nothing else, we need them to keep us in line.

Home, rested from our skating, Celery and I are just getting over a heavy make out session when we hear door slammage and rowdy talking emanating from the hall. Jonas and Kyle have returned. This fact is proved beyond a shadow of a doubt when they stroll through the living room doorway a few seconds later. I know, what were we doing on the couch. It's not like I don't have a bedroom, with a bed, and like, a door that locks. I don't know what to say! We're hooked on it! It's a thing. We sit on the couch, we TRY to watch a movie or channel surf, but instead, we inevitably end up with our tongues down each other's throats. Blame it on the hormones, man. That, and how ridiculously hot Celery is.

"Hey, guys," I say. "Have fun?" They're still a bit battle scarred, and there will be bruises later, but there's that whole glow thing going on as well. Grins too. I'm thinking, yeah to my question.

"Course! Always," Jonas says enthusiastically. "You dudes HAVE to come along sometime,"

"Can't do it, man, it's just not our thing,"

"That's what you said about the party!"

"Give it up, Jonas, there's just no talking to some people. I've been trying for years, and they shoot me down every time. It's not in the cards." Jonas doesn't look ready to let it go.

"Before I die, you will have played a round of paint ball," he says all serious predicty.

"Whatever," Celery says, dismissively. Probably wants to move on

to another topic. One a little less paint ball related, I'm guessing. Like, say, anything.

"This is where I say anyway," I say.

"I need a shower," Kyle announces.

"Me too," Jonas agrees. They look at each other. It's a VERY freaky moment. There's eye lockage. There's eerie silence.

"You go first," I try not to let out too loud a gasping breath. This naturally doesn't stop them from all laughing at me. The bastards. I thought we were past this.

"Sorry, dude, but that was WAY too perfect. How could we pass up an opportunity like that?" I glare at him, Jonas.

"Bah humbug to you all," I say, getting up. You know how I like standing for effect. Or you should. I've done it before.

"You're mad at me too, baby?" Celery asks, hurt baby puppy dog voice, big droopy eyes, stuck out lip. Double bastard.

"No," I sigh, annoyed to have been beaten by his look.

He kisses me. And pulls me into his lap. I feel better. The lap thing is pretty standard issue with us now. It seems like he's forever pulling me into his lap these days. I tease him about it sometimes, saying he only does as a cover to spare himself from embarrassment (no, I'm not going to explain to you what kind, figure it out yourself), but, actually, once or twice, that's really been true. Not this particular time though.

Pretending to be disgusted with the whole thing, Kyle heads up the stairs to take his shower. Jonas plunks himself down on the carpet, avoiding the furniture 'cause of the like paint residue and stuff.

"So, since you weren't off doing the sensible thing and playing paint ball with me and Kyle, I'm forced to ask this question, what were you up to?" Oh no. I groan. Jonas is confused. I nod over at Celery, he's grinning.

"Last time I checked? About 6' 4"," Is that not the CORNIEST joke you've EVER heard? There's too much corniness to even comprehend. Jonas puts my groan to shame.

"That was BAD, dude." Everywhere! The word 'dude' has taken over the planet!

"Survival tip number one - absolutely crucial to successful friendship with Celery - NEVER say that. Never say anything that can be made into a bad pun. For example, do not, whenever it can be avoided, say 'so' and then nothing, do you know why?" He laughs.

"Don't tell me - no, but I knit a little?"

"That's right. Also, try not to talk about solos," You know. I'm singing a solo - yeah! So low you can't hear me! Isn't that something you'd want to avoid?

"How long has this been going on?" I shake my head.

"Forever. Since he was like 7. The doctors tell me there's no cure."

About now, Celery's had enough, so he smacks my shoulder and tells me to shut up.

"Kay," I'm in a real giving mood.

"Since I actually sort of care, let me rephrase my question. What did you guys do today?"

"We went skating,"

"Okay. Try it again for the millionth time," Jonas says, nodding.

"But on our way home, things got a little more interesting," Celery feigns hurt.

"You didn't find skating with me interesting,"

"Being you is always the highlight of my life, love, you know that," I say, doing the gentle loving tone followed by a kiss thing even though I know he was joking. I have to keep up with him with my sweetness points.

"And once again, my question gets abandoned on the roadside,"

"Oh, sorry, Jonas!" I say, ending the lip lock. "Back to the tale of what was interesting. As we were skating home, we ran into an old friend."

"Who?"

"Kaleb." He gets a bit tense.

"What'd he do?" I laugh.

"Nothing! Well, introduced us to his new boyfriend," Jonas grins.

"Really? That's kick ass,"

"That's what I said," Celery butts in.

"And he's totally cute, and really sweet too. We think they're in love."

"Well, good for Kaleb." And then for the pause wherein Jonas shoots me a slightly

dangerous looking mischievous look. "Cute, huh?" Oh yeah. Way to be a pal. Really. Thanks SO much. Celery jumps right on the bandwagon.

"Yeah! Checking out the sights eh! Hussy," Forget about that other stuff. What's most disturbing here is, that's not the first time he's called me that. You'd think a 21st Century teenage male would come up with a slightly more up to date insult. But, Celery's old-fashioned boy, so I don't know why I'm surprised.

"Whatever. I was only looking out for Kaleb, he deserves a hot boyfriend. But since he can't have me - at least a okay looking one."

"What I love most about him is his modesty," Celery whispers confidentially to Jonas. Who nods in the same down low conspiratorial manner. Everybody's a comedian.

"I thought what you loved most about me was my ass?" That's another win for me. He's blushing his pants off. Jonas is back on my side too, laughing off his. What can I say? I'm the greatest.

Celery's about finished his pouting, and Jonas is down to the occasional chuckle by the time Kyle comes rolling down the stairs, still towelling his hair and wearing nothing but a pair of jeans. What the hell? We don't walk around shirtless in this family. It's just not something that's done. He grins at me, and I glance over at Jonas. I'm not 100%, and yeah, it was probably just my imagination, but I think I saw him look. At Kyle I mean. But like, LOOK. Hungrily. The me looking at Celery without a shirt look. Then it's gone, and he's getting up off the floor.

"My turn," I watch Jonas bound up the stairs, and so does Kyle. When my eyes move to look questioningly at Celery, he shrugs, as confused by the whole display as me.

"Kyle?" I actually had to snap him out of a reverie. WHAT'S going on?! There's no way this is all some elaborate plot to get me to freak out. All this work for one laugh at my expense? Not even Kyle would go that far. At least, I don't think.

"What?" Way too genuine a what. Too hazy, too, emerging from my dreamy daze. I'm swimming. I have no clue what's going on. I mean, IS something going on? You tell me. 'Cause I'm completely wiggled.

Jonas comes back from his shower, and when everything just goes on as normal, I decide it was all in my imagination. Like, so he looked at Kyle. How is that a big deal? I mean, I looked at Kyle. That doesn't mean anything. He's my brother. He's Jonas's best friend. I just overreacted. That's all.



Summer keeps going by until it's suddenly into the final days of July. Hot days and humid nights. Work, play, sleep, love. Days blend together like they do, and time just passes. The best thing about this summer so far I'd have to say, is how much closer we're all getting. There really wasn't much closer for me and Celery to get, but the four of us are really growing together. Kyle and Jonas are like totally tight, and it's really great to see. I can't remember seeing my brother more happy. And Jonas has certainly blossomed from the razor-tongued kid we first met all those months ago. He was always cool, but his whole Zen philosophy only started to show itself in the past like two months or so, since we've all been getting close. I'm glad to have Jonas in my life, for himself, and also because of how much closer I've gotten to Kyle because of it. It's like we've gotten back the closeness of our youth, and I think I have Jonas's presence to thank for that. It was really only after Jonas started hanging around that Kyle became such a regular fixture in my life again. I finally know what it feels like to have more than one close friend, and add that to being more in love with Celery than I even thought possible, and I think I can confidently say I'm about the happiest guy in the world right now.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Two  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Sat, 05 Apr 2003 18:39:51 -0500

It's some day. Tuesday I think. I don't really know. We all hung out. It's been too hot to even think about going outside, so we've been playing games. We recently discovered Beyond Balderdash (which is cooler than normal Balderdash 'cause instead of just definitions for words you have to make up movie plots, think of what acronyms mean, come up with the thing that happened on like September 24, 1957 or whatever and other really hilarious stuff). We play all the time. I swear, even the instructions are hilarious. Though, I'm not sure they're intended to be. But you know I think maybe they are. Anyway, you've gotta try it sometime.

Just before six, just as the like millionth Beyond Balderdash round of the day has drawn to a close, Celery hits his head and goes, "Shit!"

"What?"

"I forgot something. Yesterday when I went back to the house to get a replacement king pin," it's for his board, "they told me I was expected to make an appearance at dinner today," he immediately senses my elevating levels of panic, "It's probably no big deal. They're like probably having friends over or something. You know, keep up the happy family facade and all that." I nod, mostly back to feeling relaxed.

"Okay. Will you be back?" He shrugs.

"Probably. Depends on how late stuff goes. If they linger, I'll have to too."

"I don't care how late it is." He kisses me.

"Yeah, but I do. We'll see. You'll probably get your way. We both know how weak I am when it comes to resisting your charms." I grin. Sure do, and that's just the way I like it.

"See you later," I say, with emphasis.

"We'll try to keep him occupied," Jonas says reassuringly to Celery, who's sort of biting his lip. I smile.

"I'll survive an evening without you. Go." He grins.

"It's not like I WANT to or anything,"

"We KNOW!" Kyle.

Laughing, "Okay, okay. I can see when I'm not wanted." I kiss him just to let him know how wrong he is. He smiles at me angelically.

"I'll come to thee by moonlight."

I am at almost all times, I hater of poetry. As a general rule, I think it sucks. Mostly just because I don't think that way. I don't understand how people can actually be expressing real emotion if it rhymes, or even if it doesn't. But The Highwayman is a wicked weird poem. What Celery just said is a line from it, in case you didn't know and were like really confused about why I suddenly started talking about poetry.

Even though what he said about Them having guests makes sense to me, I spend most of the evening feeling at least mildly worried. But he doesn't call or come rushing over all upset and eventually I settle down, until I'm finally so settled I'm asleep, figuring he'll be happy I didn't wait up for him, and that when he arrives he'll just go to sleep too.

I wake up with a start - alone in my bed - for lack of a better expression, my Celery sense tingling. Basically, at certain times if Celery is sad or lonely or needs me in some other way, I just know. It happens in the reverse for him too. I guess it comes from being so connected like we've always been. I probably would have felt it when it he was getting beat up if I hadn't been so busy freaking out on my own about the whole thing. Anyway, usually when it happens I'll call him, or if it's this late I'll wait until morning, but tonight, crazy person that I am, I decide to roam the streets for awhile. It's not as unsafe as it sounds actually, this is a good neighbourhood. So okay it's still a stupid and reckless idea, but I'm going to do it anyway. Whada ya want from me? I'm a 17 year old male. I have no practical concept of death and therefore I consider myself to be invincible. Ask any Shrink. It's like a complex or something and every 17-year-old male's got it.

I slip out of bed and into a pair of jeans and t-shirt, run my fingers a few times through my hair (gotta look good for the muggers) and I'm out over the balcony railing, down the tree, over the fence and off down the street. Yeah, it's not so easy, a balcony escape. But it's doable. Call it my Celery Sense acting up again, but I walk in the direction of his house. It's really only about three houses away from mine, but that's if you cut through the backlane. See, his house is a little ways down on the street behind mine. If you go all the way around, it's like a bit over a block. Back in the day when he was little and sneaking over, Celery would usually climb his fence, cross the alley and then do the fence-hopping thing again into our backyard. It's still basically his m.o, but right now I'm in a kind of walking mood, so I'm taking the long way. Pretty much the second I get onto his block I see Celery slumped against a tree on the boulevard. I of course go into instant panic mode. Never mind that I'm

doing it too, what is he doing outside at this time of night? Doesn't he know it's dangerous? What's he doing just sitting there propped up against some tree? There could be a crazy person hiding behind that tree for all he knows!

"Celery," I say, running over to him. Once I'm close enough I hear he's crying. "Celery, love, what's the matter?" I ask as I reach to hold him. I don't think he knew I was there until I spoke 'cause now he's suddenly wiping his eyes and looking all startled. I guess that's to be expected though, I mean, you don't really expect your lover to just happen along when you're sobbing against an elm at 2am, now do you?

I crouch there dumbly while he finishes pulling himself together and wait until his breathing returns to normal before asking again, "Love, what's the matter?" He shakes his head and stands up, a little wobbly, even with my help.

"Not here." We begin walking towards my house and I want to keep asking questions but knowing how pointless it would be, I stay quiet.

We help each other over the fence and up the tree. I let us into my room using the key under the lawn chair. I'd launch into a big speech about how technically they're Adirondacks, but I'm kind of distracted.

"Celery, I'm seriously freaking out over here. What's going on? I find you crying against some tree in the middle of the night and you won't say anything - help me out here. Tell me, explain to me why,"

"You were out there too," he counters.

"Celery Sense. Stop stalling," I say abruptly. He shrinks into himself.

"I'm sorry," I sigh, moving closer and putting my arms around him.

"Don't be, just tell me what's going on." He takes a few strengthening breaths and shrugs a bit, letting me know I can let go.

"Debbie's pregnant," Oh-kay...

"Uh, Mazeltov?"

"We live in a four bedroom house, Carrots,"

"So?"

"So there's no room for the baby,"

"The steps can share, can't they? They're both boys,"

"They say no." They - and you should really know this by now - are Debbie and Doug.

"What does this mean?"

"It means we're moving," To a bigger house, close by, I tell myself trying desperately not to panic. S'not really working.

"Where, when?"

"Doug's looking to get transferred, but wherever it is, it won't be close. The nearest branch he's applied to is in Regina." Doug's a manager at the Royal Bank.

"When?" I squeak.

"Whenever he gets another job. It'll be soon, They hope before school starts,"

"You just found out?"

Right now my emotions have been suspended, I'm completely detached. I'd never make it through if I wasn't. I can tell Celery's doing the same thing. If we weren't we'd both be sobbing hysterically right now. Instead we're talking as if it were a ham sandwich we're discussing.

"Yeah. Well, tonight at dinner. I should have known something was up the second They told me I had to eat with them. I wanted to come over right away but I shut myself up in my room and cried for something like 3 hours instead. I fell asleep I guess. I woke up about 40 minutes ago with a headache and the memory of what happened. I got right out of bed and left the house, but I didn't get far before I started feeling unsure about coming over. It was so late already then and I was a mess, I didn't really want you to get the news when I was in that state,"

"So you stopped and cried on the street?"

"So I stopped and cried on the street."

"This is actually happening?" I ask him, still feeling more like I'm floating above this scene, watching it happen to other people. Not believing yet that any of it is real. He stops staring at the wall and looks at me, breaking my heart with his grey eyes.

"This is for real, this is actually happening,"

I have my information so now I can cry. I do. Loud sobs, muffled by my

pillow, while Celery's hands stroke my shoulders and neck. I can hear him crying too but he's trying to soothe me. I'm supposed to live without this person?!

"It can't! There has to be some other way," I say sitting up, frantic.

"You can stay here! Mom and Dad won't mind - I bet they'll insist! I promise, Cel, everyone would welcome you with open arms! No one would mind, I'm sure of it. You can sleep here, or maybe Kyle will move into his own place soon and then we can have the apartment," Celery puts a finger to my lips, I'm babbling. He shakes his head.

"Carrots, I don't think-"

"No, it'd work! Really it would! If you live here, then the baby can have your room! They wouldn't even have to move,"

"It's not just the room, Care, there's money to think about too,"

"Well, if they don't have to look after you then it'd be cheaper and Doug wouldn't need a promotion! Everyone will want you here, Cel, why can't you just-"

"They'd never go for it. I know your parents would let me, want me even, but They would never allow it. I know They wouldn't." I'm not giving up that easily.

"Then you can get emancipated! Lots of people do that, you're independent enough! My Tante Jane is a lawyer, she could help us, I know she could, it'd work, really!" He shakes his head again, there's a sad gentle look in his eyes.

"That won't work either. I'm sorry, my love, I wish it would but none of it will work."

"Why not?! They don't even-" I stop, horrified by what I was about to say. Celery turns his mouth into something that almost looks like a smile, but not quite.

"It's okay. You can say it. I've known for years and am past caring," You're the boss.

"They don't even care about you. Why wouldn't they let you stay?"

"It's a status thing. If I stay She becomes the teenage failure mother again. They don't love me or want me but they sort of need me for their image." Image is everything to Them. "It's not a perfect family without me,"

"I don't care about Them! I care about you! We'll find a way, we HAVE to find a way, I won't let them take you!" He reaches over and caresses my cheek softly.

"Sometimes there isn't a way. I have to go to, like it or not." He's still talking like it's the ham sandwich we're discussing.

"WHY can't you try for emancipation?"

"I'm not even sure we have that in Canada and anyway, what reason do I have to make the request? I don't want to be away from my boyfriend? They're not NICE to me, but I'm not abused. I'd get laughed out of court."

"They're trying to separate us! Why aren't you fighting this?" I'm desperate, frenzied.

"Because I know Them. There's nothing compassionate or loving or even decent about Them. Not when it comes to me. Nothing we could say or do will change that. I don't want whatever time we have left together spent fighting hopeless battles. I'd much rather spend the time loving you and trying to soak up as much of you as I can while I'm still here with you."

"You can't leave - I'll die!" I say, starting to cry again as the reality of the situation settles in more and more.

"You won't. I'll be back in less than a year and there's no way I'll stand for you being dead when I get here."

"Why do you have to move away?" I say, rolling piteously into a ball on my side. "I mean, why does Doug have to go and find another job anyway? There aren't any 5 bedroom houses in Winnipeg?"

"I told you, They need more money, a whole extra person is expensive. Anyway at dinner They said Doug's been looking for awhile now without even knowing about the baby. He's looking for a promotion, more power and money," The problem is They live beyond their means, really showing off. I guess the more you actually have to spend the more you can overspend. The kind of credit you get and everything.

Celery may still be acting like we're talking about a sandwich but my emotions on the other hand have made their return with a vengeance. I feel like starting to cry again but don't. I wish he'd give up and show a little feeling though. I know he's hurting, I saw that easily enough on the street, but we could at least be trying to comfort each other or something. I've sort of lost my ability to speak, but I want him to lie down beside me, at least then I'd be able to feel that he's still here at least for now, feel him holding me, know that it was real. I look up at him with a face like a whimper. It takes him less than an instant to give me my

one of my wishes, arms strong and firm, body close as you can get.

"It'll be okay somehow, baby. I don't know how, but it'll be okay. Just because I might have to go away for awhile doesn't mean I'm actually leaving you. The real me won't ever leave you, I'll always be with you. And it won't even be for that long. A year, that's all. We can do that in our sleep,"

"I know you're trying to be strong for me or whatever, but this unconcerned attitude isn't exactly helping me feel less scared."

"Oh, Care!" he chides, squeezing hard. "It's killing me too, I promise it is. You saw me crying my heart out before, imagine nearly 4 more hours of that and worse. But we can't spend the rest of our time together crying - those aren't the memories I want to take with me wherever I end up going. The ones I want to leave you with. I know it sounds completely ridiculous and impossible but I want us to try to be happy at least for most of the rest of this. Don't fake it for my benefit, but let's try, okay?" It's for him, so I can do it, but not yet.

Holding on a little like grim death, I murmur, "Tomorrow. Not tonight, tonight I get to just hold you, okay?" He's holding me back just as tight. We're probably giving each other bruises but who cares.

"Yeah, okay," for maybe the first time his voice gives away what's going on. It's a bit ragged, definitely scared, and as desperate as mine's been. For some reason, out of everything else, that's what comforts me the most.

In the morning when I open my eyes, Celery's sitting up, smiling down at me carefully. I try to smile, but my mouth's not having it. I give up and sigh. "I really am going to try - I promise."

"I know. But don't force anything. I want us to be happy - not miserable trying to be happy. No pretending either. I want us to be honest, real." There he goes again, talking me down from panic, making everything make sense. I wrap my arms around his neck and hang onto him for awhile, blocking from my mind any thoughts of times when his neck won't be around for me to cling to.

"Are we having fun yet?" I joke pathetically into his neck a few minutes later. Celery keeps rubbing my back.

"They can't win, baby. Don't let Them win," I sigh into him, and then break my hold. He gives me that same, hopeful, tentative, 'please smile back' smile. He may be smiling, but his eyes are still grey.

"Working on it," I promise. I look at my clock, almost 1. Man.



"It's pretty late," Celery mentions rather pointlessly, noticing my face change with surprise.

"Late to bed, late to rise." New spins on old adages are hours of fun.

Celery kisses my forehead and we snuggle back down together. We can talk, try to smile, do the happy for whatever time we have left thing, but what I'm most grateful for is that in this moment, I can be in his arms.

"Remember grade three?" Sure. That's the one after grade two, right?

"Um, I guess. What specifically about grade three?"

"It was the first time we were introduced to the concept that we could be separated, remember?"

It's all coming back to me now. In the middle of grade three, for the first time, someone from our circle of knowledge died. A teacher, our choir teacher in fact. In our kid way we no longer saw death as something that was so far off, it seemed real. For a few weeks we were convinced Mr. Jeunis's death was just the tip of the iceberg, and that our friends and family were going to start dropping left and right. It was then that the death pact was born. We swore to each other neither of us would die alone, but that if it was going to happen, we'd go down together. Maybe it was a chivalry thing or too many movies or something, but we swore. It took my parents forever to get us to leave each other's presence for even a second. We fought them on it because we didn't want to risk being apart for the fear that some danger might suddenly emerge, getting only one of us. We grew out of it, or forgot, like kids do, but never completely. Obviously - since Cel just mentioned it, but it was always at the back of my mind.

"I remember. Is there a pep talk in there somewhere, 'cause if so I missed it." He smiles, sad, not careful this time.

"No, I was just thinking about it. About us, then. Back then, and even after, I could never figure out what I was more scared of. You dying and leaving me alone, or dying myself, stranding you in the world without me. Didn't always happen, but I usually leaned towards the me dying, because it involved you in the most pain I guess. At eight, I would have rather died than be away from you, but because I was so deep into believing in our bond, I thought it would be better for you to die, rather than miss me. Not because I was hung up with myself, or that I thought I was all you had - I just didn't want you to be in the kind of pain I imagined I would feel if I was alone. If I lost you. But that was death, and that was when we were 8. We're 17 now, nearly, and no one's dying. I know how tempting it is to just slip into that hole, like this is the end of everything, it's where I was when you found me by that tree. But seeing you pulled me out.

I saw you and I realized that I'd rather be in the world with you for a little while than in the hole dreading the time when I'm not. This whole happiness kick I'm on, it's just me trying to make sure you don't go too deep into that hole."

"You've been practising that for awhile, haven't you." He grins.

"Yeah, a little bit. Did I rush it?" I grin back.

"No, it was good." Basically, that's me coming out of the hole. In the world of me, the rule is, 'you know he's better when: he's back to quoting movies and being a smart-ass'. And that was Oceans 11, if you didn't know.

"I love you,"

"I love you,"

"Feel up to a round of 'I love you more'?" I smile, back to feeling a bit serious again.

"Do something for me?"

"Anything."

"Don't try to do the strong thing all by yourself. Let me help. I haven't really been up to it so far, but don't punish yourself trying to keep me happy. We're in this together, and I expect you to have just as many meltdowns as me. It's only fair. Mostly yeah, let's do the happy thing together, but don't you force it either yourself. I'm here when you need to break down, okay?"

"Okay," he says, kissing my worried lips.

Very quickly, another major roadblock, hurdle type thing presents itself. Going public. Welcoming the rest of the family to join us on the island of pain. We agree to start with Kyle and Jonas. It's what fits. Mom and Dad will come after that. The plan is to tell the twins and Kara collectively.

Kyle's already around, and not working, but we have to call Jonas. He has a shift, but when we tell him it's important he says he'll trade with someone and be over right away. No questions asked. Good old Jonas. All three of us wait for him in the living room, alone in the house. You know the drill. Mom and Dad are at work. The twins are off somewhere, back from camp, but still either playing soccer or video games with friends. They've got this buddy Brady they're practically joined at the hip with. Kara's at Sue's. Celery and I are side by side, our hands are clasped firmly, but it just doesn't feel like a lap kind of day. I'm too anxious to be held like

that, too tense. I keep cracking my knuckles over and over and Celery's on the hundredth time taking off his hat and bending over the curve of the beak. I hadn't seen him do that for years before today. It was something he always used to do when he was nervous when he first started wearing it. Poor Kyle (who has no idea what's going on) is probably biting his tongue to stop from asking us, and his eyes keep darting over to look at the door. Jonas shows up, in good time probably, it just felt like an eternity to us.

"So what's the big bad?" he asks in all seriousness, but still throwing some Buffy lingo in there, doing his Jonas best to cheer up the situation. It almost reduces me to tears. He notices. "Whoa. Shit, what's the matter?" Kyle shrugs. Jonas sits down. They look at us, all braced for terror and trying to be calm.

"I'm moving," Celery states simply. Colour drains on both counts.

"Where?" Kyle's no good at the ham sandwich, his voice crackles with emotion.

"Not sure. But it's going to be far away. Hours at least. Not like across the street, you know?"

"What the hell for?" Jonas is doing the rage thing. It's safer than pain, I guess.

"Money, power, and social status," Celery sort of sings.

Long silent minutes go by. No one knows what else to say. There might not be anything. Or there's too much, and it's all getting mixed up.

"Who else knows?" There you go, Kyle. Now you've got it.

"Just you guys. Congratulations, you were the first to know," There probably weren't even THOUGHTS of sympathy smiles.

"Yay us," Jonas says with about as much enthusiasm as a corpse.

The next hours are pretty bleak. We sit around, trying to make sense of it all, and failing spectacularly. Like me, Kyle shoots off all these ways for Celery to stay, and also like me, he gets shot down every time. Jonas is the quietest of the bunch, it's like he's trapped up in himself. Something seriously bad is going on in his brain, I'm sure of it.

By the time Mom and Dad get home with the twins, there isn't one of us who hasn't cried. I'm not used to seeing Kyle cry, and it's the first ever I've seen Jonas. The twins race each other for the shower, shouting hello as they go, but Mom and Dad come into the living room. You could probably have been blind and still know something was horribly wrong. Mom looks at us

like she doesn't know who to hug first. Maybe it's some kind of motherly instinct, but she goes for Celery. She's more his mom than Debbie will ever be, and that's proven by the way she holds him, the way he caves into her arms like a little boy. If my heart wasn't already broken, that would have done it. I'm really sucking at the try to stay happy plan so far. Still, I know it's me who's going to have to tell her and Dad. Celery's mind's all wacked, thinking he'll be disappointing them again. Like when he got beat up. I don't know how he rationalizes thinking like that, but asking would be sort of useless, since I don't think he does either.

"There's no good way to say this, so I'm just going go for the simplest way. Debbie's pregnant and for a bigger house and money to raise the kid, Doug's looking for a new job. This means They'll be moving, and taking Celery with them. We're thinking maybe Alberta somewhere. Regina or Saskatoon if we're lucky."

As before, no one says anything. I can tell Mom's THIS close to crumpling, but she stays strong, keeps holding Celery, speaking to him quietly, words of comfort I can't quite make out. Dad's gone white. Somehow, both of them know not to say anything about him staying here. They must just know instinctively he'd refuse. I didn't know how badly I needed it until my dad hugs me. The men in my family, as you may recall, are not exactly huggers, but I'm gladder than I can say that he decided to make an exception here. I feel safer in his arms than I have at any point since this whole ordeal began. I love Celery so much, I think I sometimes forget how much my family really means to me. Then Kyle's hugging me too, and Jonas, Mom, and Celery join in and we're suddenly in this big, sad, group hug, like maybe together there'll be enough love to overcome the pain. We hold on to each other for a few long minutes before it starts to work, and before everyone starts to get really uncomfortable. You try hugging 5 other people on one three-person couch. It doesn't work too good.

When the hug breaks up, I'm left on the couch with Kyle, Jonas, and Celery. Mom and Dad give each of us another hug, and then leave us quietly. I guess they figured we needed a bit more brother's alone time. I also think they knew they were going to break down, and didn't want to do it in front of us. Especially not in front of Celery. We're still all on the couch, not saying anything. Our sardine-ness is strangely comforting. I'm back holding Celery's hand. Kyle has one arm around me and the other wrapped tight around Jonas. Out of the silence Kyle suddenly says, "I'll say something thoughtful soon," That's part of a Weakerthans song, and really it's more sad than it is funny, but we all start to laugh anyway. A bit hysterically, the way you do when you're under this incredible amount of strain, but I still think it's pretty remarkable that we're laughing at all. Something shifted though. I think we're all starting to claw our way out of the hole. Celery's holding on tighter to my hand, I look over at him, and he's almost smiling.

"Like winter comes too soon?" I whisper. It's more Weakerthans, but a different song.

Celery squeezes my hand. With his, Kyle squeezes my shoulder.

"Or radiators hum out of tune," Jonas murmurs.

In what could have been a moment of ultimate loneliness, I feel loved.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Three  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Wed, 09 Apr 2003 20:05:23 -0500

A day passes, and then another, and another. You know the way that kind of thing goes. It keeps going like that until a week has passed. Doug hasn't gotten word on a job yet, but a moving company has already been hired and put on standby. Celery's staying at our house around the clock until the last possible day, but we've been going over there every so often, starting to put some of his stuff in boxes. There's a lot to sort through.

I'm sitting on his stripped bed as Celery packs his life into boxes and we're talking about things like how we'll write each other everyday and remembering stuff that's happened, memories triggered by items saved intentionally or put away and forgotten about. Mostly we've somehow managed to be cheerful but my eyes keep filling up with tears that never spill down my cheeks. It happens whenever I think about things for more than a few seconds. It's still not real to me yet. I can't really remember life without Celery. Other than assuming it will be awful I have no concept of what it will be like to miss him. He's all I know. Him being here, always around or near enough for it to still seem that way. We've never spent even a week apart. No summer camps or family vacations have ever separated us. They used to leave him with us when they went away and even since the first long vacation we took as a family when I was 8, Celery's come along. The closest we've come is when he would be gone overnight for sports or the weeks of yearbook wrap-up.

He doesn't matter just to me, everyone wants him to stay. Though she didn't do it right at the time we first told her, Mom's cried about it. Almost as much as me probably. Dad too I think. When we told the twins they got mad because they thought I was joking around and they didn't find it all that funny. When we finally got them to believe me they got up and left the room. I think they cried together in their room. We told Kara together like we planned, with Mom and Dad and Kyle and everybody, and she clung onto Celery's neck and cried heartbreakingly. I found myself wishing I was an 11-year-old girl so I'd be allowed to do the same thing. Not that that isn't basically what I've done anyway.

"Look at this!" Celery exclaims suddenly, holding up something. I clear my mind and focus on him. It's a tin of some kind, for a second it's meaningless to me, but then I remember.

When we were nine we started a club. It was a club of two. That was very important. It was the first rule in fact. No new members. Only the founding two. A good club's gotta have rules. And a club house. We made my dad build us this thing big enough for us to sit up or lie down in. Just a roof and three walls, this other piece of wood we could slide that we used

for the door. It was the ugliest thing you ever saw, but of course we loved it. Dad put it in the back yard. It was Celery's idea for us to use it to sleep in sometimes. I don't know anyone else but Celery who could have convinced me to sleep outside on the ground. But, he's always been able to get me to try stuff. I've always trusted him that way. That summer we spent countless nights out there making up funny and outrageous ghost stories. The more ridiculous and the less scary the better. Scared is not something we've ever been about. We've always rather been laughing. By the next summer we'd both outgrown the fort (in the physical sense) so the club disbanded. But we packed up the rulebook and all of the countless unrealized master plans, the map we drew of the neighbourhood, and the club's code of honour, all for posterity.

"Open it up," I say eagerly, getting off the bed and crouching by him on the floor.

"This is crazy," he says, easing off the lid. "It's us." I know what he means. It's all us. Everything that's happened, it's always been us, happening to US. I don't know what I'm going to do when it stops being like that. Inside is everything I remembered, but none of it's quite how I remembered. I guess that's what it's like for everything you're remembering. Memory changes things, altering them. You forget parts and remember others. Everything seems bigger too, larger, in memory. Apparently, this is because when you remember something, you're older and bigger than you were in that memory, so objects are smaller in comparison. Sounds like a valid theory.

"I love you," I've been saying that a lot. Even more than normal. Every chance I get, whenever I don't know what else to say. He looks away from the tin and into my eyes.

"I'll always love you."

We hug each other desperately, crying over the tin, the ultimate symbol of our shared youth.

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I've never really been a nightmare kind of a guy, but lately I've been having them. In the past, uncommon though they were, the nightmares I did have I never remembered. I just woke up sometimes feeling unhappy, or my heart racing. These nightmares I remember perfectly. It's the same exact dream over and over. In my dream, I'm freshly waking up, and I feel peaceful, happy. Happiness lasts for a few seconds before I casually turn my head to the clock, only to see that it's late. I never even really SEE the numbers in my dream, I just know it's late. Too late. I've missed something terribly important. Before today, I'd always woken up before I could figure out what it was I'd missed. The mystery has been solved now

though. It was the same dream as all the others until the end. After realizing it was late I threw off the covers and ran out of my room, then my house and finally down the street to the house. I got there just in time to see Their SUV driving away, and Celery's crying face turned towards me, hands pressed up against the glass of the rear view window.

After about an hour of self-physco analysis, this is what I've come up with. Unless it's completely meaningless (highly possible) what I think is going on here is that the stress I'm feeling over his leaving is complying with my (until now mostly subconscious) fear of being left behind. In the very small, rational, sane portion of my brain, I know Celery's not leaving me willingly, but that hasn't stopped my subconscious from running amuck.

But, have no fear. Now that I've done my own little dream interpretation thing, I'm going to wake Celery up and talk to him about it. He'll help sort me out. But before the explaining and sorting, I think I might cling to him for awhile. I'm predicting it's going to be a LONG while.

It is. A VERY long while. The desperate, I'll die if I let go, kind of clinging, and the dry weeping. Celery does what he can to calm me down, but it takes forever. Getting an explanation doesn't prove to be much easier. When he's eventually pieced things together Celery looks at me sternly.

"You know that's not what's happening. I'll never leave you," I smile in the most pathetic, helpless against the crazy emotions, way you can possibly imagine.

"I know, but still with the badness." He nods.

"Okay, as long as it's only insanity and you know it. 'Cause my heart's going to be with you the entire time," I smile again, slightly less pathetically.

"And mine with you,"

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That night (after a day of much clinging) I have a now familiar conversation with Kyle. Jonas is there also, but Celery's playing with Kara, trying to cheer her up. She's been showing her misery more than any of us the past week. "I don't understand why he won't let us try to find a way for him to stay!"

It's frustrating Kyle to no end. Jonas isn't saying much, not about anything. He's spoken very little since we broke the news.

Like always, I repeat Celery's reasons, even though I'm starting to wonder



more and more myself. In fact, the longer I think about it, the surer I am that there's more to why he isn't putting up more of a fight about moving than the reasons he's given me. There's something else that's stopping him, and I'm pretty sure I've figured out what it is. I don't say so to Kyle and Jonas though. As usual, my answers don't satisfy Kyle, but after he's ranted for a few more minutes, Jonas stops him.

"Just let it go, man. He doesn't understand it anymore than you do, can't you see? You're just hurting him." Not only did I not expect Jonas to pick up on that, I'm even more surprised he'd both notice it and say it right to Kyle's face. Kyle is instantly contrite and quickly voices that.

"I'm really sorry, bro, I didn't think." I smile. Sad smiles are my new speciality. After Kyle smiles back, I direct my smile gratefully at Jonas. He returns the smile gently. I don't know about him though, I think he's taking this a lot harder than he's letting us know.

It takes a day or more before I'm ready to deal with bringing my confusion to Celery. He's been sleeping here every night as you already know, but I found some way to avoid it. It wasn't really all that hard. I just let myself get lost with him down memory lane. But I'm ready to talk about it now.

"Cel." He looks up, and smiles.

We're in my room. We've given up the couch. We break into tears too much these days. It's funny that that's the thing we're afraid to have people walk in on us during, considering the other stuff we've been cool with, but we've never been what you'd call normal so maybe it really isn't all that strange.

"Yeah?"

Before this we'd been going through some pictures my dad took of us in grade seven. In every one of those pictures we were touching. I'd been thinking I couldn't believe how small we were. How orange his hat used to be. Silly stuff like that. Trying to put off talking.

"Why aren't you fighting this move - really? Not the story you're telling everyone about knowing it would be pointless and not wanting to waste the time. I know what you're like, Celery. You're the guy who believes that you fight for something if it's worth fighting for even if you know you're going to lose. That's the way you play sports, that's the way you live your life. You give 100% to everything, no matter what. It doesn't matter if it's only an exhibition game, or if you know it's not even possible to actually land that trick in a certain line. You're still always the one who wants to try anyway. And I can't think of anything that's more worth fighting for than me and you, so I want to know what's going on. I don't

believe you're just like 'okay' with it or something. I know it's hurting you as much as it is me - all of us - but something's holding you back and I need to know what it is." The whole time my voice was that 'on the brink of tears' one you've probably heard on like TV shows or whatever. Except it wasn't acting. My eyes were burning with the tears I refused to let fall. And now I'm looking into his and there's so much pain in them. More than I expected, more than I could have ever prepared myself for.

"I just don't want to cause you and your family any more trouble," I'm not hearing this. "You've all done so much for me over the years, giving me this replacement home and family just 'cause mine's not Leave it to Beaver quality. Baby, giving me yourself would have been more than enough for me forever, but you weren't satisfied with that. You had to give me your whole family too. Loving you and being your friend landed me three brothers, a little sister, and better parents than my biological ones could ever hope to be. For all that, I've given you almost nothing. All I've ever been able to offer you is me, and I've done my best to be as good for you as possible, but I still feel like I owe you. I DO think fighting Them would be pointless - and that trying would achieve nothing good. But what it would do is drag all of you through this monster circus I just can't bear to put you through. Not when I know the outcome would be the same no matter what." I don't even know where to start. This is as close as I've ever come to being mad at him. How could he think those things and never tell me about it? How could he go through so much pain and never once share it with me? How could I not notice?

"I... I don't even,"

"I know. I'm sorry. I didn't want to unload all that on you - that's why I've said only what I have. I wasn't lying," he smiles feebly. "Just, you know, not telling the whole truth," that's the only way he can do it, the lying. Only when it's not really quite lying at all. But there are loopholes for everything. 11 years with a very truthful boy hell bent on protecting me from all manner of hurt has certainly taught me that.

"It's that you didn't tell me, not WHAT you didn't tell me. You actually believe that shit? That you haven't given me anything?" Desperate times call for foul language.

"I know what I've given you. I just don't see it as as much as what you've given me. It isn't."

"How could you think that?"

"I'm the math guy, the one who looks at facts, who pays attention. I analyze and interpret." He's mocking himself, and I don't like it. So add that to the list.

"You make stuff up and allow it to hurt you. I'm practically the founder of that particular corner of the bad feelings market - don't try to hustle me out of my position after I've done so much with it. Made it my own and all." I sigh. "You're so much better at this than me, comes with practice, I guess. I don't know what to say that will prove to you how wrong you are. Telling me would be helpful," I say with mock lightness.

"It's not how I feel, it's how it is."

"Celery, you're smarter than this. Use that brilliant mind I know you have - use fucking logic for all I care - find the place in your brain that knows this isn't true. It's in there somewhere - I'm sure of it. Just think about all the times we've had together, all the years we've been partners in everything, side by side through it all. How do you think I would have made it through my fucking LIFE if it wasn't for you? How many times have you been there for me? For all the stupid things, and the real things, and the stuff I made up. Think about how many times you got me to calm down when I was freaking out. How many crises have you talked me out of? How many times have I laughed with you? Lighted up just because you were around. How many of my days have you made better just by being there? You don't even have to THINK about that one 'cause I'm going to tell you the answer. It's ALL of them, Celery. There hasn't been a single day I've known you that you haven't brightened. So please stop thinking you're not enough for me - that 'just you' isn't enough for me. You're all I've ever wanted, and you don't disappoint. I first realized I loved you the day I understood that inside you there was everything I'd ever need. I was trying to figure out why I wasn't interested in girls, or other friends, and I looked at you and it was like - you idiot! It was because I already had my complete right in front of me staring me in the face. You satisfy, and overflow. In my eyes you have never, nor will you ever, be found wanting."

There's nothing I hate more than those 'waiting for the other person's reaction' silences. There are so many levels on which they suck. This one has a pretty kick ass ending though. He grins.

"Oh yeah. You're crap at making me feel better. Really terrible. I should freak out more, you could use the practice," I whoop ('cause, it's the happiest sound I could think of) and fling my arms around him.

"I love you, Celery," I say joyfully, kissing him. "And there's never a time I love you more than when I can see you truly know how much." "I love you too, baby, it just makes me really stupid sometimes," I kiss him again.

"Yeah, I think you got that from me," he holds me tightly, and almost makes me swoon with the look he gives me.

"Never doubt that I love you?" I smile.

"Never."

The whole situation is explained to Kyle in a manner he's finally able to understand, and though he does sort of snort, and say 'typical' under his breath, it was that good old, loving older brother who often likes to pretend he knows better type of typical, so no one beats him up. I leave Celery to talk with Kyle further, and manage to steer Jonas away so we can talk.

"You're not doing so well," I point out, as if he didn't know.

"And you are?" I shrug.

"No, but, I'm trying to talk about it. Sob like a little girl about it, brood, all that good stuff. You're just sort of nothing. 'And once again, no reaction from the Wheaten camp' - stuff like that."

"I guess I'm just not getting it. There's no processing happening, you know? All I know is this isn't supposed to be happening. That like one single thought is just sort of blocking out all the rest. It's this mantra and goes over and over in my head. You and Celery are the anchor, the foundation on which everything I care about is built. If I hadn't met you guys... well, there are just so many things in my life that wouldn't be going right right now if it wasn't for you. I wouldn't have you as friends, I never would have met Kyle, your parents, the kids. I wouldn't have my second home, my second family. I have a good one to start with, but to right away feel totally at home somewhere, that I immediately fit in with this new and mostly very strange group of people, I can't tell you what that did for me."

"Sure you can, I can see it. I mean, you're the Zen master 'cause of it." Never with the able to be serious with me. I so totally need to work on that. Jonas doesn't seem to mind much though. Maybe it even relaxed him a little, let's hope. Something good coming out of it would be nice.

"Well, yeah. And now, with Celery moving, I feel like it's all slipping away. I didn't want to like go asking for help or whatever, I mean, you're all suffering just as much as I am. Like jeez, no one's hurting as much as you must be, except Celery. So I was just supposed to walk up to you and go - hey, I'm sorry to bother you. I know your soulmate is moving away, but could I cry on your shoulder for a little while about how it's affecting me?"

"Damn right! Jonas, the only way I'm going to get through this - and honestly, more than half the time I'm really not sure I will - is by leaning on the people I love. That includes you big time. Giving some of that back should go without saying. That stupid expression should be 'when the going gets tough - the sane get help'. None of that get going

shit. What did that ever do for anybody? If we don't all come together and just have one major depressed bond about all this we're all going to crash and burn. In the coming months, I'm going to need you. Kyle's going to need you. I'm just barely clinging to the edge right now, and Celery's still here. He's got this whole 'lets try to be happy for the time we have' philosophy, but really, I'm only still hanging in 'cause he's still around to hang on to. I need to be a little strong for you now, 'cause I know a time's coming where that's just not going to be something I'll be able to offer. Let me help you now so I don't feel so fucking guilty for all the help you're going to do me later."

"You're pretty fucking good at this, dude," Jonas says, heavy tears on the way. I smile through the onslaught of mine.

"Celery taught me well."

Thus begins the majorly depressed bonding fest of the summer of 2002. We all get so close we know it's just going to hurt more when he leaves, but there's no helping that. It may hurt more later, but it's still better this way. Better to be something that often resembles happy now and miserable later than miserable now and much more of the same later. Don't get the idea that it's all one big happy joy fest. Remember the title. Sad and angry and unhappy are big emotions of the time. But there's a lot of good bonding too. I get to love Jonas even more like a brother than ever before, Kyle and I become closer as well. Celery's always with me - sometimes we separate to go to the bathroom - but the intensity of our closeness is just getting higher with every passing day. We're just trying not to think about the badness, mostly, but sometimes it creeps up on me. When that happens, after all the rest of it, the thing I most am is afraid.

We're both handling the ever nearing of our impending separation in different ways. I for one (when I'm not existing in complete and utter denial, that is) go along with everything Celery says and suggests. Usually his suggestions are for us to do sort of old-timey-time stuff. You know, stuff like lying on the grass of our backyard having cloud races like we did when we were nine or having rhyme outs like we did, well, almost all our childhood. Occasionally, I've been tempted to ask him if remembering stuff we've already done was what he had in mind when he said he didn't want just a bunch of sad times to remember when he's gone, but I haven't yet.

Kyle's a part of a lot of it - which makes sense, 'cause he was also there for a lot of it. Jonas wasn't, but he's a part of us now, so he gets to come along for many of our trips too. You know, our down memory lane trips. Not the drug, hippie, 60's kind. It sort of helps and hurts at the same time, but that can be said for pretty much everything we've been doing. I guess there's just no avoiding the hurt (though I'm trying my

hardest). The depressed bonding fest has been good though. That's the bit of good I'd pick out of all this horror so far. Getting closer with Kyle and Jonas. The rest of the family too. The twins have been hanging out with us quite a bit. I don't think they ever fully realized how much they like having Celery around until they heard he was leaving . Even Kara and Sue have been more visible. I'm beginning to suspect Sue is in love with Celery, but she can't have him. He's all mine. Until he moves anyway. Terrific. I'm going to start to cry over here right away. Excuse me. Thanks, I'm better now. Where was I? Oh right...

Mostly yes, we've been doing the back in time thing, but, of course, there are a few things we've been doing that we never did back when we were nine. This time, keep those minds firmly planted in the gutter. Like, we're talking about almost savage here. We're definitely having a go at trying to consume each other. It's almost scary sometimes, how great our need for each other is and what we do about it. But I have complete trust in Celery and him in me, so I know scared is something I never have to be when we're in each other's hands. Didn't even mean it quite literally like that, but it works too.

It's getting to be around mid August now, and time's beginning to run out. The new school year begins around the 30th, and Doug's still determined to have them moved by then. Celery's been able to spend less time around here with me. I mean, he still sleeps here every night, and is around almost all the day, but he's been having to go over and do packing and stuff more frequently. I go with him most of the time, but sometimes we force ourselves to be apart for a little while. It's supposed to help us get used to it or something, but all it's really doing for me is making me miserable.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Four  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Tue, 15 Apr 2003 16:57:47 -0500

On the second Monday in August, Celery gets a call to report to The house for awhile, and because he tells me he'll probably be there all afternoon, I go and work in the bakery office for a few hours. In the early evening when I get back, I find Kyle gently rocking a crying Celery in his arms. I'm over there faster than I thought it was possible for me to go. Celery's still mostly gone, but Kyle's eyes meet mine. His explanation is simple.

"Doug found a job."

"Where?" we're masters of the ham sandwich conversation by now. All details are discussed in this disconnected manner. It's how we cope.

"Calgary." I swear, I can hear the clattering of my life falling apart.

Half blinded by tears, I shake my head repeatedly, whispering, 'no' over and over. Calgary's too far, don't you see! Like 20 some hours! What's more it's all so much more REAL now. In my heart of hearts, I never really believed it was actually happening until now. And it could be tomorrow for all I know!

Kyle gets up a second before I fall down, clearing a path for me to land safely on the couch beside Celery. We find each other's arms through our teary eyes and cling to each other in our now perfected 'grim death' embrace. Kyle starts to leave but I don't want him to go. Somehow the noises and weak little hand gestures I make manage to get this message across and he sits back down at the end of the couch, rubbing Celery's back. We all calm down in about 15 minutes.

"We should call Jonas," I say, not feeling right about him not being here.

He's supposed to be here. Especially at a moment like this. We need to be together, the four of us. I especially think Celery needs to have all of us with him. As much as I'm dying over this, it's hurting him more. It has to be. He's more sensitive for one, but that doesn't even begin. We're his FAMILY. They mean nothing. They don't love him! They don't even not hate him! And now he has to go off with them to stupid Calgary, to be all alone for a year. I may be at the top of the list of what he's losing, but it's no one item list. It's home and family and everyone he loves and who loves him. Just thinking about it makes me hug him tighter. I'm probably cutting off any number of bits of circulation, but Celery doesn't complain.

"I'll call him," Kyle says, reminding me about Jonas. I nod and then go

back to pressing my lips to Celery's hair. He'd taken his hat off before I even got here, it's lying on the floor right now. For some reason, seeing it there all by itself makes me want to start to cry all over again.

"I don't know what to ask," I say to him softly. He tilts his head back and our eyes meet.

"Okay certainly would be wrong, wouldn't it? Just tell me you love me, okay?" I kiss his lips softly.

"I love you, Celery. I love you here and I'm going to love you when you're in Calgary. I'll never stop, not for anything." His chin wobbles a bit and I know he's about to start crying again. I kiss his cheeks, replacing the dampness brought on by his previous crying with my lips.

"I can't believe I'm going to have to leave you," he chokes through his newest tears.

"Not for long, my love. What was that you were telling me about how a year we can do in our sleep? Well, you were right. We can and will make it. Don't cry, sweet one, don't cry," I keep kissing wherever the tears fall until the shaking stops and the breathing relaxes.

Somewhere, deep down, there's a part of me having a small but sad celebration. It's mostly been me breaking down, and Celery's being mister strong stable guy. I never wanted that (as people who listen will know) and I'm glad in a not very glad at all way that I now have the chance to be the one to be there for him. It's just no good for him to keep everything bottled up, so I'm almost relieved to see him breaking down a bit. Dealing with some of what I know he must be feeling. It's like I told Jonas, you've gotta lean while the leaning's good.

"Jonas'll be over soon," Kyle announces softly, obviously having returned at some point.

"Thanks." He smiles sadly.

"He's pretty shook up. And pissed off," I almost laugh. That's been Jonas alright. It's his way of dealing.

"I'm in shock." Everyone shares a weak smile.

"I tried to break it to you gently."

"We appreciate that." He finally rolls his eyes and sits down on one of the armchairs.

I take a good look at Kyle. My first one in awhile. I never noticed until



now how gaunt he's gotten. He looks so tired. As I keep on staring I begin to understand why. Celery's been trying to be strong for me, but Kyle's been being strong for everybody. Not even just me, Celery, and Jonas. EVERYBODY. Mom, Dad, the twins, Kara. All the stuff he's been doing, I never realized until now what all of it meant. But when you put it all together, it's clear as day. He's been holding all of us up, keeping us from falling totally apart. All the jokes and distractions haven't just been Kyle being Kyle, the avoider of serious emotion. They've been Kyle being Kyle the amazing older brother, son, and friend.

He smiles at me, like he knows what I'm thinking. I shake my head, too much emotion welling up in my throat to speak.

"It's been my pleasure, bro," he tells me gently.

Sensing that this is all something he doesn't need to ask about, Celery just cuddles me up closer and takes his turn kissing my hair. I reach over for one of his hands and bring it back joined with mine onto my lap.

"I love you both so much," I whisper.

"What about me?!" Jonas has arrived. I know he was joking, but I smile lovingly up at him anyway.

"Fool," he smiles for a brief instant, and then the rage.

"So what the fuck is this about you moving to Calgary?" he demands, looking over at Celery.

"I'm thinking of becoming cowboy." Who would have thought a half-hour ago we'd be joking about all this? But that's just the way we do it here at the depressed bonding fest of summer 2002. Embrace the spirit.

That night in the dark when we're lying intertwined, Celery and I have another cry.

"Do you know when you leave?" I never did get around to asking for more details. It stopped being that kind of a thing after Jonas.

"On the 22nd, so, we have 10 days." God. That's not enough. But, it would never be enough. Right? I mean, 10 years wouldn't be enough.

"You know, don't you?" I whisper hoarsely.

"I know." We hold on tighter.

The next morning, I hear my parents and Celery talking in hushed tones as I'm coming down the stairs from my shower. I'm already slightly annoyed in

a dumb childish way that he didn't take his with me, and when I creep quietly down a few more steps so I can eavesdrop better, what they're saying doesn't improve my mood.

"Celery, you can't keep this from him." It's my mom talking. "He should know it's an option."

"No," Celery shuts her down firmly.

"Son, you know he'll probably want to go for it," Celery makes an angry sound at my dad.

"Of course I know that! That's why I don't want to tell him. I really appreciate what you guys are trying to do, and it means a lot to me - it really does, I just can't let you do it. He belongs here, with all of you. I mean, so do I, but it's just not possible right now. I can't take him away from his family."

"You know what he'll say to that," my mom says, I'm guessing, while she shakes her head.

"How about what the fuck is going on?" I demand, storming in. I'm not the best at the whole lurking in the shadows thing. I can never stand standing around listening to people talk about me for too long before I have to storm in and say my piece.

"Oh shit," Celery moans, deflating, sinking into a chair.

"Carrots, your mom and I have been-"

"NO!" Celery bellows, startling all of us. His eyes are practically on fire.

"Son," Mom begins soothingly. He jumps up, eyes still smouldering.

"I said no. Please."

"What the hell are you hiding from me!" I shout at him, with blazing eyes of my own. He cringes, and I'm immediately sorry, but not enough to let it go.

"Celery, you have to tell me." He looks like he thinks doing so would kill him, but I hold firm in my gaze.

"Celery," my dad questions. He looks up, and nods weakly before sitting back down. I guess he's given Dad the go ahead to fill me in. "Sit down, Care," Dad instructs gently. I do. "Like I was saying, your mom and I can see how much Celery's leaving is affecting you - both of you - and we've

been trying to figure out a way to ease that pain. We know how much you don't want to be separated, and all we could think of was that since Celery can't stay here - you should go there. We can't move, but there are lots of good boarding schools in the area of Calgary They're moving. It's late, but we believe we would be able to get you into one. We've already sent out some letters to test the waters. Selfishly, we naturally want you to stay here, but more importantly we want you to be happy. We want you to think carefully about what you need for that to be the case."

It's a damn good thing I'm sitting down. It's also a good thing I'm not looking at Celery right now. He was going to try to hide THIS from me? I can't even begin to try to understand why. I don't need to think carefully. He's all I've ever needed to be happy. He's my whole happiness in the entire world. I don't need to think about that, but I do need to think. I'm so mad right now, it's like, I can't even talk. I feel like if I looked at Celery I'll completely fall apart. Yelling, screaming, crying, swearing, full collapse. So I get up from the table, still not looking at him, and say to no one in particular,

"I'm going to my room for awhile," making it very clear that's alone. Celery says nothing, and since I'm not looking at him, whatever facial reaction he made is lost to me.

I stew for about an hour, too angry to be doing any actual thinking, time not calming me down very much. There's a knock on the door, and I just know it's Kyle. It has to be Kyle. Kyle will always push when Celery will give me space and time.

"Go away," I mutter sullenly. The door opens anyway. Definitely Kyle.

"Okay, bro, what's got you so pissed off?" I don't look up. For a long time I don't answer either.

"You really don't know, or are you just trying to be the like sympathetic eared innocent in all this?" Kyle pulls the chair out from my desk and sits down.

"I really don't know. I just got home, remember? I was out with Jonas, - there was some stuff he wanted to talk about, just needed to cool off mostly. Turned out to be an all night thing. When I get here, Celery's crying, Mom's trying to comfort him, Dad's pacing the kitchen and you're nowhere to be found. No one would tell me a damn thing. Celery couldn't stop crying, Mom couldn't stop trying to get him to stop and Dad couldn't be bothered to stop pacing. So, in case you didn't hear me the first time, to answer your question, yes, I really don't fucking know."

There's a long, wounded silence, and then I just go off on him. Nothing personal about it, just Kyle's the one here, so he's the one who gets to

feel a lot of my wrath. When I'm done, he doesn't say a word. Not for the longest time.

Then finally, he says, "Oh."

"Oh?" I fire, all sarcastic. "That's the best you can do? No telling me I'm an idiot, no insults and sarcasm?" He looks at me sadly, and I meet his gaze for the first time.

"I don't know what else to say. I don't even know how I feel about it,. I guess, I'm not sure I'd want you to go. I mean, you're my brother."

"So's Celery!" He nods with difficulty.

"Exactly. I don't want to lose both of you," he sounds ready to start crying.

"I'm sorry," I say, meaning it. I am sorry. I'm sorry that I don't feel like it's enough. That they just aren't enough for me. Kyle and Jonas, my parents, Kara and the twins. I'm sorry I love him more than them.

Kyle gets up off my chair, and comes onto the bed with me. I suddenly find myself in the very strange position of being held by him. Since you know how rare HUGGING is for us, you can imagine what this is like. But really, after all the weird, it feels really good.

"You've got nothing to be sorry for, little bro," he assures me gently.

"But..."

"I know, I just don't think you're right. It's just different - the way you love him. It's not more, it's just different. Okay, maybe it's also a little bit more, but mostly it's just different. I've known you since the day you were born, I've seen you practically every day of your life. Family is different, we're like routine," god that sounds awful, "It's not like that with Celery. There's this like desperation or something," he actually laughs. "Like, I'm guessing you don't exactly wake up burning with the desire to see my face every morning," I'm shocked to find myself smiling, "That doesn't mean you don't love me, right? You just don't love me the same way you love Celery."

"Which is a good thing, 'cause that whole incest scene really isn't cool," I always make really weak jokes when I'm coming back from being really upset, but Kyle laughs, 'cause he knows about my weak jokes routine, and I guess he's happy, thinking it means I'm slowly starting to feel better.

Which I kind of am. For this moment I am. But later, when I have to face Celery, I'm relatively sure I'm going to go back to feeling like crap

pretty quick.

Kyle keeps on holding me for what seems like hours, and it keeps feeling both really weird and really comforting and safe. Kind of like the way I felt when Dad hugged me when we first broke the news.

At some point that I can only classify as later, there's another knock on my door. The hesitant, timid nature of the knock lets me know it's Celery as clearly as Kyle's forceful, abrupt one had given him away earlier. Kyle lets me go, and gives me a half smile.

"You ready to see him?" I'm stuck for a second, all choked up about how protective he's being, and then I nod. Nodding because I wasn't sure I'd be able to talk (probably not the best sign, but hey).

"Okay," he says, getting up and walking over to the door. Before opening it he turns back to say, "Love you, bro," I favour him with one of my patented weak smiles.

"Love you too, Kyle." He nods and opens the door.

Looking past Kyle, I see Celery's forlorn self standing in the hallway. He's biting his lip, and his eyes are practically black they're so dark a grey. Kyle wordlessly slips past him and disappears down the hall. Celery seems to be waiting for me to say something. I guess he's still not sure he's allowed to come in. I push myself up against the wall, like being sitting up makes me less vulnerable, and motion him in. Still with the not trusting myself to speak.

Celery inches his way in painfully slowly and shuts the door behind him once he finally makes it all the way inside. For maybe the longest time in the history of us, no one says anything, and it's a bad silence. Full of accusation and pain, worry and fear.

"So tell me already. I know you've got some fucked up logic behind why you did it. I know it. So just get on with it. Give me that list of doubts and fears, tell me which insecurities and wacked acts of selflessness directed you this time so I can feel all guilty for being upset, realizing you did it 'cause you love me so much and we can make up like nothing happened," He doesn't say anything to this, and I add nothing more. I think we're both more than a little stunned by what came out of my mouth.

I've never said anything like that to him before. Never set out, knowing what I was going to say, intentionally trying to hurt him. It's not even all because of my anger or feelings of betrayal, it's like he has to feel it, because if he doesn't then we're not even any more. Equal pain and joy. That's the way it works. We feel everything together. I couldn't look at him while I said it of course. If for a second I'd seen the pain I'm

sure is written over his face, I wouldn't have been able to finish. And I felt like I had to finish.

Another horrible silence has fallen. I'm determined not to be the one who breaks it this time. I think I was doing less damage before under my no-speaking policy.

"I'm sorry," I let my head hit against the wall.

"Don't tell me that, man, I can't hear that." My voice is thick with soon to be shed tears, with desperation and hopelessness. I can feel him approaching, though, careful to look everywhere that he isn't, I can't see it.

"I'm not sure I can't even stand to hear myself say it," he admits desolately. Finally I look up. The pain in his eyes is profound. I have to look away, a second more and I would have caved completely. Him in my arms, me telling him he didn't have to say anything.

"I was afraid you'd say no," It's like an explosion in my brain. I can't even think that's so crazy and absurd.

"What?" It took ages for my brain to regroup enough to remember how to put that word together. He laughs bitterly.

"I know. I can't even really believe it myself - but that's why I did it. I told myself it was because I didn't want to take you away from your family and it was that in some ways, but that's not what stopped me from asking you. It's not what made me lie. Maybe it's still what's going to stop you from coming, but the only reason I didn't tell you was because I was afraid. There was this tiny part of me that kept telling the rest of me you were going to say no - or that you'd say yes except you'd only say it 'cause you felt sorry for me, not because you really wanted to. I understand that one percent of insanity you're always talking about better than you think, Carrots. Why do you think I always know how to help? It's 'cause half the time I'm feeling the same thing. Calming you down is usually how I calm MYself down. I know you think I'm this totally honest guy, but I'm really just a big liar."

"You're not a liar," I sigh, rolling onto my back. "You just have a lot of trouble telling me the truth," he snorts, "when you think it's going to hurt me. You're always trying to protect me from shit, a lot of the time unnecessarily. It's like you think your needs and wants always come second, and sometimes that makes you hide yourself from me. I guess it's just a hard habit to break. You've been looking out for me since day one, shielding me from the rest of the world."

"I just didn't want to you to be like me."

"Huh?"

"When we were little, I loved you so much - not that I don't anymore - it's just, one of the things I loved best about you was that you were a kid. You acted like I thought kids were supposed to. I mean, you were mature for your age, but not like me. I was hard when I first met you. I'd never loved anything before in my life. I had no memory of anything ever loving me. Knowing you brought me out of that shell, little by little until it was almost like it wasn't there, but the whole time I was taking those walls down I was building a different set up around you. I never wanted to see you crying or upset, I thought I could get in the way of any problems that might befall you and that way you'd never have to be hard and turned off like I was. You know that's why I started lifting weights and shit? I wanted to make sure no one could mess with you. I've been doing it my whole life, Carrots, I don't know how not to be this way,"

This is all so much worse and more serious than I imagined. It goes so much deeper. We're going to be here all fucking day.

"Celery, I..."

"No pity, Carrots, no tender understanding. Finish what you started. How else am I ever going to get over this? It'll never happen if you keep letting me get away with it all the time."

"I don't know how to stop you any better than you know what it'll take to stop yourself!" I protest with panicked desperation edging in.

"At least we're on the same page."

We go back and forth like that for hours. Getting through some stuff, bringing up new really scary stuff, generally doing the one step forward three steps back thing all day long. We break once for food, to go to the bathroom, and to show everyone we're still alive and talking to each other at least, but that's basically it.

Now, suddenly I'm looking out the window and it's dark. We've found each other again by this point, enough that he's holding me at least, even if things are far from being okay. With everything else, we've barely touched on whether or not I'm going to go with him to Calgary. We've been quiet for awhile now, so I think I'm going to bring it up.

"Cel?"

"Yeah," he murmurs into my hair.

"What about Calgary?" I feel him shudder against my back.

"I don't know."

"Do you want me to go?"

"I want you to be happy," nice cop out.

"That means I go with you to Calgary." He sighs.

"You shouldn't leave your family."

"YOU'RE my family. I mean - you're a part of ME, for crying out loud. And it's not MY family I'd be leaving. It's OUR family. You have to know that you're every bit a brother and a son to them as I am. But forget about everyone else - do YOU want me to come?"

"I don't know."

"What don't you know?"

"Well, obviously I want to be with you," he's moving out from under me, frustrated and no longer able to sit still. "I want that more than anything. I want it like, I don't know, like a junkie wants heroin. We're addicts, you know, Carrots? I'm not sure it's right for us to be like this. It can't be healthy - in fact I'm sure it's not."

"So you're saying you think we need some time apart to like get over our addiction?"

"I don't know what I'm saying. I can't even begin to imagine life without you. It's a joke for me to say I think it's what's best. I don't believe that. We're supposed to be together, that's what I believe. I'm not supposed to be leaving, that's the problem. We both belong here, with our family. I just, I don't know. I feel like it's already one wrong, my leaving, and you leaving too, it'd just be that whole two wrongs making a right thing. And I also don't think we can just forget about everyone else. You're needed here. Jonas and Kyle need you and your parents need you. The twins are just hitting highschool and all drama that comes with the later years of teenhood. This coming year's going to be big for them, they're already changing so fast. Then there's Kara! She loves you a lot more than you know. She's not even showing it much, 'cept maybe to your mom and me sometimes, but she's really taking all this hard. It's not even 'cause I'm leaving - not entirely. She's really afraid for you, she keeps saying she knows how sad you're going to be, it's like the thing that's bothering her the most." He sighs, pausing for ages. "I guess that's what it comes down to. I want you to come but I know you should stay."

And as much as it's killing me, into as many pieces as it's breaking my



heart, I know he's right.

"Okay," he jerks his head towards me.

"Okay?" I shrug.

"Something that I know is right has never made less sense to me or hurt me more, but I do know you're right. It seems totally ludicrous 'cause I'm pretty sure once you leave I'm going to die, but I know I have to stay," Even though he knows it too, even though we both get that this is what has to be done, it's not too gorgeous hearing it out loud.

The half second it takes him to get back over to me seems horribly long, but now that we're holding each other once more, I'm at least able to breathe again.

About an hour later, still holding on tightly, we start talking again.

"Carrots?"

"Yeah."

"Do you still want to marry me?"

"What?! Why would you ask me that? Of course I do!" In my shock and agitation, I sat up. I'm looking down at him now. He looks sad.

"I just thought, maybe, with me moving and everything that's happened..."

"Oh for heavens sake, Celery! You haven't been listening to me at all - have you? Not these past weeks, not today," I accuse, the pain evident in my voice.

"Sure I have-"

"Then you should already know the answer to your question," my voice's gone softer though, despite the harshness of the words.

"Sometimes you know things, but you still need to hear them out loud to be able to really believe they're true," I feel any of the remaining fire in me die an instant death.

"I know, sorry for getting all ragey," I apologize candidly, slipping back down into his arms. He strokes my face.

"Sorry for making you think..." I kiss his shoulder.

"It's alright."

"I'm sorry for everything," I sigh.

"I know you are. So am I."

"Why are you sorry?"

"Because something happened that was really bad and that I wish didn't. 'Cause even if you were being crazy I understand and I don't want that for you. Because I love you even if you are an idiot - which is no less than you deserve, since you do the same for me," he almost achieves a smile.

"Thanks," I shrug.

"You're welcome," he sort of bites his lip.

"The marrying thing, I had a reason for asking - beyond what I already said."

"Yeah?" We're both trying to be quiet, 'cause it's late, so I speak in a hushed tone.

"Yeah. I want," swallow, "I want us to get married. Like, now. Before I leave anyway. With the family and something, some symbol. I need us to be permanent."

"We ARE!" Not angry, panicky, desperate for him to be sure.

"I know, I honestly do. It's just, I need some kind of reminder."

"Something permanent you can carry with you," I say, nodding, getting it at last.

"Is that, like, really pathetic?"

"Huh. As if. Like I wouldn't have thought of it if I was as smart as you. I've been feeling that I needed something, I just didn't know what it is. But you've hit it. Still don't know what the what is exactly, but at least I know generally. Permanent. That's what it needs to be."

"Tattoos!" Celery suddenly exclaims. The whispery kind of exclamation, but definitely an exclamation all the same.

"Tattoos?"

"Yeah! Not like a dragon or anything stupid like that, just words," I can tell by his voice he's thinking this up as he goes along. "Yeah,

words. Our names - nothing weird or elaborate. Just our names," I'm starting to get into the idea.

"We could have each other's," where though? Wait! Got it, "On our wrists! Going across the undersides of our wrists, I could get Celery and you could have Carrots."

"Perfect, baby," he says, kissing me. I'm suddenly very excited.

"Your name on me forever, that's permanent enough, eh?"

"I'd say." We grin. Actually grin! Not a sad smile or a weak grin. Real, actual, honest to goodness grins! Wow. I missed this feeling. We kiss hungrily. I've missed that too.

"I love you so much."

"I love you too, say it again."

"I love you, Celery, I love you, I love you, I love," kisses in between each word.

"Oh baby, I love you too." We keep kissing and it gets to be so that talking really isn't in the equation anymore.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Five  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Thu, 24 Apr 2003 17:36:00 -0500

In the morning, or you know, the early afternoon, when we finally get up, we go looking for Kyle and Jonas. Not surprisingly, we find them talking in Kyle's little mini living room thing. Jonas sleeps over sometimes, and he always takes the couch. He's small enough for it to be comfortable. We share quiet hellos and almost happy smiles.

"Everyone, what's passing for okay these days today?" Kyle asks, at it again.

"Yeah, um, we have news actually," I say. Jonas's eyes narrow. Kyle obviously filled him in on the basic events of yesterday's carnage.

"If it's bad news, I'm going to kill something," I laugh.

"No, this is actually under the good column," Kyle actually sags in relief, and though less dramatically, so does Jonas.

"Then do tell."

"We've decided to get tattoos."

"Tattoos?" Kyle's sort of dumbfounded. Understandable. I mean, that's a pretty out of left field thing to say on any day, never mind the one after this massive bad feelings pain blow out.

Kyle may be having trouble getting this to make sense, but Jonas on the other hand, seems to be all for it. He's grinning, almost inspired looking.

"That gives me the best idea! You guys want to get married, right? Have a ceremony? Well I say, let's combine the two! My uncle owns a tattoo parlour and he's totally cool. My parents don't really like him and we're not exactly supposed to like, see each other and everything, but since we moved here I've seen him quite a bit. We've gotten kinda close, he's an awesome guy. Only like 30 or something. Anyway, his tattoo place is like, great. You could have the ceremony there! The tattoos could be like your rings and stuff." We all just stare at him.

Married in a tattoo parlour? Mom would freak. It's probably never been done. But when you think about it that way... of COURSE we should get married in a tattoo parlour! Where else fits? Where else makes sense? This is me and Celery! Doers of the new, strange, and just plain insane! To get married anywhere but Jonas's uncle's tattoo parlour would just be silly.

I grin. Celery looks at me dubiously.

"You want to do it?" I nod, still with the grinning.

"It's perfect!" He raises his eyebrows skeptically.

"It is?" I take his hands.

"Come on, sweetness! Think about it. Of course it is - it's us!" He thinks about it. Then he laughs.

"Jonas, you're a genius," Jonas beams.

"That's what they tell me."

"Mom's going to kill you," Kyle says, shaking his head.

"Nah, she's Mom. She'll understand," and she will too. How many mothers can you honestly say that about? She's in class by herself, our mom.

"Yeah, you're probably right. Okay, so I'm on board. On with the planning?"

"Planning?" Simple, people! Simple!

"Yes, planning. As in, making a plan."

"What's to plan?"

"You're serious," Kyle says, shaking his head.

"Sure I am!"

"How can we NOT plan?" I look over at Celery. He's clearly already planning in his head. Great. Jonas is no help either - he's gone, off, calling his uncle.

"We aren't going to do it like now, Jonas," I shout, craning my neck to where he is over by the phone in Kyle's sort of kitchen thing he never really uses.

"I know," Jonas replies, his hand over the mouthpiece. "I'm just going to run the idea by him," I don't bother listening in. I have other things to worry about.

"Celery, I really need for this to be simple." He smiles. That's one down. Now Kyle. "As for you, let's just remember which one of us is the straight one here and act accordingly." He grins and rolls his eyes. Man, I'm good.

"Lou is all for the idea." It just figures that his uncle's name is Lou. Like, it's way typical.

"That's good to know, anyway. Um, what else to we need to like plan?"

"Whatever there is, I think we need to continue this not here and somewhere that like, Mom is. I mean, if she'll kill us for real if she doesn't get to help plan your wedding - even if it is going to happen at a tattoo parlour."

"I think Lou prefers tattoo emporium," Jonas adds helpfully. How classic is that?

"I'm sure Mom will be thrilled. Should we move out?"

"Sounds like the wanta stay alive thing to do," Celery says. That's enough to get us all moving.

Okay, so, I'm not going to bore you with all the details, but suffices to say, it took awhile to win Mom over to the whole getting married in a tattoo emporium thing. But like, what do you expect? Craziness only gets you so far in life. She's still like, a mom. Which worked against us for awhile, but eventually the day was ours. First of all, we had to assure her that we'd worked stuff out, and break the news that I wouldn't be moving (following which Jonas became visibly relieved, and so did Mom, though she hid it better). We also had to promise stuff like a reception type thing at our house to follow and many elaborate baked goods prepared by her and Dad - but still, victory. Look at the task, and be impressed.

Dad's even easier. He just snorts out a laugh and smirks at Mom. The twins will think it's an awesome idea, and I think we'll even be able to get Kara the 11-year-old old romantic behind the idea.

The six of us hang out in the living room, big with the trying to plan. We're talking guests. I look around.

"This is basically it," I look over at Celery for confirmation. "I mean, add the twins and Kara and that's about everyone I want to be there."

"Maybe Brian and Alex too," Celery adds. I think about it, and then nod.

"You're right, we should at least ask them."

"What about your aunts and uncles? Cousins and grandparents?" SIMPLE is the word we're looking for here, people! SIMPLE!

Celery takes over. "We really want to keep this small. It isn't going to be

a wedding in the conventional walking down the aisle, having a guest book, cappuccino makers from distant relatives sense. We want all of you guys there, because you're our family. You're the people we love and trust the most, and we want to share our commitment and promise with you. But really, everyone already knows we're committed. This is going to be like, symbolic."

"And let's not forget - tattoo parlour," Jonas making with the funny.

"How could I forget?" Mom's all with us now though. The making fun is a sure sign of that. If there's anything lingering, Dad will take care of it tonight. They always, like, talk and stuff at night. I love that my parents still love each other. I don't even want to be all braggy about this, I'm just saying, I'm grateful.

"It'll be great, Mom - really." She smiles.

"I'm sure it will be. Your crazy definition of great - but great," you've gotten that she's like me by now, right? I mean, that's sunk in, hasn't it?

"If we've settled the who, what about the when?"

"Soon," Celery begins, and then sighs. "I mean, it HAS to be soon," he finishes a bit reluctantly.

"Soon is good, we can do soon. Right, Jerry?" You remember. Jerry's my dad.

"Sure we can. Especially if it's only family and maybe those two boys..."

"Alex and Brian," I supply.

"Right. Any time really."

"Do we care about the date at all?" I ask Celery. He shrugs.

"August 17th sounds nice," I smile. Who knows why, but it kinda does.

"Okay, so when's that?"

"This Saturday," When else could we get married but a Saturday? Think about it. I smile more.

"Perfect."

"And doable," Mom adds.

"Okay, next item. Best men?" No brainer.

"Jonas and Kyle," Celery and I both say automatically. They grin.

"Unless one of you likes one of us better, let's sort of just share, eh?" I suggest to them. Jonas sighs.

"Well, since we both sort of like Celery better, that seems like the kindest thing to do," okay, I'll take Kyle!

"Yeah, sure, stick me with the bum groom," on second thought - where's Kara?

"We'll take that as a yes to the sharing," this is all Dad, by the way. Being details and calm organized guy.

"Yep," I say, Celery nods.

"Clothes."

"Tattoo parlour."

"Enough said. Anything else we need to cover?"

"It's a good start," Mom answers. "We can talk about food more later, and if you would like more people to be at the reception, that sort of thing. Until then, we have roughly four days to plan a wedding cake and make other top secret parental arrangements, let's get to work, Jerry," Dad's all for that, and they leave.

I take a deep breath, and look around the room. I need a minute to recover. I mean, planning my wedding? Come on. Tattoo parlour or not. It's crazy.

"That's right, baby, just breathe," Celery coaches, starting to rub my shoulders. Pretty soon I've turned to putty in his hands, and am totally calm.

"Thanks." He tilts my head back, so in a sort of upside down way we're facing each other. I smile as he smiles tenderly at me.

"Just doing my job."

"We're still allowed to tease the hell out of you as your best men, right?" Jonas cheek master cheek inquires. I straighten up a bit again to roll my eyes at him.

"Please, don't hold back on our account," he shrugs.

"I wouldn't, just checking to see if there wasn't some way out of wearing



the sea foam tuxes I can tell you guys are planning to make us wear," I laugh almost uncontrollably at that, mostly cause of the image it conjured up in my sick and twisted mind. Naturally, it was a frilly sea foam bridesmaid gown in my imagination, which when you think about it, is way more funny, and also a hell of a lot more disturbing.

"Sea foam!" Celery says it the way you'd expect someone to say, 'eureka!', grinning at Jonas.

"You really ARE a genius."

"There'll be no sea foam," Kyle lays down the law, deciding it was time for him to step in.

"How about peach? Magenta? That weird pastel pink colour that was popular in the 80's? Oh! I've got it! Leopard prints! Or Zebra - or maybe just the Miami vice look! I hear it's coming back!" Somewhere around Zebra, we all started laughing, and the whole stopping thing really isn't working out, so we're all just doing the can't breathe, sides are starting to ache, red faced thing. It's a lot of fun. I highly recommend it.

That continues to be about the only kind of wedding planning I'm able to do. The totally unserious goofing around kind. Celery and Mom (who basically take over) put up with me, mostly 'cause I'm a relatively vital component to the whole final wedding scene, and we all manage to get through the arranging process without any kind of bloodbath. Again, look at the task, and be impressed. My constant pleas for simple, and the fact that we only had like 4 days, results in a day with very little hoopla planned.

The night before, Celery starts to joke that we should spend the night apart (you know, like they always do in Soap Operas and shit), but the look on my face quickly puts an end to that. He holds up his hands in total surrender, grinning sheepishly.

"Okay, so that wasn't really all that funny," I walk over to him across my room and hug his waist.

"Sorry I've been such a bitch about all this." He smiles down at me, totally void of reproach.

"It's okay. I know how lame you think weddings are - and I agree in theory. I just really wanted us to have something to remember, to hold onto, you know?" So that's why he did it! Oh man.

I sigh.

"I get it now. I sort of wondered why you were getting so freakishly involved, I didn't really understand until now. I thought maybe you were

trying to distract yourself or something, but this makes more sense, knowing how your insane mind works. I officially surrender myself to the wedding day beat. It's going to be a great day because you put your heart into it, and 'cause mine finally is. I love you, sweet one, and I want you to know I really am very touched and grateful that you put so much heart into planning a day for us to share that," He kisses me.

"Thanks, baby."

"Sorry again for all the not taking it seriously, freaking out stuff," he smiles knowingly.

"I knew you'd come around eventually, and I knew it'd be worth it when you did," I laugh.

"You're a sly dog." He hoists me up, and carries me the 2 strides over to my bed. I'm not even that little, man, Celery's just freakishly strong.

"I love you," he says, kissing my forehead and lying down beside me. I start kissing him, taking my kisses consecutively downwards, but he puts his arms around me, holding me in place over his chest, stopping me from moving further.

"Bastard," I laugh, understanding what he's doing.

"Consider yourself lucky I'm letting you sleep with me at all, the way you've been treating me lately," I give in totally, relaxing fully against him, and kiss his shoulder.

"Tease," he starts rubbing my naked back, but, like, JUST my back. That's all I'm getting tonight.

"I love you," he says again. I sigh.

"Yeah yeah," I roll off a little, just using him for a pillow, and start breathing deep.

"Care?" I finally smile.

"I love you too, Cel," I can feel his smile.

"Night, love."

"May you have many nightmares, you teasing bastard," he laughs, which is what I wanted him to do.

Not long after that, we're both fast asleep.

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I can't even describe to you the frantic rush that was most of the next day. To me, it didn't seem like there was all that much to, after all, we were just driving down to Jonas's uncle's tattoo place in the bakery van. But Mom and Celery kept pulling details and arrangements out of nowhere, and the whole day just sorta flew by in total mayhem and general chaos. Fucking weddings, man. Even if you are getting married in a tattoo parlour with only your closest family - they're majorly insane.

By 4 o'clock, I'm feeling beyond ready to drop dead, or at least go hide in Kyle's apartment with him, the twins, and Jonas. That's when Celery pulls me into a hug and kisses my drooping eyes.

"The hard part's over," he assures me. "Now all we have to do is get dressed and head over," I look at him with obvious panic in my eyes. Get dressed?

"I thought we were just dressing, like, casually," he nods.

"We are, but, NEW casual, your stuff is in your room, I'm going to go change in the twins'."

I'm sort of dumbly obedient to everything he tells me to do by this point, so I just trail after him up stairs, and let myself get gently pushed into my room. Laid out for me - as promised - are my new wedding duds. I have to admit, they're pretty nice. Stuff I'd wear normally, but with the whole added bonus of being clean and unwrinkled. Simple stuff too. Beige cargo pants and a green short sleeved shirt. Not exactly a T-shirt, and certainly not T-shirt material, but still, wearable. Not quite boyband enough for me to be morally objected to. It's the kinda dusty green I've been told goes well with my eyes, and fits perfectly. It hugs me a little more than I'm used to, but I check myself out, and okay, I have to admit, I think I look pretty hot in it. The best part is the shoes. A brand new pair of Lakai's that go great with the shirt. Trust Celery to make sure we're wearing skate shoes on our wedding day.

Half nervous for him to see me and excited for me to see him, I peek out of my room, and see Celery's head cautiously sticking out of the door of the twins' room down the hall. We grin at each other, and laugh.

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours," I sing. He rolls his eyes, but on a mental count of three, we both open the door. I'm too busy being stunned to notice his reaction to me.

I have one sexy looking groom-to-be - that's all I can say. I can tell you what he's wearing, but that's not really going to help you get how amazing he looks. His pants are navy blue, just like work pants style, no oversized

pockets or junk. His shirt's sky blue, and made from same clingy material as mine, but he's got a way better upper body to show off. His eyes are practically blinding they're so blue, and they match his shirt perfectly. His shoes are navy as well, ES's. On his head, of course, is his backwards orange cap. He wouldn't be Celery without it. But really, out of everything, what makes him the most beautiful (warning, incredibly sappy but sincere line ahead) is his smile. Dudes, I told you it was going to be sappy! But I also said sincere, and I meant that. It's all him, man. His smile, his eyes. Clothes got nothing to do with it. It's how beautiful he looks when he's as happy as he is that's really causing me to step back and go, WOW.

"You look," we both start to say at the same time. Laughter inevitably follows.

"Amazing," I finish.

"Incredible," he does the same. We go back to grinning at each other.

"Did you pick the stuff out?" I ask. He shakes his head.

"No, your mom did. All I said was to get us skate shoes, these ones are awesome too. Like, I can't wait to go skating in them," I roll my eyes.

"After the wedding, eh?" He blushes. I go over and hug him.

"I love you," he grins.

"Love you more," I'm not even going to start that today.

"Yeah, but only 'cause I'm the best," he laughs, and then kisses me.

"It's time to go, I think," I nod, not moving. I'm liking just chilling with him in the hallway, relaxing in his arms.

"BOYS!" Guess it's not working so good for Mom.

We grin guiltily at each other and break slightly apart, just enough so that we can walk safely down the stairs.

When we get outside, everyone's there and they're all decked out. It's all still very much with the casual theme, but everyone's managing to look pretty spiffed. The twins are doing the unintentional matching thing, Kara's in this really simple summer dress I can easily see her running around in later, grass staining it up and other good stuff. Jonas and Kyle are also with the matching, navy jeans and red shirts (no sea foam?!) and then you've got Mom and Dad. Dad's got a pair of grey cords and a light blue-grey V-neck sweater, Mom's in a slightly crazy crunched cotton shirt

and a loose matching top. Her hair's down, but that's really the only major difference. My mom's quite a crazy dresser normally.

We all just sorta beam at each other there on the lawn for a long time, soaking up and love and all that, but then the pictures start and Mom gets thinking it's time to go nuts with the organising and rushing again, which sort of kills the peaceful mood. The whole way there Kyle cracks a lame joke every time he notices I'm starting to get nervous, and Celery squeezes my hand about every two seconds.

We get there and Brian and Alex are loitering out front, awkward grins on their faces, wearing clothes I've seen before, but that look like they've been ironed. We park, get out, everyone says hi and stuff, then we go inside. Lou (that's Jonas's uncle for everyone who smoked their short-term memory away on too much of the blessed weed) closed the place for the day, so it's empty. There's no like aisle and shit, we just all head from the front lobby into the lounge area, which is like the recovery place after the actual tattooing gets done.

We never had a rehearsal or anything, like - TATTOO PARLOUR - but there is sort of a plan. We all met Lou a couple days before (very cool guy, sort of like an older tattooed Jonas) and gave him a general idea of what we were going to do, and he's cool to wait to do our tattoos until after we've said our vows. We wrote our own by the way, and let me tell you, that's fucking stressful. I finally gave up the whole memorising thing and just have a general idea of what I want to say.

"Everybody ready?" Lou asks coming out from the back, we nod. There's not going to be a ceremony or anything really, he's just going to show us the way our tattoo's are going to look, we'll say our vows, get the tattoos done, and that's like it.

"So guys, what did you decide?" Uh, weren't we going to do that like, now?

I look to Celery for help. He's blushing.

"Well, see, I had this idea," one he obviously shared with Lou, who appears to be trying to hide a smirk. It's the exact same smirk I've seen on Jonas a thousand times. Must run in the family.

"What idea is that?"

"That we'd like, um," he looks down at his feet, painfully and adorably shy. "Like, sign each other's wrists, and then Lou could just go over them," Oh god.

I have to stand there silently for a few seconds, focusing hard not to cry.

"That's like..." I can't even finish.

Celery smiles at Lou.

"I think we'll go for that then," he nods.

"No problem, I've got some setting up to do, you guys just do your thing, and I'll see you in a little bit."

"Sure," I somehow manage to say. Celery nods.

I look at him, and suddenly out of nowhere I get the intensest case of nervous jitters. Not about marrying him, just like, I don't know. It's all so CRAZY! I can't describe it, this is all just so insane. My heart's in my throat, I'm afraid I'm going to cry, and my stomach's doing the weirdest things.

I'm trying to relax myself by thinking about the marriage scene in the Princess Bride (Maawage, that bwessed awangement, that dweem, wipin a dweem) but it's not really working. And I mean, that's like, one of the funniest scenes in the entire movie.

Celery leans over and kisses my ear.

"Relax, baby." Two words and I'm like butter. I smile. He smiles. Jonas coughs and Kyle tries not to laugh. Everyone else is just sort of waiting.

"Do we like face each other or what?" I say, big time at a loss. Celery smiles, exuding everlasting patience.

"Yeah, sure," we do. I keep thinking to myself as long as I'm looking at him, no matter what, I'll be okay.

"Who's going to go first?" Kyle asks. Oh shit. I forgot about the actual vows. Celery smiles again.

"Me," oh thank goodness. I exhale loudly, and there's more poorly contained laughter from our groomsmen and other members of the peanut gallery.

Celery takes both my hands, and focusing back on him, I find I can breathe normally again.

"Carrots, when I first met you, we were only six. You were scrawny and lippy and every other thing that came out of your mouth was either sarcastic or mocking but somehow I found myself feeling more comfortable around you than I had ever felt around any other human being. I can't really describe it but somehow I knew - in the way that you just KNOW stuff sometimes - that you were every bit as afraid as me. Of being alone,

different. I don't mean gay or anything like that, just plain different. Separate. It was like I knew for both of us that we weren't going to grow up to be like everyone else. I never told you this, and I know you always thought things just sorta happened, but," he smiles shyly, "I did my best to make sure we became friends. We're talking everything in my power here. In a way, you could call it lucky that we turned out being so right for each other, but it was like I KNEW it was going to work out before I even started. I've said I knew it was love from the first day, and I did love you right from then, but it took me almost two years to name it. Now there's nothing I know more clearly than that I love you. How much I love you isn't something I can ever seem to find powerful enough words to express and the reasons that I do are far too numerous to list. I love who you are - everything that you are, but there is one thing that stands out most clearly in my mind. You were the first thing I ever loved - person, animal, and especially mineral. You taught me how. It took me so long to put a label on what I was feeling because I had no experience with it. If I hadn't met you I'm positive my heart would have just died. It would have shrivelled up and turned to dust. But I did meet you, and from the first minute to now, you've been teaching me how to love. I love you always, baby, unconditionally. I want to spend the rest of my life loving you and making you happy,"

"Damnit, I knew your vows were going to be better than mine," I say in that shaky through the tears that are threatening to fall voice. He laughs the same way. I shake my head a little, trying to get rid of hair and the approaching tears, before looking back into his eyes again.

"Um," way to start, genius. "Celery, I love you so much. I don't have the words for it, I can't even think sometimes with how much I love you. It's like everything else just gets blocked and blacked out and I'm not able to put together a single thought - all I can do is FEEL. I feel your love - and my love for you - every second of the day. You're a part of me in ways that probably aren't even healthy." He smiles. We've actually worked at it enough that that's a smile memory now. "But I know I'm happier than most people ever get to be whenever I'm with you. You've taught me so much - not just to love without condition or hesitation - but simply to live. I'm not fully alive when I'm not with you - I'm never doing what I most want to be doing unless you're with me, unless we're doing it together. You've given me more confidence and peace in myself than I can ever thank you for. I mean, you know me better than anyone else and you STILL love me! Sometimes I worry about how insane that makes you, but mostly I'm too busy being totally in love with you to care. There's nothing that could stop me from loving you - not time or distance, acts or deeds. I'm always going to be head over heels in love you, no matter what, forever."

Celery beams at me, and the minutes start doing the stretching into eternity thing, when, as only he can, Jonas breaks the moment, chanting, "go for it, dudes," making everyone laugh.

I stop laughing the second Celery's hand is on my face, and I start getting so lost in his eyes I think I'm going to swoon for real, when he kisses me. I'd have to say, as kisses go, it was a pretty fucking awesome one. Right up there with our very first.

After our mini love fest breaks up, Jonas and Kyle start blowing bubbles at us, which I find to be totally random and strange until they inform me it's like some crazy new wedding tradition. Like a rice replacement or whatever. Who knew.

Mom and Dad come over and hug us both, and then Lou comes back, checks to see if we're ready, and we follow him into the back to get the job done. All in all it's pretty quick and painless. The tattooing I mean. Signing was obviously first, done lovingly, with soft smiles and long looks. He gives us the speech about leaving them covered for 24 hours and keeping it clean and everything, and that's like it. Mine's on my right wrist and his is on his left, that way we can like hold hands with our tattooed arms. Slightly tender but otherwise blissfully happy, we thank Lou profusely and rejoin everyone back outside.

"Congratulations, you guys!" Jonas says, coming over to hug us and then blowing more bubbles into our faces.

"Fuck, man," I laugh, laughing with my eyes closed, afraid he's going to blind me.

"What's a wedding without a little loss of vision?" Kyle wonders, hugging us too.

"No one pronounced you man and wife yet!" Jon suddenly quips out of nowhere, causing big time laughter from everyone who isn't me (since, basically, I would be the wife), and I take a mock swing at him. He just grins. Kids.

"Seriously, guys, you're like married! That's so cool!" Dave is such the cooler twin.

"Thanks," I say, smiling in a weird proud, I-just-got-married kind of way. Celery gives my shoulder a squeeze. Yep. It's cool alright.

There are times I can't even say how grateful I am for Kyle. Like now. 'Cause just when I'm starting to think it's all getting a little weird, us just standing here, me not knowing what to say, he goes, "Let's get this show on the road, eh? Wasn't I promised a party?"

"That's right, let's rock." You really don't want to hear your mom say stuff like that. No matter how cool you think she is.



We drive back in the van with Brian and Alex following us in Alex's car, and I'm feeling pretty calm until we get to our street and I see like a million cars parked all over the place. I think it's safe to say I've found the reason for the mysteriously large amount of planning that was going on all day. I glare at Celery, but he looks as surprised as me. Mom. I'm going to get her. Her wagon's getting fixed big time.

"Just some family, and your other friends from school," Mom is quick to say in her own defence. "There are a lot of people who love you that want to share this day with you." Okay. So maybe that's true. Doesn't mean I'm not going to pout about it.

I do my pouting silently as Dad parks the car, and then all the way up the front steps and into the house. Before I even get the chance to be incredibly rude to a bunch of my close friends and family, Celery's got his hands on my shoulders, marching me upstairs and into my room.

"Five minutes of whining and then you have to deal, okay?" Being the no nonsensey hard-line guy. Then he softens, "Just for a couple hours, it won't be so bad," I smile rather feebly.

"I know it's like the thing to do or whatever and I don't mind it really, only, I didn't want this now. Tomorrow or something maybe, but I wanted this part of today to be just for us. I haven't even had a chance to adequately express to you how much you killed me with those vows of yours. How I just like totally fell in love with you all over again and that I've been this close to bursting into tears every five seconds since you said them. I love you so much, sweet one, and it's like I get a little annoyed every now and then that I have to share you, especially after something like this." He's into ultra-beam, and hugs me in the it'd hurt if my insane love for him didn't dull the pain way.

"I love you the same way, baby, but we'll have time for the greedy private stuff later." The cloud that had been miraculously absent this whole day suddenly returns with evil a vengeance and my face falls into self-pity city (the capital of misery island).

"Right, like three days."

"Oh baby, no," he pleads, holding me tighter. I have to take a second to be shocked that such a thing was possible, and then I let myself start to feel comforted.

"Sorry for being such a downer," I say with a sniff. I tried not to do the sniff, but I like had to. Wish I hadn't though. It made him feel all bad again.

"Comere," he says, drawing me over with him to the bed. We just sort of hold each other and regroup for a couple of minutes.

"I'm okay now," I let him know once I am. He smiles.

"Okay." He kisses my forehead. "Ready to party it up?" I do the ironic half smile thing.

"Much with the getting of the party started."

Because of that whole reeking of honour thing we've talked about before, I'm forced to admit it really isn't that bad. A lot of cool people showed up and I'm actually finding myself enjoying being in a room with them. Kaleb's presence makes me momentarily worried, but find no trace of the same in Celery, so I'm able to relax. Everyone just sort of parties together, and there's really very little awkwardness or anything like that. I mean, I never expected to be hugged by so many different people in such a short period of time, but really, I've got no complaints.

We get a lot of gifts, which I find totally weird since it's not like we're like, moving out and starting a family or something, but the gifts are all basically of the 'getting through the time apart' variety, which is cool. It's all stuff that we can share which is also cool. Like we got cell phones, but I'll probably only use mine to play games if at all and probably not at all since I hate video games and suck hard at them, but Celery will be able to use his to call me which is like the most important thing ever. We also got matching shirts from Kyle and Jonas. Mine is green and his is orange and they have our names on them plus these funny veggie tales like pictures of a carrot and a celery on them. I plan to sleep in mine. Plus we got a lot of checks from people that we're going to put towards paying the cell phone bills we're going to rack up. The craziest present of all is from my parents. What they give us is, no other way to put it, our honeymoon. It's not going to Cuba or anything (don't ask!) but a night in the Fort Gary ain't bad. Anyway, we don't really have time for much more.

So weird to be packing overnight bags after the reception is over and going on a honeymoon. A weird, short honeymoon, but a honeymoon none the less. And so, weird. Also weird was stuff like the cutting of the cake, and the toasts, and all that other like WEDDING stuff. I hate to say this, but in some ways, in most ways even, I don't really feel any different. I mean, I guess it's just 'cause like, I made my commitment to Celery long ago. Like, 11 years long ago. Or even when we first came out to each other, if you're not going to accept my taking his carrots in kindergarten as a firm enough symbol of my commitment. It's like what I felt when he asked me if he could keep me. Of course you can keep what's always been yours. I mean, it's not really too complex of an idea. But it was a thing he wanted, and I'm all about doing whatever I can for him. This was no

big. It was even fun, and I love the tattoos. I like can't wait until we can take the bandage stuff off.

We do the little driving off in the car with the 'Just Married' sign and cans trailing behind thing, all giddy and laughing for no reason. We sign into the hotel and clothes start getting thrown and pulled off before the bell dude has even completely shut the door behind him. That's pretty much the way it stays. All I'm going to say is it's a good thing the hotel walls are thick and leave it at that.

Sometime late in the morning of what I guess is our first official day as like, married people, we actually start looking around the room, and it's totally swank city. Big, classy and comfortable. We lounge around, talking and making out like it's going out of style. Which with us you'd think it always was. Someone counting how many times we've been saying "I love you" would have a very long list right now.

"So, what's the verdict?"

"Huh?" Gotta love that thick, out of the blissful daze huh.

"No after the fact cold feet?" I roll my eyes at him for about an hour.

"Oh tons. I'm like so totally ditching you at the front desk," he kisses me, grinning. Kissing while grinning is a lot of fun. It takes skill, but it's fun.

"I know you did it for me, baby, I know the whole wedding thing really isn't your scene. I feel the same as you - that the commitment we made to each other happened a long time ago, but for some reason I still needed this. He runs his thumb lovingly along my wrist. "It was like I needed something that I'll be able remember and think back on when I move. I wasn't sure how else I was going to be able to leave you," I try not to whimper.

"Can we not talk about that right now?" His eyes fill with compassion and understanding, and he slips an arm around my waist.

"Of course, baby.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Six  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Sun, 04 May 2003 21:58:50 -0500

The only thing I can really say about our final days together is never underestimate the power of denial. Every time even a glimmer of his leaving comes up I'll have it pushed away so quick you wouldn't have even guessed it was there. I on no uncertain terms refuse to let myself think about it and I don't let Celery talk to me about it either. It's an incredibly fine and perilous line to be walking between safe and dangerous. It's also the only thing I can do. The bad thing is I sort of collapse under the strain of my own denial on the morning of his last day. This unsurprisingly causes HIM to break down and before you know it its just one big wet teary sob fest.

Everything's been arranged, phone calls and e-mail, visits, all that stuff, so technically, we're like, "prepared". But, of course we aren't. There's no preparing for something like this. I've been saying it over and over, you should have gotten it by now. I just can't prepare myself for this. I still can't believe it's happening. To me, to US.

I know he's leaving. I know in my head that this time tomorrow Celery won't be here with me. I believe it, like in my brain it's one of those facts that I've accepted kind of like that the world is round and you shouldn't drink draino, but I can't FEEL it. Not in my heart. I don't even remember what it's like to be without him so I have nothing to base my irrational focus on. How can I truly freak out about something, if I don't know what it's like? Because I can't in any practical or tangible way picture life without him, it doesn't really seem possible. I can't imagine myself doing things, living regular life, without Celery along for the ride and it seems so unreal because of that.

Looking over at him now, lying across from me on my bed, I can't make myself believe he won't be here with me tomorrow. That after tomorrow I'll have to go back to waking up alone, living alone, BEING alone.

Celery smiles at me sadly. Will I really be expected to go on without seeing his beautiful face? Can this actually be happening? He reaches over and strokes my face. Here now. Real. Not gone.

"I love you,"

"I know you do," He takes my hand and kisses my wrist, just where the tattoo is. I love it when he does that. His eyes are like these giant grey tunnels and I swear if I stare into them long enough I'll be able to disappear into them forever.

"You going to be okay tomorrow?" And here's me, wanting with everything I have to pretend like tomorrow's never going to happen. That we can just keep on living today for the rest of our lives.

"No. Not okay or fine or even anything short of unbearably in pain. Just like you. But there's nothing that will change that, no matter how much we talk about it, or plan ways of keeping in touch." I've gotten extremely bitter these past couple days. Like, more so than usual. I know. And you thought it wasn't possible.

"Baby, we'll get through it," Hilarious. Him telling me that.

"You think if you tell me that enough times you'll actually start to believe it?" I warned you about the bitter. Celery's used to it by now. He doesn't really let me get away with it though.

He sits up.

"Don't," told ya! "Not today. Today is all we have left, we have to enjoy it." I sigh.

"Then stop asking me if I'm going to be okay," I plead, almost in tears, ready to lose it. "I can't think about any of it and still smile at you and be happy. I can't," Just before the tears really start coming, he takes my head in his hands and cradles it against his chest, sort of rocking me. I slip my arms around his waist and we just zone out the world for awhile.

At dinner it's all about sharing the pain. Everyone's at the table (naturally that's Jonas too) and we all talk and cry and try to comfort each other. There's also a big stay positive and cheerful push. Remembering the good in life and all that. There are even a few times now and then that it actually works for a second. And that's like, a WHOLE second. Which isn't bad considering.

It's gotten to be that I can't even look at Celery without starting to well up with tears, but I guess I'm coping. Full out breakdown will come later. And it's not going to be pretty.

I know I'm being kind of disjointed and all over the placey and I'm sorry, but I can't really think too long about anything. I keep sort of phasing out all the time. I think it's starting to worry Celery. People talk to me, and I'll hear about half of what they say before my mind slips into something else, or more likely, nothing at all. It wouldn't really bother me (cause at least in my weird little trancy things I can't feel the pain of his leaving) except I'm missing precious minutes with my love. I must have missed dinner ending. I also don't recall going upstairs but here we are. Jonas and Kyle too. All in my room. Celery has his arms around me,

we're on my bed. In it actually. I'm cold for some reason so we're under blankets. I guess I must have told him about the being cold, or he guessed. I don't remember that either.

Kyle is on my chair, Jonas at his feet. He's leaning against Kyle's legs, his eyes half closed. They look so natural. So painfully beautiful. Blonde and brown, dark and light. Kyle with a hand on Jonas's shoulder. Best friends. They make each other so happy. They laugh together. Their minds have those corresponding shapes that make it all worth while whenever they're together. If I try really hard will I be able to hate them? Tomorrow will come and they'll still be together. Not alone. Their hearts will remain unbroken. No use trying. I couldn't want to hate them, even if it was possible for me to.

Celery's touching my arm, talking to me. I can't focus on what he's saying. Not even his face. I can barely feel him. He's not even gone yet and I've already lost him! He's shaking me harder, talking louder. There's movement. Jonas and Kyle are getting up. Standing over me. How did I get on my back?

"Celery?" The word sort of rips itself out of my throat. With massive relief he exhales and pulls my limp weakened body back against him.

"What happened?" I ask shakily.

"That's what we'd like to know!" Jonas scoffs, sounding slightly hysterical.

"Are you okay baby?" Celery asks me, holding me away so he can peer at me all concerned and pensive.

I smile.

I don't know what I am, but I don't want him to be worried. That thing that was happening to me before - whatever it was - I think it's over. I'm back from wherever I was. Back in the pain, but also back with him, which is all that matters.

"Yeah, I guess," He hugs me again. I look over his shoulder at the still worried and standing Jonas and Kyle, and try to smile again. "Really," I tell them. Doubtfully, they assume their previous positions.

"I just like spaced out or whatever,"

"It was happening all evening, I just didn't know what to do. Then like 10 minutes ago you went all like catatonic," Celery tells me, not exactly being calm and confident that everything's back to normal guy. Lots of worry and fear still. If I only understood myself I'd be happy to explain

it too him.

"I guess it was just like, too much or something. I couldn't handle it anymore so the only option left was to like NOT handle it. Slip out of the reality that was too much for me to take," That sounds at least vaguely possible right? Plausible even? Sound theory-ish?

Celery seems mildly convinced and relaxed by my patched together explanation.

"Do you think it's going to happen again?" Finally a question I know the answer to. I smile reassuringly.

"No. I'm absolutely sure it won't. It's very little fun, but my brain's finally figured out that I want to be here," I smile again, nudging him with a shoulder, "with you, for as long as I can, even though that's not very long anymore,"

"Much love to you too Care," Jonas gripes. I smile with the love and amusement Jonas almost always brings out in me.

"You guys too, you're all part of this particular reality package,"

"The platinum addition," I roll my eyes at Kyle.

"Good taste is easy to recognize," I'll expect my many cans of free cat food within the day.

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Later, when we're lying together, alone in the dark, the bad thoughts come back - and worse - but I don't let myself stop looking at him and eventually the feelings stop. The pull ends and I find I don't have to cling so hard onto reality in order to be able to stay there. Celery's no more asleep than I am, but the quiet is what we're about right now. In some ways I think we both feel like we should be, I don't know, taking advantage of this last opportunity to be together, but there's not even a shred of that mood here. Cuddling, whispering, that we can do. Sex on the other hand is basically out of the question. That's a joyful thing. Definitely not the tone of the evening. I doubt either of us could even like physically do it. I might as well be dead as far as that part of me's working right now.

I can't think of what else to do, and since I remember it helped once, very softly, I start to sing,

Come up to meet ya, tell you I'm sorry You don't know how lovely you are I had to find you, tell you I need ya And tell you I set you apart Tell me

your secrets, and nurse me your questions Oh lets go back to the start  
Running in circles, coming up tails Heads on a science apart

Nobody said it was easy It's such a shame for us to part Nobody said it was  
easy No one ever said it would be this hard Oh take me back to the start

I was just guessing at numbers and figures Pulling the puzzles apart  
Questions of science, science and progress Do not speak as loud as my heart  
And tell me you love me, come back and haunt me Oh and I rush to the start  
Running in circles, chasing tails Coming back as we are

Nobody said it was easy Oh it's such a shame for us to part Nobody said it  
was easy No one ever said it would be so hard I'm going back to the start

By the time the sun comes again, I'm totally hoarse, but singing silly  
songs, and we're actually laughing. We didn't sleep at all. We talked and  
I sang and we kissed our lips numb, but nothing more. It was a beautiful  
night. No matter what, we'll always have it. Whatever the rest of the day  
brings, we'll always have that one pure joy memory. And the ceremony, that  
promise. I'm just hoping that's going to be enough. All the time as I'm  
fearing it won't be.

Breakfast is like dinner all over again, the striving for cheerfulness  
against all odds, the general failing miserably with snatches of near  
success. I can't talk or take my eyes off Celery. My mind doesn't drift  
from full attention to him for a millisecond. I'm locking these images of  
him in so they'll never leave me. Every sip of juice, every bite of food,  
every smile, every look, every touch and gesture.

In an hour he has to leave. We'll talk over the Their house (all packed  
away and empty by now) and then he'll get into the car, and that'll be it.  
I still don't really believe it but in an hour whether I believe it or not  
it'll be real.

"Baby?" Up in my room again, willing our last minutes together to go on  
forever. Hiding up there, wishing that shutting the door could make time  
stand still.

"Yeah?" He's holding me of course, and I'm looking up at him. Lying on the  
bed, head in his lap, one hand brushing fingers along my hair, the other  
gripping my shoulder.

"This changes nothing." It's a simple promise. One we've made using  
different words a million other times since this all began, but I  
understand why he needed to say it again. Half a promise, half a plea. He  
needs me to tell him I believe it, so maybe he can start.

"It changes a lot of things Cel," I begin softly, hoping my tone will stop



the words from hurting him.

"Not how I feel about you," it's old ground. Familiar territory. But we can't seem to stop covering it.

"No, not that. But other things. Big things. We may not be changing but the world is changing around us. We may have to change in order to keep up."

"I'm not going to stop loving you to `keep up!'" I quickly grab his hand away from my shoulder and squeeze it firmly.

"That's not what I meant. You have to know that. I mean, we got married didn't we? That's a fairly long-term commitment. Like, till death is awhile. I just think we have to prepare ourselves. A year is going to feel like a pretty long while too,"

"You don't think it's a little late to try to start emotionally preparing ourselves now? I'm leaving in less than an hour. Where was "let's deal" Carrots for the past month?" I sigh.

"Hiding. Terrified, in denial, and hiding." Sadly, he leans down and kisses me.

"You weren't right to be hiding for the reasons you did, but you were right about not bothering to try to prepare. It's impossible. I can't do it, neither can you. It would have been a waste of energy,"

"Like you trying harder to get Them to let you stay?" I must admit that's still something of a sore spot.

"Can we not go over all that again. Didn't we settle all that?" I sit up. His eyes are grey. This particular portion of our parting isn't going well. I think it has something to do with the fact that we're both trying to fill up the silence by saying things we already have or that are better left unsaid.

"I love you Celery," He gets it. He gets that that's me saying enough. It's my line in the sand.

"I love you too," He pulls me into his arms.

I've often had the unfortunate experience of hours passing too fast. There was so much to do, not nearly enough time. So many other people he had to hug and try to say good-bye too. So many other people who will miss him too. It was stupid of me to say Jonas and Kyle's hearts wouldn't be breaking today. They're losing a brother and a best friend. It's not just me. I'm pretty selfish and sometimes I feel like it is, just it's far from

just me. My heart's not the only one that's crying.

"You sure you want to come along?" Celery asks gently, biting his lip. I don't have the energy to roll my eyes, but I manage some faint scowl action.

"Want to try asking that again and see what happens to you?" He surrenders with a guilty smile.

"Okay, so it was dumb. I just don't want you to have to like, go through that. It'll be so much like your dreams and I'm afraid you'll-"

"I won't. I promise," I say with all sincerity.

The bit of his sentence I cut off probably went something like 'freak out when I can't be there to calm you down'. I meant my promise, but still, the thought's pretty chilling. Very, grim realities and all that stuff. Soothing, calming me down. Getting me through a million insane freak attacks. Just one of the countless things I depend on him for.

He nods.

"If you're sure," We stare at each other for a stretch of time I wish could go on forever, but dies slowly when he says, "I have to go," I nod, somehow, not even crying.

He reaches out, tucking my hair behind my ears, then takes off his hat and places it firmly on my head. It's on backwards, so I can still see all of him. I smile. I understand. It's his only physical way of staying with me.

We take one more deep look, and then slowly, with a determination and strength I didn't know either of us possessed, we take each others hand, and start walking down the street.

It's very dead man walking.

When we get there, They're already standing in the lawn, the steps packed into Their shinny SUV, probably whining about something. I make no attempt to hide my hatred and disgust at the sight of Debbie and Doug. My hand tightens onto Celery's and I wonder if I'll actually be able to let it go.

"Let's go, in the car," Doug orders, annoyed we took this long.

Celery turns, and uses his free hand to caress my face. I soak up his touch.

"I love you baby," He says in a loud and clear voice. Making no attempt to

hide from Them. I pull him close.

"I love you too sweet one, always, forever, all of it," We kiss, quite possibly with more passion than ever before. Desperation will do that to ya.

"I'll call you when we get there," I nod through a tremble. I feel him starting to slip his fingers out from my grasp. I somehow force myself not to resist.

"Always baby, I love you," He promises one last time and then walks towards the car.

I get one final look, and there's the kind of love in it that almost makes me fall to my knees. And then he's gone. Doug slams the door behind Celery and he and Debbie get in too.

I didn't even feel like crying really, or think I was going to, but the second he got into that car the tears just started pouring down my cheeks.

Just like the dream, Celery's crying face is pressed up against the receding glass, but unlike the dream I know it's not forever. I know it's Them who are leaving, Them who are taking him. I know it's not Celery who is leaving with Them. I know that his heart has stayed here with me.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Seven  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Thu, 08 May 2003 18:25:05 -0500

The first few days are just this horrible blur. I don't know how I got home. I assume someone must have come and gotten me, 'cause I'm pretty sure I just like stayed there standing on that driveway, lost to all things around me. Through the blur, I curse myself repeatedly for not going with him. What an idiot. Like I'm any use to anyone here in this condition. As if anything could be worse than this. Along with the major waves and grief and self-pity, I seem to recall a lot of no eating, feeling like death, and near endless crying. All pretty pathetic. There also may have been a fair amount of concerned voices and faces surrounding me at intermittent periods during the day. All the usual suspects I'm guessing. I think even the twins and Kara took shot at reviving me. Eventually, on like day three or four, Kyle held me down, Jonas force-fed me and I was shoved into the shower by somebody. I think it was my dad. Could have been someone else. Not sure.

Anyway, I'm back to bathing and eating regularly now, but that's about all the improvement I've made. I'm crying less, but I'm feeling as terrible as ever. There's too much pain. I can't even feel it all really. I just know there's all this other stuff down under the surface, but I'm gradually becoming numb to it all. Feeling less and less, responding less and less to the people and things going on around me. I know now, what's it's like to be without him. I'm now experiencing all I knew I could never prepare myself for. The shock of it has far from worn off, but I'm definitely feeling it. Even as things start to slip away, even as the pain is dulled by numbness, the pain is with me. I'm become almost entirely mute. What else can I do? Do you know what it's like to go from having someone who understands everything you say no matter how insane and out of context it may appear to be, to nothing? Suddenly, the fact that I speak a different language is really starting to matter. My brilliant solution is to say nothing. Don't knock it. It's working so far.

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I'm not wrong when I assume most people know at least vaguely who Plato is, am I? And it's true that there's a smaller but still large number of people who are familiar with one of his theories of love presented in 'Symposium' which generally and poorly explained says people used to walk around in pairs, attached, and now we're just unattached looking for our other half? I believe that, and quite obviously, Celery's the missing half of me. Now that he's gone, I'm incomplete again. Aside from being awful and horrible and all that other

stuff, it's really strange. I mean, I haven't been incomplete since I was 6 years old and frankly, back then, who really thinks about stuff like that? Well not me anyway. Even if I had been aware then that I wasn't whole, now would still be worse because I've felt what it's like to be, making me feel all the emptier now that I'm not again. It goes beyond just missing him. I'm not even me anymore. I've been left all on my own to do all the things I only know how to do with Celery and it's rendered me totally useless. I have no idea what to do with myself.

Nothing's funny anymore. Not without Celery to laugh with.

Kyle and Jonas are trying though, heaven knows. I want to laugh just so they'll feel some sense of satisfaction or accomplishment, but my hearts not in it. My heart is not here at all. It's 23 hours away somewhere in suburban Calgary with Celery. Remember how I said I before basically hadn't been talking? Well, that's still going. Never to engage conversation, only to answer questions, usually in as few words as possible, often just with no words at all. A head shake or nod, some facial expression, no response. I've lost the will to tell jokes without Celery to laugh at them. There's nothing I have to say, no stories I want to tell if he's not here to listen to them. I used to be the guy who resented it when other people said stuff like, 'now's really not the time to make jokes' and 'I don't think that's appropriate right now'. I used to believe that there existed no situation where laughter wasn't better than the alternative. Now I see differently, now I understand. I mean, how dare they (usually Jonas and Kyle) try to spoil my bad mood being all funny and supportive. Do they understand nothing about wallowing in self-pity and misery?

Honestly though, I didn't expect it to be this bad. I mean, I knew it was going to suck - rip your heart out suck - but this is unreal. What makes it all a million times worse is that I know this is what Celery must be feeling too. That if anything, he's doing worse than me. All alone. Not that I'm exactly taking advantage of my support network. I don't think anyone else was expecting it to be this bad either. Lately, I get the feeling they're all sort of waiting for the day to come where it's suddenly 'the worst's over now', but no luck yet. I know what an asshole I'm being. Like, I'm not the only one who misses him. He was like a son to Mom and Dad, a brother to the twins, Kara, and especially Jonas and Kyle. I don't have exclusive pain rights about this whole thing. I know how I'm acting isn't helping matters, but the me they miss - the one they're all expecting me to snap back into - he doesn't live here anymore. At the moment, he doesn't even really exist. I've been split in two. It's just bad luck that the really crappy half of me is what we're all stuck with over here.

What I do with a lot of my time these days is sleep. I find not being conscious very helpful. What I am isn't even sad really, but empty. I don't feel anything. I'm just sort of numb to it all. Like I said, there's just too much. I can't deal with it. I'm able to pull myself out of it, and feel something again only for the like 20 minutes a day we talk on the phone. Even though my parents would pay for it, that's it 'cause that's all he can afford for us to talk. As you know he got a cell phone as part of our whole wedding present extravaganza, but Celery has to pay for the minutes himself. The wedding money's already gone. I've tried to get him to let me help, but I think it's some stupid pride issue or whatever. More of that 'You've already done more than enough' crap. Not like it isn't for me too or anything. We do go over lots though, and then sometimes he lets me send him cash, so I guess it's okay. It's horrible and wonderful simultaneously, talking on the phone. The distance both disappears and seems more tangible. Hanging up is naturally the worst part. We usually have to start saying good-bye while we still have a good five minutes left or we'll never get it done. My only other show of emotion for the day will be crying directly after we've hung up.

You're probably thinking our phone conversations are awkward, but they're not. There's nothing wrong with US. WE'RE not different. We still fit together perfectly. We're struggling because we don't fit with our new situations. But for the about 15 minutes we have before our usually tearful good-byes, it's like everything's back to normal. The pain of the distance comes with saying good-bye, until then we can both pretend he's still a just down the street, talking to me from his room at Their old house. I don't know if it makes saying good-bye hurt more or less.

The main other thing that I feel (other than that black nothing I mentioned and this sick sad feeling constantly in the pit of my stomach) - and it's with me pretty much all the time - is worry for Celery. I'm absolutely positive he hasn't made any friends. There's no chance, considering he's bound to be talking even less than I am. Celery's never really shaken that 'don't talk to strangers' sensibility. He really only meets new people when someone he already knows and has some level of trust with introduces them to him. It's no small miracle he was able to make friends with the other jocks in Junior High, and that's only because he already sort of knew Brian from Elementary. When I think back, I don't know how on earth I got him to talk to me so casually right when we first met, but I guess it just goes back to what he said about always trusting me in a special way different from everyone else. I don't know what it was that made me seem so special, but I'm glad he saw it, whatever it was. So anyway, I worry about him.

He tells me he's fine when we talk, but I tell him the same thing, and I'm sure not fine, so that doesn't really help me.

Something that's surprising (at least to my parents anyway) is that my marks aren't suffering. If anything, they've never been better. I was actually happy to see the first day of school. There was a lot of 'this is our anniversary sort of' type pain, but nevertheless it came as a welcomed distraction. Pouring energy into doing the work at least gives me something to do other than sleep and feel way too sorry for myself. The only downside to the whole school scene is that people are always asking me about Celery. Where he is and if I miss him and all that stuff. I prefer the people who harass me about not having my 'big boyfriend' around to protect me anymore. Anger's easier to feel. The looks of sympathy, the strangers who try to act like we have something in common, like what they're feeling is anything compared to me, how they say they miss him too, that I can't stand. It's truth from my family, from Jonas, and maybe also from Alex and Brian, but no one else even knew Celery. They don't know anything.

Kaleb's been pretty present. Trying to help, give his support. He's 100% not trying to make a move on me now that Celery's gone, he's still way gone on Shane, but I still don't respond to him much. It's nothing personal. I don't respond to anyone much. Not my family, not Jonas (who's basically family anyway), nobody. I do my work, I stay focused, I try not to feel. Celery's doing the same escape thing, but with sports. He's got to be going crazy not having his board, cause skating is one of the major things that soothes him and calms him down when he's upset, but They didn't let him bring it. Just to be assholes I think. There was no other reason. Except maybe some bullshit about how it's illegal to skate in the neighbourhood they moved to. Like that ever stopped him before. They made him throw it out, but I liberated it later of course, and sometimes I go out to one of his favourite spots, and just sit on it, feeling everything and nothing. But me doing that doesn't do him much good. At least his school has a volleyball team so that's something.

In addition to phone calls, we write letters - everyday. It's like a journal we're writing together, sharing our pages with each other. I tell him what's new and exciting, but I'm sure he can tell like everything else it's just me going through the motions. Without Celery nothing's exciting. He tells me stuff that's going on there too, but according to his letters that's not much. He's settling in, he doesn't mind his teachers, or coaches, or the people. He's never said he likes them, only that they don't bother him in any particular way. They are ignoring him as usual. The steps love it in Calgary. Everything is reported factually without any emotion. Mostly though, our letters are filled with memories of the 'good

old days', I miss yous and lots of mushy love stuff. Only I'm not sure if I want to call it mushy since it's what we're feeling, so it means more than mush usually does.

A big thing for us is "Song of the Day". Basically, we each find a song that sort of captures the mood and feel of our day, and then we send the songs to each other. It gives us something to do but it also makes us feel connected. Music says stuff, sometimes, that you just can't. I know I'm not the first person to come up with an idea like that, you don't have to act impressed by my profoundness. It just helps. We both have Morpheus, so we can not only read the lyrics but listen to the song. We'll highlight the bits that really affected us, but listening to the whole song helps transmit the emotion more effectively. Sometimes lyrics, or even what the song is about, have nothing to do with the way it makes you feel. Sometimes it's the way a song connects you with a memory, or a person, or a place. It's the most honest part of our correspondence - what we can't bring ourselves to say ourselves we say by stealing other people's words.

It almost kills me the day we both send each other Brick. Brick is one of the most beautiful but heartbreakingly sad songs I've ever heard. We both highlighted the same line too: "I'm feeling more alone, than I ever have, before." It loses so much in just words, but you get the idea. We cried into the phone our whole 20 minutes that day. It was pretty harsh. The next day was better though, sort of. I sent him "Understanding Car Crash" (by Thursday) and Celery sent me "Pamphleteer" (by The Weakerthans). With lines like 'why do I still see you, in every mirrored window, in all that I could never overcome' and 'I don't want to feel this way forever', I don't know why I've classified that as a better day, but there you go. Maybe because we managed not to cry the entire phone call, I don't know. The day after that, I sent "Places that you've come to fear the most" (by Dashboard Confessionals) and got "We Never Close" (by the Bonaduces) With mine it was basically the whole song (except for all that 'perfect makeup' stuff), but Celery highlighted only "I just wanna be with you, tonight."

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Since Celery left, I've been going home for lunch. I've been lucky so far, no one's been home, I find it's better to be alone. Easier. No one looking concerned or trying to get me to string together more than a few words at a time. On this particular noon unfortunately, luck is not with me.

"Hey," Kyle says, looking up at me from the kitchen table, surprised.



"Hi," I mutter, opening my lunch bag and taking stuff out.

"What are you doing here?" I shrug.

"Having lunch."

"Yeah, I can see that. How come you're not at school?"

"I like it here better. You know, more privacy."

"Do you want me to like go upstairs or something?"

"No, it's fine. I just... I mean, I'm not going to be very good company." Kyle puts on a brave-face grin.

"Carrots, you've always been shit for company."

"Don't call me that," I say sharply, action on a decision I've made. It's been almost a month, and I just can't take it anymore.

"What?"

"Don't call me Carrots or Care or C1 or any of it."

"Why not?" I hate that concerned look, that gentle tone. But maybe it's my own fault. The way I've been acting, how else are they supposed to treat me?

"I can't stand to live in a world where every single thing it in - even my name - reminds me of him. It hurts too much," in my worst moments, I've wanted to scratch my tattoo off and watch it bleed, or at least cover it up. I've wanted to take off his hat and do something melodramatic and drastic like burning it. But I could never do that. I could never deny what Celery means to me.

I can tell he's holding back, that there's a rant like lecture on the tip of Kyle's tongue. He struggles with himself for a few minutes before shaking his head sadly and moving to but not touching my shoulder.

"Okay. Sure. I'll try to remember."

"Thank you."

I don't talk to Kyle or anyone else for the rest of the day. I dodge Jonas in class, and ignore Kaleb's concerned looks. I eat something right after I get home and then spend the rest of the evening in my room, door locked. I break out of my cocoon to talk to Celery, and then cry myself to sleep after we've said good-bye. Typical day.

The whole name change thing does not go over quite as well with Jonas as it did with Kyle. We're in the cafeteria before class, sitting in silence (which is mostly my fault, seeing as I'm not talking boy these days) when Jonas begins some thought, "Carrots," I flinch at the name.

"I don't want to be called that anymore. At least not for now."

"No?" His voice is dripping with something, and it's not golden honey.

"No. It's too painful." I notice his fists are clenched, he's rising up in his chair, not totally standing, but definitely adding some height.

"This shit will cease," his voice is dead serious, commanding. "Carrots is you. You're not whatever the fuck your birth name is. Just because Celery isn't here doesn't mean you get to stop being the person you are. I know how much having him not here sucks, and we're all feeling the pain, but you're just making it worse, dude. You're hurting yourself, you're shutting off. That's no way to live. I guess we were all hoping you'd like snap out of it so no one would have to call you on it, but that's obviously not going to happen. So I'm doing it.

And I'm going to nail Kyle for not doing the same. I assume you've dropped this little bomb on him already?" I nod sullenly. "Thought so. Weak willed softy. This is tough love time. The whole giving you time to deal and adjust period is over. No more, misery man, you've got to get with it. I know time isn't making this suck any less, but regardless, it's time. The world is NOT over. You're still fucking alive - and so is Celery - so you better start acting like it. Got that, Carrots?" I say nothing. A few minutes pass and the bell rings. Jonas holds up a finger. "This isn't over."

Avoiding his eyes, I start walking sulkily away.

True to his word, Jonas starts riding me about talking more, smiling, laughing. He's not mean about it, after all, the goal is still to cheer me up, he's just less patient. There's no more 'okay, if you're not ready yet, I won't push it'. It's all about pushing. Everyone's on board. They must have had like a meeting about it or something. I wasn't invited. But Mom, Dad, even Jon, Dave, Kara and of course Kyle, are all part of Jonas's new regime. Each of their attitudes towards me has shifted. That same night I got a verbal thrashing from Kyle, who went the 'how would Celery feel if he knew you were doing this to yourself' route. Major ouch. But also major mad, like, fuck them. They don't know how I'm feeling. They aren't missing this huge gaping part of themselves. Mostly, that's my emotion. But, as much as I'm trying

to ignore it, there's this little part of me, this little voice,  
that knows they're right. Not that I'll be spreading that information  
around any time soon. This is a strictly on the almost entirely  
suppressed and subconscious DL right now. Be that as it may, I have  
the sneaking suspicion I'll be thanking all of them for this one day.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Eight  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Mon, 12 May 2003 20:45:28 -0500

I've never really been a huge fan of Thanksgiving (to me it's always seemed like such an insincere, American holiday, plus, you know, all the slaughter) but this year my enthusiasm has reached a new low. I was looking forward to sleeping the whole time, but what with my mom banging on my door and it being 6 in the fucking morning, I'd say that so far that plan isn't really working out. I've always known she's insane, but this is getting out of hand. It's 6am! On a Saturday. Oh no, here it comes, the very worst part about being woken up by my mother.

"Come on, Carrots, RISE AND SHINE!"

I hate it when the person who's waking me up tells me to rise and shine. I mean, I'll rise, maybe - if they're lucky, but shining is just not in the cards. Under no circumstances have I ever shined. Okay, well maybe a few times when Celery was in bed with me, but those times, there was shining, but usually not a whole lot of the conventional type of rising.

More banging. "Up! It's a new day! Time to rediscover what the world looks like before noon on a Saturday." She'll just keep banging and talking until I eventually get up, and she knows I know it.

Grumbling, cursing, and plotting various forms of outlandish revenge, I sit up. After a few more minutes of banging, I stand up. 15 minutes from the first bang, I've opened my door. Mom's standing in the hall, not looking irritated like I sort of expected, but grinning. Can you believe it? She's grinning at my pain. Wait a minute, that's not it. She's turning her head towards the stairs.

I look.

I see.

I collapse.

Considering the fact that it's where I find myself right now, I'm assuming I fell to the floor. I actually fainted, totally. I've never fainted in my entire life. I was beginning to suspect that it never actually happened in real life, just like in movies. I was all ready to blow open the whole thing and reveal the truth about fainting, and then I up and do it. My eyes are starting open, and I guess they're going as fast as they can, but I really wish

they'd hurry up, 'cause if I saw what I think I saw, I want to see it again as soon as possible. Finally, after taking their sweet time, my eyes are fully open, and that was no trick of light. Before me in all his glory, is my Celery. The excitement in him I glimpsed for half a second on the stairs has been replaced with concern as he brushes his fingers against my cheek and peers down at me, repeating my name with soft urgency. But that doesn't matter. He's here. Real and here and touching me. I force my pathetic body into action, flinging my arms around him, and Celery joins me, until we've locked each other in a death grip. Everything goes away. All the sadness, all the empty moments, each second of missing him, it all evaporates from my brain as we hold each other. At this very moment, I don't care about anything except that he's here.

Just when I'm thinking, I could fall asleep right here, Celery moves. Only a little, but his grip goes from crushing to firm and he shifts himself enough for our eyes to meet. His eyes are such a clear, sparkling blue, you'd almost think they couldn't be real.

"How?" I croak. He smiles, still all radiant and glowy.

"They're on this retreat thing for the rich and affected, and the steps are staying with some of their monster friends. I was just going to stay home, but your parents called and somehow convinced Them to let me come. I'm sure the fact that it isn't costing Them anything had something to do with it. Anyway, as long as no one finds out what sort of a friend you are, They still get loving parents points." I'm still sort of in can't-speak mode, too overwhelmed by his presence and everything that it's stirring up inside me to put together a sentence.

Getting out, "All weekend?" Is no small feat. He grins.

"I leave Monday evening. Three days, baby."

Whatever the thing inside me is that needed to click does, and I start kissing him like a madman. There's an equal force of longing and need coming from his end. No way are we getting to the bed. I just hope my mom shut the door.

Eventually, and somewhat mysteriously, at some point, we must have helped each other into my bed. I know this, because I recently woke up, and found myself lying in bed with Celery. I suspect he may have carried me. Looking at the clock, we must have been dozing for a few hours already by now. I'm awake (as you may have noticed), but Cel's still doing shut-eye thing. I'm not counting time sleeping as waste really, if you're thinking I might be. For one, those few hours were the best sleep I've had since he left and for another

thing, nothing compares to waking up beside Celery in the book of me. Plus, now I get to watch him sleeping, which doesn't rank too poorly on the great scale either. It's so wonderfully NORMAL. So much like this could be any Saturday morning - er, afternoon. I settle down again, draping my arm across his waist, loving feeling the movement caused by his in- and exhales.

I emerge from my second doze session when Celery kisses me.

"Hey."

"Hi."

"What time is it?" I look.

" 'Bout 2." His eyes widen.

"Wow." He stretches, smiling shyly.

"Me too."

"Did you dream?"

"Why dream when you've got the real thing?" We kiss.

"I missed you, this, everything. God, I missed you." He practically moans. I hug him.

"Miss me later," I say, touching his face. "Enjoy me now."

We finally haul ourselves out of bed and my room to shower around 4. Kyle's sitting in the kitchen, eating an orange, grinning when we arrive. I'm not especially surprised, but I am especially pleased, to see Jonas is with him. Tears well up in the eyes of all concerned.

"By gar," Jonas says, getting up and giving Celery a most hearty hug.

"It's been awhile," Kyle says, finishing up Jonas's thought and mimicking his gesture.

Even through my depressed haze, I've been able to see those two continuing to bond. I don't think Kyle's ever had a closer friend, and though I can't be as sure, I think the same thing goes for Jonas. They're pretty much exactly like Celery and me, minus a few years and the gay love. At least, I'm pretty sure it's minus the gay love. Then again, you never know. Kidding! Kyle, I'm kidding. Really.

"I'd say how've you been, but that would be a stupid question. How

'bout, how are you now?" Celery grins wide and long.

"How do you think I am?" he says, hugging my waist. I kiss him.

"What do you think, Ky?" Jonas asks, thumb and finger on his chin, all quizzical. Kyle bites down on his lip, concentration etched on his face.

"Let's give them this one." Jonas nods.

Whether it's because they're all mind readers, really smart, or I'm just really predictable, that's pretty much it for the different. We all talk around the table for a little while, about fascinating old nothing in particular, and then walk to Video Update to pick up some flicks.

"You're cool with this, right?" Celery mutter-asks while we're browsing through the comedy section. Jonas and Kyle have the horror covered. Every once in awhile, there's nothing better than a cheesy 1950's horror classic.

"Cool with what?" I ask, puzzled. He shrugs.

"The double-date-ness."

"Okay, laugh, weird smile, and then yeah." He smiles.

"Good."

"Why?"

"Just checking."

"Just checking why?"

"Um."

"Aren't you?"

"No, I am. I just thought maybe you'd...." He drifts off, leaving me to fill in the blanks. It's not too hard.

"I CAN share," I wrinkle my brow and do the weird one-sided smile one eye closed move. "Sometimes. For awhile."

"Good on all that. Especially the `for awhile' thing. 'Cause that's all I can do."

"Would you like me to share with you what's weird?"

"Not like, LOVE."

"I miss them. Not, like, in the same way you must, but in the way that I do which is missing the them that they are when we're all together. I missed us as in you and me us, but I also missed us as in the you, me, Jonas and Kyle us. We were just starting to be a good us when you had to move," I'm so far gone on my ramble I don't even flinch when I mention the dreaded Move word.

"Me too. The me way and the you way." We smile at each other, small happy little smiles of mutual understanding and... I think camaraderie is the word I'm looking for here. Overjoyed just be have our same wavelengthness back in the physical.

We keep browsing and I say, "Oo!" excitedly after a few minutes.

"What?" I hold out the movie for his survey-ige.

"Office Space?" Question and statement rolled up in a piping hot Tortilla.

"Damn, it feels good to be a gangster? Definitely."

"Okay, with this one, I think we have enough, should we go find them?" Plus Office Space, we've picked up Rushmore and The Royal Tennenboms. They're all hilarious, very multiple viewing worthy movies. I'd suggest you rent them, but when have you ever listened to me about stuff like that?

"Yep. Let's plough."

We find Kyle and Jonas in, ug, the New Releases section, pretending (one can only HOPE) to gush to each other about Crossroads. You know, it's that Brittany Spears movie nobody went to? I mean, hopefully not anyway. I haven't seen it, and I never will, but I'm absolutely positive it's one of the worst movies in the history of the world. Back in the day (painful wincing) me and Cel were going to have Mock Fest 2002 and rent Crossroads, A walk to Remember, and possibly something of the On the Line, Glitter, nature, but we never got around to it. I think the dream may be dead now, but who knows. In a few months time, I might just get a jones for some really mock-able movie action. In a few months time when Celery is back with me permanently. I have to remind myself almost constantly that such a time is actually coming, or I really would cease to exist. What you've seen is nothing compared to as far-gone as it's possible for me to get.

"Can I assume this means you guys didn't find anything good?" I ask dryly. They grin.



"Totally struck out," Kyle affirms.

"How'd you guys make out?" Jonas asks. I show them.

"All good jams. Time to rock?"

"I'm paying."

"No you're not, Kyle."

"Why not?"

"Okay, fine." I say, grinning. When he asked, he really puffed himself up, trying to look all tough and threatening. I've never been less scared, but if it matters that much to him, hey, what's it to me?

So Kyle pays and we start walking home.

"How's this going to work? Straight through? Breaks of the food variety, are we stopping for Dark Corner, on goes the list," his name is Jonas.

"Uh, doesn't matter." Not to me anyway, mostly, I plan to turn the movies on and then stare at Celery's lovely face the whole time.

"Let's just go with whatever flow flows," Celery suggests.

"Everyone down with that plan?" No one objects.

That night after the movie marathon, I'm soaking up the joy of having Celery half asleep beside me, thinking about a whole night with him, when he asks,

"Care, did you know Kyle wrote me awhile ago?"

"Uh, no. That was nice of him though, I guess."

"It wasn't exactly a social thing. I mean, we e-mail a lot. This wasn't that kind of thing. He's worried about you." That in itself comes as no surprise but I didn't think he'd actually go running to Celery about it.

"Is he?"

"Yes. So's Jonas, and your parents, and everyone. They say you never laugh anymore - that you barely even talk. Kyle said you just sleep all the time, he said you're shutting out all the people who care

about you." I don't say anything, instead I glare at my hands. "Is it true?" I can't stand lying to him, not matter what it's about. I'm not even sure I can.

"Yes." He sighs. I'm still not looking up.

"Why?" It's timid, concerned.

"Why do you think?" I snap sarcastically, jerking to pierce him with angry eyes. I didn't want to talk about stuff like this. I just wanted us to have a fun, regular weekend. Pretend for a few days like life was back to normal and he isn't just going to leave again soon. You know, denial.

"Baby," he says sorrowfully, reaching out, massaging my shoulder. "It's no good, letting yourself get like that. If you shut yourself down for too long you'll forget how to feel - no matter what the situation. You can't let that happen to yourself."

"I'm feeling plenty right now," I say heatedly.

"So you're angry. How is that any different from every other day?" It's dangerous, trying to have an argument with someone who knows you this well. Someone who knows every button to push.

"It's just easier," I say feebly.

"Easier doesn't necessarily mean better."

"I'm supposed to believe you've been having a regular joy fest in Calgary?"

"Of course I haven't. I'm not saying I don't find this every bit as hard as you. God, Carrots, how do you think I feel? I have no one there. NO ONE. Nobody to talk to, to hang out with. I'm all alone. You've got Mom and Dad, Kyle, Jonas, the twins, Kara, EVERYBODY and they're all trying to help you get through this but you won't let them. You can't keep taking them for granted." I can't believe how right he is, now much of an ungrateful bastard I am. I mean, I sort of knew, but who wants that thrown in their face?

"I--"

"I can't be here, Carrots, there's no way around that, but that doesn't mean you can't either. Don't you see? You have to be here for both of us! When something funny happens you have to laugh for you and me. When there's an opportunity to make fun of Kyle - do it in a way you know would make me proud. If there's a perfect spot to toss in a PB quote, do it the way you know I would. If you can'

t be here for you then be here for me." Looking at him, his eyes blazing, one hand in the air. We stare at each other for awhile, some mental battle being fought with our eyes, and then he just deflates. "At least one of us should be happy."

"Don't you try that selfless shit on me, Celery - not after what you just said. If you meant it then it can't be only for me. Short of being with you, the only way I can possibly be happy is knowing you are. You were right about what you said. I can't keep myself shut off like I've been, but that goes for both of us. Maybe for you it's been what? Sadness?" He nods grudgingly. "You know me? Well I know you. I know how you get when something bad happens or you're sad. You refuse to think about yourself, you blind yourself to what you're feeling and hone in on me. I love you for it, but it can't work here. It hurts you, which hurts me. We both need to make some changes if we're going to get out of this as ourselves. What you said made me realize I've gotta start responding when people reach out - and maybe even do a little reaching of my own, but it CAN'T just be me. You have to try too." When I get mad, or frustrated, I tend to cry. Angry is usually when I cry the most, it's like that with Celery too sometimes. Right now, we're both experiencing some cheek showers.

"Who, huh? Who am I supposed to reach out to?"

"I don't know! Me, Kyle, Jonas, all the same people I am. There have to be a FEW decent people in Calgary. You don't have to bare your soul to them, but you could make some friends. People like you Cel, if you'd only stop to notice. I'm not a fluke. You have so much to offer and you're like the only one who doesn't see it."

This is, I'm positive, our very first fight ever. If you can call it that. Two miserable people trying to help each other, love each other and knock some sense into each other's thick skulls all at the same time.

Our eyes meet up again, red and bloodshot, sore from crying.

"It's time I got back," he begins quietly.

"And I don't even know how I got off the track," I continue. Lyrics from Good Life by Weezer. Kick ass song.

We'll be okay. Somehow, I know it. We still have lots more to talk about, but we'll be okay. I know we will.

We lie further into each other, nothing more on our minds than needing to hold each other. Feel each other breathe and sleep as one.

When I wake up the next morning and Celery's there, lying beside me, I don't understand why nobody's setting off any fireworks, taking pictures or constructing a commemorative plaque to honour this moment.

"I love you," Celery says, smiling.

"I love you." I can't think of anything that would serve as a better commemoration than those three words.

The Sunday family fun takes my private Celery away from me, but I get my family Celery in exchange. Even more than a normal Sunday due to the Thanksgiving-ness, but that's okay. I know I'm pretty great, but Celery has needs I can't meet. You know, stuff like mother type love and brotherhood. With the whole family directing it at him, Celery's practically drowning in love, and I'm bursting just watching him. It's so cute watching the twins and Kara clamouring for his attention and how overwhelmed he gets by it. Then there's Mom who's so high into nurture overdrive it's not even funny, except that is really, really is, and Dad who can't seem to stop giving Celery one armed hugs saying `it's great to have you here, son'. Let's not even taking to the endless pictures. The only real downside to the day is that there's just WAY too much food floating around (like how many pieces of pumpkin pie can a person safely eat?!).

In the early evening once we've recovered from the food and frivolity, we sneak up to my room and I enjoy a little private Celery action. Not THAT - just kissing. With lots of tongue, and okay, a little groping. Just a little though! Really. We're very well behaved. Mostly. Once we've, well taken the edge off I guess, Celery asks,

"So what's next on our schedule of fun crammage?"

I smile and he smiles back questioningly. "That's your I-have-a-plan smile," he accuses. I keep smiling and turn to walk over to my closet. I open the door and he teases, "Decided to go back in the closet, have you? I'm not sure I'm really on board with this plan."

I look over my shoulder and smirk. I bend down and grab the key item required for what's next in the fun crammage, and then turn back around, grinning like my mom did when she woke me the day before. Celery grabs his head with his hands and drops to his knees.

"My board!" he practically screams, eyes like blue flames, staring at it, me. "You are my GOD, Carrots," he says starting to knee over to me. "I love you. You have no idea how fully I mean that." I lower his beloved skateboard into Celery's outstretched hands. I smile as he runs his fingers along his GIRL grip take, then as he flips

it over, admiring the smeared and cut up Toy Machine graphic. He lovingly spins his PIG wheels.

"I'm getting jealous over here," I joke. He tears his eyes from his deck.

"Say the word and I'll never skate again. If it was for you I swear I wouldn't even miss it." I shake my head.

"Don't be ridiculous. Skating is a part of you. Just like I am, but a smaller part. One hopes." He's gone back to gazing at his board.

"I missed you," he tells it, and kisses the nose.

"Pathetic," I laugh. Celery jumps up, holding his board by the trucks.

"Can we go right now?" he asks eagerly.

"WE?" He glares.

"OF COURSE `we'! I'm not going without you! You think I'm letting you leave my sight for a SECOND until I have to fly back?" I grin.

"Not really."

"So, let's go."

"It's just, you've been apart for a very long time, don't you want some time alone?"

He's realized, finally, that I'm goofing around, and gives me a smack on the shoulder.

"Funny guy. Don't make me beg."

"I think I might enjoy it if you did." He rolls his eyes, but looks at me imploringly anyway.

"PLEASE, can we go skating now, PLEASE?" I nod.

"Until our legs turn to rubber, and even after that." He grins.

His `I'm going to cause some destruction' grin is a very unique one and only really come up when he's about to skate. I can tell right now that I'm going to have my work cut out for me just preventing him from killing himself trying stuff.

"Can I ask that you go easy, at least at first, you might be rusty." He looks down at me, very `oh please'.

"Fine, don't listen to me. Break your leg after two tricks. Whatever," he loses the bravado and most of the smirk.

"I'm not going to break my leg. If anything, this will be this deck's last day, but I plan to live to skate another day. Alright? I could say I'll try to take it slow, but we both know the second my wheels hit the pavement and my feet hit my board..."

"You lose all control over your actions. I know. Lie to me, say you'll take it easy." He smiles.

"I'll take it easy."

"Thank-you."

Watching the change that comes over Celery when he starts to skate is a beautiful thing. He gets this totally peaceful look on his face, but at the same time you can tell he's totally focused and concentrated. It's rare to see a person take something so seriously and also enjoy it so much. I basically skate along, not trying much of anything (like I'd have a prayer in keeping up with him anyway) as he produces hammer after hammer. The boy's on fire. Rusty? Man did I ever deserve that look. I've rarely seen him bust tricks out with such ease, such fluidity. You'd think, seeing him do them, that the tricks were so easy anyone could do them, but believe me, skating is hard shit. Celery just makes it look easy. The scars I've acquired over my pathetic career are a testimony to the amount of true skill required.

There is one semi-rant I must go on, just in the interest of truth. Some people I know, think that skateboarding is only snowboarding with wheels. Let me contain my rage, and then I'll be able to continue. It is WAY WAY WAY harder than snowboarding. Any pro skater - hell probably any half decent skater - having never previously stepped on a snowboard could practice for like a month and be good enough to go pro. It's even been done to prove the point. Snowboarding's not even really an extreme sport anymore, it's in the fucking Olympics for heavens sake! It's all TRENDY now. I hate snowboarding. And roller blading. That's also a totally easy sport, compared to skating. I guess most of the rage comes from the fact that while skateboarding is so obviously better, bladers and snowboarders get way more recognition. Then again, who wants to be hip with the idiot masses of the mainstream? I know that this makes me like a skateboard Nazi or whatever, but I'm also prejudiced against Red Necks, Country Music, and Boy Bands, and I stand by my prejudices. Oh yeah, it also really pisses me off when people who know nothing about skateboarding and have never ridden themselves wear skater shoes

and clothes and stuff. Let the posers stick with snowboarding. Like when I see some dude wearing A Zero hoody and Es shoes, and I KNOW for a fact he's never skated for real, it really makes me mad. Celery's more calm about the whole thing (so he's a better person than me, no surprise there) but he doesn't like it much either. I think for him, it's more that he feels sorry for them. I think, privately, Celery feels sorry for every person who's never skated. Even I, crap skater that I am, feel some of the same. Nothing feels like skateboarding. Honestly, people who've never tried it have absolutely no idea how fun it is. You just can't understand unless you've tried it. It's like nothing else.

Our skate session - which goes late into the night - proves to be a good frustration getter-outer. I don't even do much, but it still wicked relaxes me. Celery too, and we're ready for another serious talk when we get back. We try to keep it down 'cause of the lateness, but it's not the raging emotions talk of the night before, so that's easy. There's more planning, more 'we can do this' building each other, more laughing. By 2:30, I'm 100% whole again. Celery's here, and he's punched out the dark places and the holes that seeing him didn't erase, and that's what I've done for him. We're more in sync than we've ever been. We're not even talking anymore. Just lying on my bed, holding hands. I can't really describe what I'm feeling, but it's something like we're resting in the clouds instead of my bed. Like we're flying. It's a sense of freedom and joy I've never experienced before.

Monday goes by all too fast, but you know what they say about what happens to time when you're having fun. It's another day with Kyle and Jonas, but we've had our nights, our private time. There's just as much joy in time with them. I was right, we do make a kick ass quartet of US. We laugh, we joke, and we never stop smiling.

Until the time comes for him to leave, of course. We keep the sadness from coming by all cramming into my bedroom, keeping the talking going as he packs, checks his tickets and makes sure he has everything he needs. I try to ignore the voice that's screaming what he really needs is ME, but it screams on. We take the bakery van, so everyone can come along to the airport. The whole way, every time I look at him, my eyes fill with tears.

When we hear the flight's been delayed an hour, there's a celebration. Celery and I sit cuddled together on one of those ultra comfortable airport chairs, and I know there must be looks, and probably comments, but we don't hear them. Just before boarding there's this big tearful scene, but we have our new plans, and I know I'll see him at Christmas. That, coupled with the arms of Jonas and Kyle around me and the love coming from my parents and younger siblings standing behind

me, saves me from a total breakdown.

I stare out the window way past when the plane's gone from view, and I have to be led to the van, but I'm a lot better than I expected to be. That night, when I feel myself wanting to slip back into the blackness again, I remember our latest pact. The happiness pact. We've never sworn on something with more gravity, except maybe when we exchanged our vows. It's a simple pact. It's a get back into the world pact. It went like this.

Me first:

"I swear to stop feeling so sorry for myself. I swear to smile when I'm smiled at, laugh when something is funny, and make fun of as many people as possible - especially Kyle. I swear that I'll do my best not to feel guilty, and that I will not only talk to people when they talk to me, but that I'll even try to start conversations. Most of all, I swear to start appreciating the people around me, and to be grateful for the fact that I am loved."

Then Celery:

"I swear to stop ignoring my own feelings. I swear that if I need to be sad, I'll let myself be. I swear to stop ignoring everyone on the volleyball team when they talk to me, or when other people talk to me in class. I will try to make friends, and I'll do my best not to feel guilty about it. I swear I'll be more honest about what I'm feeling - not just in song lyrics. I swear to laugh more, to smile regularly, and be happy, knowing that I am loved."



Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Nine  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Thu, 15 May 2003 20:41:46 -0500

A week has passed now. I'm doing okay. Like, I am getting better, progress is getting made, but this is honestly the hardest thing I've ever had to do. I mean, YOU try reconditioning yourself to be independent of the one person whom you've built the last 11 years of your life around. Even though the sane part of me (yeah, that would be the really small part) remembers the pact, and knows I'm doing this for Celery - WITH Celery - the rest of me has a guilt fit about it at least daily. It's like, every time I achieve some new level of 'happy on my own' independence, I go into this state of panic, afraid we're losing our connection. How do you train yourself to act in a way you're terrified might damage the thing you hold most dear? Well, I'll tell you, it's ridiculously hard. But you talk to people, you make the effort, and a lot of the time, you don't succeed. But you keep trying. And every once in awhile, something funny happens, and you laugh. Or maybe you're just able to get through a day without crying, or wanting to. Someone smiles at you, and before you have the time to analyse the situation, you smile back.

I remember the first time I laughed after Celery went back to Calgary. It'd only been a couple days. Me, Kyle, and Jonas were all sitting around, still sort of in the dazed getting over in phase, when Kyle made some joke, comment thingy. I don't even remember what it was, but it was hilarious. And as I was sitting there, sort of slowly, it occurred to me. That was funny, I should laugh. The laugh wasn't forced either, just delayed. As I was laughing Kyle and Jonas looked at me like they were going to cry. That, or like, pummel me. But you know, definitely one of the two.

I owe those guys so much.

But when you get right down to it, Celery's still the one who ended up saving me. Not just him coming at Thanksgiving - though that was a huge part of it - what he's doing now. He actually made a friend! Sort of, anyway. Not another jock or skater like him, this totally shy kid who I think is his neighbour. Really smart, but not many friends. A couple years younger. Skipped a few grades. There's actually discernible levels of excitement in Celery's voice when he talks about the kid. His name's Saul. I'm not jealous about it - I'm happy. That's my saving grace. What wards off the other insanity. Every hint that Celery's doing better lifts my spirits past the heavens. I don't resent it, and that's what keeps the knowledge that he doesn't resent happiness on my part more real in my heart. On the phone, we have happy stuff to talk about that isn't just

past memories. We only cry about half the time, and once or twice we've been crying from joy, or just from laughing too hard. Most of the other times it's just this involuntary thing that happens just from hearing the other's voice. But it's gotten to be so that they're almost good tears, even if they are sad ones. So phone calls help too.

I don't think we're growing apart, but we're definitely changing. We're not working from the exact same set of experiences anymore. But we share everything with each other, and I think all this new, separate experiences stuff may even be sort of good for us. I know that I'll never grow out of Celery. I know that in a million years, no matter how `independent' I get, I'll always need him to be in my life. Maybe it won't be to BE my life, but that's okay. I hear that might even be like the way to go. There have been little glimmers of a greater good. Some kind of a higher purpose or design. It still hurts - don't think it doesn't - but the thing that's starting to be driven home is that it just may be worth it. I don't need Celery because I can't physically survive without him - I need him because I WANT him. I'm becoming aware that I can have a happy life without him continuously at my side. I'm capable of it. Being with him isn't this thing I like can't do without, it's my CHOICE. All knowing this has made me do is love him more.

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A major problem (silly person, did you think we were done with the problems? Did you forget who you were dealing with?) with opening myself back up to feeling everything again is that a lot of the time, it DOES hurt way more now. I AM mostly okay, I haven't been lying, but at the weirdest times my mind strays to what's really going on in my world and it hurts so much my throat tightens up so that I can barely breathe and all the time no matter what I'm doing, even if I'm laughing and basically having a good time, there's this empty, aching pain in my stomach. It's like the song, `The world has turned and left me here' by Weezer. Yes, this time, I'm going to give you some lyrics. Just the main important ones. If you want to know how I feel in song form, here you go: the world has turned, and left me here, just where I was before you appeared, and in your place, and empty space has filled the void behind my face. I highly recommend you actually listen to the song though. Not just 'cause it's a wicked song, but because you get the sadness way better if you actually hear it.

But despite all that, things really ARE getting better. I know I've been saying that like a lot, but I sort of have to keep repeating it - especially to myself - just so I'll remember that it's true. If you're looking for some kind of a time frame on all this betterness and gradual good cheer, it's been about two and a half weeks since

Celery half. Which would make it almost the end of October for all you people out there who don't know when Canadian Thanksgiving is and just assumed we have it at the same time as the Americans do. Well, we don't. It's on October the 13th here. There. You've learned something new, doesn't that make you feel so much better about yourself?

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I get home late - like 12:30 late - following the order a pizza after wrapping next week's issue of the school paper hootenanny. I'm not editor like I was supposed to be, but lately, I've been helping out again. Doing research, writing the occasional article, keeping a low profile. I assume everyone's asleep, so I creep up the stairs as quietly as possible. As I'm tiptoeing past the main upstairs bathroom, I hear the distinct sound of someone retching. I knock gently on the door. There are a few moans, and more gross sounds of throwing up I won't describe to you. I test the knob. Not locked. Should I go in? I open the door a crack, and peek inside. It's Jonas. What the fuck?

"Jonas?" I hiss in a whisper, stepping inside. He looks up at me miserably. He looks like shit. Face sort of yellow, eyes hurt and wet. Crying too, in addition to throwing up. Let me be perfectly clear - WHAT THE FUCK?

"Hey, Carrots," he says feebly. I get down on my knees beside him. He closes the toilet lid, and flushes, saving us both from the stench.

"What's going on?" I figure "what the fuck" isn't what he needs to hear right now. He shakes his head.

"Oh man. You don't even want to know. I'm like not even sure." His eyes are glassy, and it occurs to me that he's probably drunk. Or was, recently. I don't really know how it all works. I never drink. I think it's totally idiotic and disgusting, but now isn't the time for such a rant. Probably drunk, but I'm not exactly dreaming of getting a whiff of his breath, so no help there.

"Are you okay? Like, are you sick or what?" He closes his eyes.

"Sick and or what, I think." He opens his eyes again, and looks at me sort of pathetically.

"I hate to ask, but can I like sleep in your room tonight?" Okay, now I'm really starting to get confused. He always sleeps on Kyle's couch. Always. It's like tradition. Set in stone tradition. But, if that's what he wants.

"Yeah, sure."

All the stuff Celery used to use before he moved into my bed with

me is still in my closet, so he should be pretty comfortable. I help him up after rising myself and walk slowly behind Jonas all the way to my room. I don't turn on the light. The shade's not drawn, and the light from the moon and the street lamps are enough for us to get around. I get out the extra bedding and start rolling it out for him.

"We'll talk in the morning, yeah?" He gives me a look of infinite relief and gratitude.

"Yeah. Sure, thanks so much, dude."

"Hey man, it's what friends are for and all that stuff. Not like I was going to leave you out in the cold or anything." I know that's not really what he meant, but hey. It's no big thing for me to take the pressure off him. Why further complicate what was obviously a night from hell. He probably wouldn't make any sense right now anyway. It's a better idea to wait for all concerned. Though, I can't deny that I'm dying from curiosity.

In the morning when I revert back into consciousness, Jonas is already up, sitting tensely on the floor, hugging his knees. Talk time.

"Hey Jonas, doing okay this morning?" He scratches his ear nervously. Fails miserably at trying to smile. I get out of bed and sit down on the mat with him. "So, talk to me." He sighs.

"It's all fucked up."

"What?" He looks away. "Jonas, man, I can't believe I even have to say this - you can talk to me. It doesn't matter what it's about. I love you." He smiles. so weakly.

"You've never told me that before," I shrug.

"I'll have to work on that," He turns a bit, but he's still mostly looking at me.

"Last night, since you were going to be gone, me and Kyle decided to do something together," not like that hasn't happened a million times before, "He heard about this party and we decided to go. From the start, everything was just weird. I think maybe, it's been weird for awhile now, I just wasn't ready to notice," and I was too wrapped up in myself. Some brother slash friend I am. "Anyway, this was like impossible not to notice. Kyle was acting so strange. Like, wired. He just couldn't wait to get to the party. He may have mentioned something about really hot girls, but I can't remember. At the doors, he told me to have a good time and then he like totally ditched me. I was so pissed off, but I guess, really, I was just hurt. I didn't even really want to go to a party, I just wanted to hang out with Kyle. He's my best friend, you know?"

"Of course."

"But he was gone, and I didn't know anybody. I don't even know why, but I let some girl who thought I was like adorable or whatever give me drinks. I guess I got pretty blitzed. By the time I found Kyle a few hours later so was he. I don't know what got in to me - being drunk I guess - but I started to really tear into him for ditching me. He started to cry! Fucking CRY, man. I didn't know what the hell was going on - with him, with me. I was feeling all this weird stuff, and then, like, being drunk. I asked him to stop crying. But he wouldn't. So I went over to him and like put my hands on his face to try to calm him down. And then I don't know what happened. It's a bit like hazy," He looks at me, the freaked out deer in the headlights look. "I just want you to know this isn't like some gigantic joke, okay? Like, don't get pissed or laugh at me."

"Laugh at you?"

" 'Cause this is serious. And I'm pretty sure it really happened."

"What?" I'm trying to sound gentle, but who knows if I succeeded.

"I think we made out a little," big and paralysing blood rush to the head. Hearing that is the kind of thing that short circuits brain function.

I take a hard look into his eyes. He's not wearing any of his various array of coloured contacts. I didn't notice that before. Really, he has nice eyes. They're somewhere between green and brown, but they have a really nice soft look. The fear's sort of killing it right now, but I think his eyes could be beautiful. I don't think I could talk yet, so I figure a hug would work. When my arms go around him, Jonas starts to cry.

"I was afraid you were going to be mad," he cries into my shoulder. I actually have to laugh at that.

"Like, for what, exactly? Who's the biggest fag here anyway?" He stops shuddering and removes his face from my chest. He rubs his eyes a little and tries to put back his hair. That really never does work.

"Yeah but like, thanks for not, I don't know." Oh, I get it.

"Blaming it on you and rushing off to go see if Kyle's okay," Jonas sort of smiles ironically.

"Well, yeah. Like, blood and everything."

"Hey man! You're my brother from another mother! I love you just

as much as I love Kyle. And anyway, I'm thinking this had to be a team effort thing. It takes two to tango or whatever. But, what happened after that? How'd you get back?" He shakes his head.

"I'm not sure. I don't think we drove," he closes his eyes like he's trying to remember. I wait. "I think... I think we got a ride with someone. Yeah! It was that girl who gave me all those drinks. I gave her money for a cab back, and she drove us in the Le Baron. I think so anyway. I think she wanted me to go home with her, but I must have told her I needed to get Kyle home. He was even farther gone than me. He talked all this slurred drunken nonsense the whole way back here. I had to help him up the stairs, and search his pockets for his house key. I'm surprised I even thought of that, the way I was, we probably could have easily ended up sleeping on the porch. We got inside and then..." more eyes closed pausing. "I guess we must have went to his place. I put him in his bed I think, and crashed on the couch myself. Maybe I fell asleep, maybe not. The next thing I remember was you finding me in the bathroom. When was that?"

"About quarter to one, something like that." He nods.

"We got to the party around nine, so, that must be about right."

I'm back to having no idea what to say, and now that he's done telling me, I think Jonas is in the same boat.

"Do you think he's awake yet?" Jonas asks eventually, looking at me fearfully again.

"I don't know." I shake my head. "You guys are going to have to talk though, at some point, either way. I mean, this is, well, it's something you're going to have to talk about."

"I don't think, like, he's not..."

"Neither are you, I thought." He shrugs.

"I've always said I was open to the idea." He closes his eyes for a really long time, and then without opening them continues in a muted voice, "And even though I never really admitted it to myself," swallow, "when it comes to Kyle," sigh, "I've always been really open to it."

I know that shouldn't surprise me as much as it does, there were signs, lots of them, from both of them, but I just always made myself take it as the joke they were fooling themselves with. Plus, the self-absorbed prick I've been the past few months certainly did his part.

"So, I mean, what are you, like, how do you feel about him?" I'm

real eloquent when I want to be, eh?

He meets me with naked eyes. He stares for a long time, and then lets out a ragged laugh.

"Oh fuck."

"What?"

"I think I might be in love with him."

"Thank-god!"

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Ten  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Mon, 19 May 2003 20:31:29 -0500

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"Oh fuck."

"What?"

"I think I might be in love with him."

"Thank-god!"

"KYLE!" Jonas is frantic, my heart is racing a mile a second.

"God, are you okay?" He rushes towards Jonas, this desperate, panicked look on his face.

"I was so afraid I left you there! I woke up and I couldn't remember how I got home and you weren't on the couch. Oh Jonas, god, I'm SO sorry." He's practically ready to start to cry. Jonas, is, to say the least, surprised. You can add confused to that as well. I'm pretty sure Kyle didn't hear what he said though.

"It's, I mean, don't worry about it," he says in a vague, distant, still very confused, tone. Kyle's down on the floor with us now. He's still wearing his rumpled clothes from last night just like Jonas. He runs his hand through his hair and laughs nervously.

"Jeez. What the hell happened to us last night?" Jonas's eyes widen to like triple their normal size.

"You don't remember?"

"Not really. Like, I know we were at a party." He looks at Jonas, sort of squinting. "Did we have a fight?"

"Uh, sort of," Jonas admits uncomfortably.

"What about?" I don't think this is an act. I really hope it's not at least. It doesn't sound like one.



"It's not important," Man. Me and Kyle are just SURROUNDED by these selfless types who just can't get enough `sparing us' the hard details.

"Was it my fault?" Kyle asks, ready to be apologetic. Jonas shrugs.

"Not really. It was stupid, and we were both drunk. We can just forget about it."

"Are you really okay?" Kyle asks, touching Jonas's knee, looking tenderly concerned. I don't know how he manages it, but Jonas nods. Kyle smiles. "Good. You have no idea how crazed I was when I thought I'd left you at some fucking keg party. Even though you're okay, I still feel like the world's biggest idiot and think you deserve to get to call me that a few times. Punching optional" When did Kyle get to be so sweet and cute?

Jonas melts. Damn. It IS obvious. Is this what me and Celery were (are!) like?

"That's okay, well, I guess you are sort of an asshole," Kyle's mouth opens all shocked.

"I said idiot! Not asshole, jerk." They do a little gentle hitting awhile before settling down.

"I really need a shower," Kyle announces suddenly. Jonas sniffs deeply. He pretends to faint. It's an old joke, but some jokes just get better with age. Kyle laughs, anyway. "I'll take that as a hell yes and go to it then. Unless you want to take one first?" Jonas shakes his head no. "Okay then. Try not to miss me too much."

Once Kyle's safely under the water of the shower, Jonas rolls onto his side and moans.

"What am I going to do? He doesn't even remember," I start rubbing his back.

"You should still talk to him."

"No. It's better this way."

"What the hell are you talking about? Like - who do you think you're talking to here? Hello! Secretly in love with his best friend for years guy over here! Trust me, the keeping it to yourself thing is HIGHLY overrated."

"Yeah, maybe for you. Celery's always been totally in love with you."

"I didn't know that!"

"Sure you did. You were just too chicken to do something about it."

"Yeah, Jonas. And that's NOTHING like what's going on with you."

"He's STRAIGHT!"

"So are you!"

"Apparently not."

"My point exactly." It's kind of a realization hitting you like a ton of bricks moment. Hope flickers briefly in Jonas's eyes, but then it dies.

"I don't think so. And even if maybe he liked me too, think about it. Us, dating? It would be so weird. I mean, we're friends." I roll my eyes.

"Jonas! Listen to yourself! What do you think me and Celery were for the first 10 years we knew each other? Uh, could it be FRIENDS? Come to think of it, yeah, I think that's what it was."

I admit it, I'm not very good at the sensitive friend guy thing. This is like, Karma. I just know it. All those times Kyle yelled at me, TRYING desperately to drive some sense into me and hitting a giant wall of completely insane resistance - now I finally know how he felt. It's not very fun.

"It's not the same thing."

"How?"

"Well, for lots of reasons. Just to name one: Kyle's dated LOTS of girls, I've dated some myself. We both like, we like GIRLS. You never did. It was the most obvious thing in the world that Celery didn't either. I DO. Kyle DOES. It's not in my mind."

"So he likes girls, that doesn't mean he can't like you too."

"Right. Whatever. I'm aware of the concept of bisexuality. I just don't think that's what Kyle is. Maybe it's not what I am either. I don't know."

"Are you in love with him or not?" I ask it as gently as possible.

"I think I am, I don't know," the mantra of the hour.

"Well then, take some time. But you have some serious thinking to do. And just remember I'm here, okay? I really HAVE been there, you know? Your pain is my pain." Jonas smiles, it almost passes for something that isn't sad or painful.

"Thanks, I'll try. But like, REALLY. Thanks. I'd be so much more crazy right now if I hadn't had you to talk to."

"Glad to be of service."

Over the next couple of days Jonas is distant and reserved. He still comes over after school (something we've been doing again since after Thanksgiving) but it's all very `there in body but not in spirit'. On Wednesday night, Kyle storms into my room anxiously demanding to know what's going on.

"I know something's bothering him and I know it has to do with what happened when we were at that stupid party. Can't you please tell me what's the matter?" He's into begging by this point. I sigh.

"You really need to talk to Jonas about this." It's all I feel at liberty to say. Plus, he does.

"Carrots, I," he chokes out. "If I did something to hurt him you have to tell me. Please. I couldn't live with myself if I'd hurt Jonas. He's--" He just stops, this horrible look of pain and agony on his face.

"Your best friend?" I suggest.

"Yeah," Kyle says, mind somewhere else. I'm taking a wild guess and saying it's probably with Jonas.

I don't know else to do. I'm not any good at this. I need Celery. He'd know what to do. Kyle just sort of drifts out of my room and I'm still too clueless about all this to stop him.

I immediately fire up the old computer. MSN's our newest thing. We chat for hours sometimes. Almost as good as talking. But know this, we never use any of that lame internet shorthand. We're way too cool for that. There is in my opinion nothing more annoying than using one letter or number for a whole word, or, what's worse, doing away with letters entirely and replacing words with symbols. So lame. It's good though. The MSN and e-mail. So good that we don't even do the everyday phone calls all the time anymore. What we sometimes do instead is save up our minutes and then have like a marathon talk one night a week or something. It's less draining and having more time gives us longer to get some real quality talking and connecting done. Though, really, most of the time we end up talking everyday anyway. I mean, all that sounds good in theory, but the hearing each other's voice thing is still pretty much vital. The daily talks though, they're rarely more than 'I love you' and maybe 'good night' or something. Just enough to hear each other, and still saving lots of time for a big mother conversation later.

I haven't told him anything about Jonas or Kyle yet though, even though we've been e-mailing and stuff everyday since it happened.

I send him an e-mail, simply saying 'we need to talk - soon' and fortunately for my poor addled brain he MSN's me back in a manner of minutes. You can just follow along.

Celery: Phone?

Carrots: No, I don't really know what to say yet, and all the shocked silences would eat up too many of our minutes.

Celery: Shocked silences?

Carrots: yeah.

Celery: So fill me in.

Carrots: this is harder than I thought, and I knew it was going to be pretty hard. I don't know how to put this...

Celery: Is it about Jonas and Kyle?

Carrots: WHAT?! How'd you know that?

Celery: Baby! It's me! They were acting totally weird at Thanksgiving, and the past few days you've been talking about everything BUT Kyle and Jonas, so... I just put two and two together.

Carrots: Okay, smart boy. What do you think it is about them?

Celery: Well, the love that dare not speak its name. What else?

Carrots: Shit!

Celery: I don't know why you're so surprised, baby.

Me neither.

Carrots: Yeah, but like, it was right in front of me and I didn't have it figured out.

Celery: Don't feel too bad. I only noticed it that weekend, and probably only because I HADN'T been around them for awhile. The same way Kyle busted you.

Carrots: Oh.

Celery: So, how did you figure it out anyway?

Carrots: Jonas told me.

Celery: Way to go, Nancy Drew!

I can hear his laughing. All the way from Calgary.

Carrots: Screw you.

Celery: Wish you could.

Man, I TOLD you about his corny, pun-happy ways. Maybe now you'll believe me.

Carrots: Perv.

Celery: Oh come on! Don't be like that. Tell me how it happened.

Carrots: They went to this party right? And they both got totally blasted. Then they had this fight 'cause Jonas felt like Kyle ditched him, Kyle starts to cry, and the next thing you know, they're making out. That's how Jonas remembers it anyway. Kyle doesn't. Remember, that is. But he knows something's wrong with Jonas, and he's really freaking out about it.

Celery: Poor guy. He probably suppressed the whole thing. Can't let himself remember.

Carrots: You think that's it?

Celery: I'm not like positive, but that's my guess.

Carrots: Sounds right. Hey! On the making me feel better side, I may be pretty slow, but I did figure it out before Kyle. He still seems to be pretty much clueless.

Celery: Yeah. He did sort of seem to be living in oblivion about the whole thing when I was there.

Carrots: Do you think they actually, like, might get together?

Celery: I think they're in love with each other, but that neither one of them is really ready to face what that means. Not just the they're both guys thing. They're not the same kind of friends we always were. They aren't the physical types with each other. It'd probably be super weird for them. I can't imagine what it must be like being Jonas or Kyle right now. I always knew I loved you. I had years to get used to it. All their

lives they've thought they were straight. If Kyle's actually bi, I don't think he's ever admitted it to himself. Probably just because it never occurred to him though. He's not really the kind of guy who'd care about that, obviously, so I'm thinking he just never really thought about it as an option for himself.

Carrots: Jonas has.

Celery: Yeah, which is why he's been able to recognize his feelings sooner. It'll take him a lot longer to accept them and be able to see them in Kyle though, I should think.

Carrots: So, what am I supposed to do?

Celery: I don't know baby. Don't worry too much. It'll be okay.

Carrots: I hope so.

Celery: I give you the Celery Schnider guarantee.

Carrots: damn. It's never let me down in the past.

Celery: It's not gonna this time either. But, how are you handling all this? Honestly. Are you freaked?

Carrots: Not really. I mean, it's definitely weird, but... in a way, I guess, nothing else really makes sense. When you find someone who understands you and makes you as happy as I know they do each other, you've gotta just say screw gender and try to run with it. Like, not to say they couldn't keep an incredibly strong bond on the platonic level and have it mean just as much, but it's starting to become infinitely clear to me that they want more than that from each other. I'm a great after the fact detective. I'm picking up on all the clues now, and it's obvious. I can't be freaked about that. They're my brothers and I love them. I want them to find happiness wherever they can. If that ends up being with each other, I'll be all for it.

Celery: That's my boy.

It sounds like such a simple thing, but I know how much pride and love there is behind what he said.

Carrots: I wish you were here.

Celery: I always wish I was there.

Carrots: Well, me too! But especially right now.

Celery: I know, baby.

Who knew text on a computer screen could come off so soothing?

Carrots: How are you anyway?

Celery: I'm okay. It's been a good couple of days. Saul won this big prize at the Science Fair.

Carrots: Oh, cool.

Celery: He's really good at math too. I bet he could teach you a thing or two.

That's his way of letting me know I'm still utmost in his mind. What a sweetheart.

Carrots: Na. I'm hopeless at math. Everybody knows it.

Celery: I still think you should never have dropped Pre Calc.

Carrots: Please. There was no way I was even going to PASS without your help, and I didn't need it anyway. You should be happy I didn't drop Applied too and go straight to Consumer.

Celery: You're way too smart for Consumer math.

Carrots: Whatever. The point is, be grateful. I thought about it.

Celery: I wouldn't have let you.

Carrots: Yeah, since when do you decide what math classes I take?

But then, who got me into Pre Calc in the first place?

Celery: Since always.

Carrots: Hmmmm.

Celery: Bored?

Carrots: NO!

I'm always desperate when he starts talking about signing off. Even if I've got nothing left to say. It comforts me to be able to know for SURE what he's doing at a certain moment. Like, right now, I KNOW he's sitting at his computer. I don't have to wonder what he's doing or thinking about. I have trouble giving that feeling up.

Celery: Wanna cyber or something?

It's this big joke with us. We'd never actually do it, but, we joke around about it all the time.

Carrots: Sure.

Celery: Okay.

Carrots: I love you.

Celery: That's not sex!

Carrots: Jerk.

Celery: I love you too.

It really is sort of late, and it's later for him.

Carrots: Do you want to go?

Celery: No, of course not. I think I probably should though.

Carrots: Okay.

Celery: Sleep well, baby, and remember not to worry! Just be yourself.

Carrots: I want to make things better - not worse!

Celery: Ha ha. Good night,

Carrots: You too.

And then with the signing off and all that stuff.

In an effort to do as Celery said and be myself - the helpful, supportive version of myself - I do my best to be as stupid and amusing as possible whenever Jonas is around, and especially when Kyle is too, just so he can see Jonas acting in a way that at least resembles normal and won't freak so much. But damn, cheering sad people up is really hard! I had no idea. Poor Kyle and Jonas. The way they slaved trying to make me feel better, and I never gave them even the slightest bit of encouragement. At least Jonas TRIES to laugh at my lame jokes and smile occasionally. And talking. That he's got down. While Jonas may himself still be uncertain about his feelings, after listening to him go on and on about Kyle for hours at a time, I'm most definitely not. I don't know if the way Jonas sounds when he's lying on my bed rambling on about Kyle is how I sound when I talk



about Celery, but I think maybe it is. Don't take my calling it rambling as like a dismissal. I totally listen to everything he says, and a lot of it really breaks my heart. It's like watching myself a few years in the past. If I had someone to talk to about my confusion when I was 12, I would have rambled endlessly too. So, I guess I'm better than nothing, and I hope I'm helping Jonas, but I can't really be sure. He hasn't really perked up much, and he still maintains that telling Kyle would be a way bad move.

I've been keeping Celery well up to date on the happenings and he claims to think I'm doing a good job. I haven't been ignoring Kyle either. I'm not really any good at subtly pushing someone in the direction of facing their true emotions, but I'm trying to help him in other ways. He still hasn't talked to Jonas though, not the one on one talk I keep assuring both of them they need, but let's all remember that Rome wasn't built in a day. Well, a Vasskez isn't going to be awoken from the depths of denial in one either. In fact, I bet I could build Rome faster than I'm going to be able to get Kyle to wake up. I just hope they don't have to wait the 11 years me and Celery did.

I've been watching them both really closely, sort of gauging their actions and emotions, and I'm pretty sure they're about where Celery and I were when we were 14. I'd say it's exactly the same in fact, or it's exactly the way I thought it was. Think back. Waaaayyyy back. Remember, when I was 14, I didn't know Celery knew he loved me yet. That whole since he was 6 thing has me thrown me for a loop to this day. Of course, Jonas is more Celery than me. He refuses to even consider the possibility his feelings are returned. Plus there's the whole wiggling about liking a guy thing, which neither one of us ever experienced. Jonas is not homophobic (hello?! Two of his best friends are gay!) and he did always have that `if some guy comes along who happens to really rock my world I'll be cool with that' clause, but that was all theory. Putting it into practice is a little harder to get used to. And then there's the fact that his world rocker had to be KYLE of all people. Though Jonas assures me Kyle has a `really beautiful heart' he keeps well hidden. Like, I know my brother is an amazing person, (deep down under the sarcasm and mockery) and I love him SO much, but, well, he's a lot like me. I happen to know that I'm not an especially easy person to be in love with. Not that Celery'd ever admit it. But me and Kyle, we have our whole really awkward about being serious and expressing real emotions thing, and I imagine that sometimes that has to really suck for the poor souls who try to love us. Jonas's whole cynicism thing is working against him too. The Zen happiness philosophy has sort of taken a giant leap out the window since his moment of personal discovery, and he's pretty much `things don't work out like that in real life' guy full time these days.

Halloween. This is one holiday that actually gets better with age. When you're little, sure, you've got the whole costume, going door to door deal, and that's fine, but once you've hit junior high, or maybe for some people it's senior, the night becomes something else. Yes there's parties, dances,

and all manner of your teenhood prankage to be had, but I'm talking about something much better than all that. I'm talking about the mother of all Halloween celebrations. But be warned, this is not for the faint of heart. This particular Halloween tradition is meant for the most daring and hardcore of the Halloween enthusiasts. That's right. You guessed it. Sitting on your staircase with your brother and his best friend (who both happen to be secretly in love with each other) wearing dumb costumes your mother picked out and forced you into, handing out candy to a bunch of ungrateful little kids, some of whom are little criminals in the making to boot.

You know what I'm talking about. Maybe you even did it too. You see, the joy and innocence has been sucked out of even the most treasured of holidays. Halloween was supposed to be the day where ghouls and goblins come together with the witches and little Brittany Spears of the world in a spirit of love, peace, and harmony. But now it's just been turned into a racket like everything else. Never mind that over-protective mothers who throw half the stuff their children bring home out for fear it was poisoned by some sick crazy person, that's not the worst of it. The real crime is the little kids who keep something like three extra costumes hidden in their pillow cases, who come to your house once and then proceed to change behind a tree and perform the whole little dance again after you've give them even more candy. I really think we've seen the same three kids the whole night and that's been it. Their voices all sound the same anyway, that's for sure.

I don't know, maybe it's just me. I really don't like kids. I thinking Emilio had it right in the Mighty Ducks. They're barely human. Celery's different though, he loves them. Maybe that's why I'm being so bitter about all this. I could be using all that stuff as an excuse for the rotten mood I might really be in 'cause I miss him so much. He really loves Halloween, you know? And I've been thinking about all the Halloweens we spent together as kids (we always went as duos of some kind), stupid pranks we pulled, parties and dances we never went to. So maybe that's it. That and Kyle and Jonas anyway. They still haven't talked and their weirdness around each other continues to reach new heights. I'm getting a little fed up. Or maybe I'm just getting worried, and telling myself it's the other thing. I think we've established that would be like me.

Celery and I had a really long talk about it on the phone the other day and that did a lot for helping me keep my sanity. The little bits that are left of it anyway. Being so wrapped up in everything with Jonas and Kyle hasn't really done me any favours when it comes to missing Celery, so hearing his voice period was nearly as important as what he had to say.

One thing he said about Kyle and Jonas really stuck with me though. More than anything else in the whole conversation. He said they're still in the beginning stages, that they haven't reached the like forever love yet. He

said he thought they could still get over it. Not that it wouldn't be hard, just that it wouldn't be impossible. That's why he's stressing the get them to talk and sort out their feelings - and fast - thing so much. If they fall all the way, only to realize they honestly can't be that for each other, that they can't suddenly be in a gay relationship, they'll both be seriously and permanently fucked. The fact that I'm pretty sure he's right has got me scared shitless. This really might not work out for them. Two of the people I love most in the world could be walking around very soon with a pair of wrecked and broken hearts. There's no way I'd be able to get them through that on my own. I'm not strong enough. But who else do they have? They're the ones who worked their asses off, doing everything they could think of to keep my heart at least somewhat alive when Celery was first gone, I have to be able to be there for them like they were for me. I just don't know if I can. I need Celery so badly right now. On the phone I got so overloaded I cried for awhile. That hasn't happened in what was becoming a long time. Celery comforted me really wonderfully, though I was still almost dying, wanting his arms around me. Wanting him here with me, needing him to be here so he could help me sort all this out. I don't know what to do on my own. I just --

Hold up, someone's knocking on my door.

"Yeah?"

"Carrots?" Kyle?

"Yeah"

"Can I come in?" What?

"Sure," Kyle, knocking? Something's definitely up.

"Hey."

"Hi, what's the matter?"

"Jonas isn't around, is he?" I take a very obvious scan of my - apart from us - empty room.

"No. Why?"

"I just want to talk to you, and it's weird and private, and I don't really want him to know." Gee. I wonder what it is.

"So what's up?"

"I..."

"You what, Kyle?" I try to speak slowly, gently.

"I like him." Really, when you think about it, this is pretty incredible. It's only like a week after Halloween. I thought it was going to take MUCH longer than this. You remember what I said about Rome and all that.

"Jonas?" He sinks onto my bed. I scoot over to give him enough room.

"Yeah." I'm rethinking the giving room thing. I move closer, and put my arm over his shoulders.

"In what way?" I think he needs to say it, even though we both know what he's talking about.

"In the, the, you know," he struggles for awhile with the word before finally spitting it out, "GAY way," I wait awhile before speaking, trying to give him time to get used to having that out there.

"There's nothing wrong with that, you know." I say gently, but firmly. I'm rubbing his back now.

"I know, it's just, I never thought that this kind of thing applied to me. And the fact that's it's Jonas..."

"What's wrong with Jonas?"

"He's straight!"

This is insane. I'm stuck trying to convince both of them now? Why can't they just take my advice and confide in EACH OTHER for once?! I can't do this!

"Maybe," I hope I'm at least fooling Kyle though.

"He dates girls, Carrots."

"So do you." He's not getting it any quicker than Jonas did. But what else am I supposed to say? Am I supposed to out Jonas to Kyle? Kyle to Jonas? Betray one of their confidences? What?! Tell me what I'm supposed to do.

"Well, not anymore."

"Kyle, it's not the end of the world." Even though, going by his voice, you'd think it was.

"Carrots - I think I love him!" His words come wrenched from his heart, just like Jonas's did. Again, I take a long pause before responding. There's no sense rushing him.

"Then you should talk to him."

"Are you crazy!" Oh Kyle. How quickly you forget.

"Kyle, I'm going to give you some of your own advice, okay? And I really hope you take it. 'Cause I did, and it made my life."

"What advice?"

"Tell him. Tell him, or you're going to lose him." He stares at me for awhile, seeing how serious I am.

He throws himself down onto his back and puts his hands against his face. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!" There's more where that came from, but you get the idea.

I think we made a pretty good start, don't you?

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Eleven  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Wed, 21 May 2003 20:14:17 -0500

A few more days go by. I've got both of them coming to me now, lying on my bed, staring up at those glow in the dark stars on my ceiling, waving their hands around idly as they verbally explore their feelings. It's hard to say how they're coming along. They're still both saying, "I think I love him" which I'm not really thinking is a forward step, and they still either laugh or yell whenever I suggest to one that he open up to the other. Kyle's torn up the most though, I think. Not only is he worried about his sudden feelings of gay love for his allegedly straight best friend, guilt is eating him up. The weird distantness of Jonas hasn't let up, and Kyle convinces himself more and more everyday that he did something terrible to Jonas that he can't remember. I can't seem to talk him out of that, or into talking to Jonas. Celery still assures me I'm making good progress, but it doesn't really feel like it.

"How are you otherwise, baby?"

It's been nearly a month since the night of the party, a little less than three since Halloween, and in case you didn't notice that there's only one person in the world who calls me baby, I'm talking on the phone with Celery. If you're looking for exact days of the week, it's Tuesday.

"There really is no otherwise for me right now. This is my life. I go to school, I eat, if I'm lucky there's sleep involved at some point during the day, I miss you constantly, and I try to counsel Jonas and Kyle. This usually does not work." My breathing starts getting ragged as I try not to cry. I'm getting seriously sick of all the crying. "I'm falling apart over here, sweet one. Things were just starting to get on track again and now everything's all messed up but I don't know what to do!"

"For one thing, it's not your responsibility to solve Jonas and Kyle's relationship problems. For another thing, things aren't really all that messed up," like hell, "I know how confusing it must be over there right now, but that will pass. One way or the other. Baby, I really do think the hard part's over. You've like rounded the curve or whatever. Think about how they've been acting. What does that remind you of? Just before we finally talked, what was going on? What were you feeling? There was that sense of something building up inside, and you knew that pretty soon it was going to get to a point where everything was gonna boil over, no matter what, right? That's where I think Kyle and Jonas are at right now." He may be right.

"Maybe."

"Don't become pessimism boy now! Home stretch, remember! And if that doesn't brighten your day, I'm coming in just over a month!"

That's enough to cheer me up from anything. I love the feeling I get thinking about him coming. Not that kind of feeling, gutter brain. Well okay, there's some of that too, but I'm talking about the warm, deliciously anxious feeling in the pit of my stomach.

"I know. I'm even doing the crossing off days on my calendar thing. I swear, making an X on my calendar is the highlight of my day."

"What about chatting or talking to me?" One thing I'll say for the phone, it certainly lends more to the joking and teasing inflections end of things.

"Yeah, well, after that."

"Feeling a little better?" Master topic changer, my guy.

"Yes, thank-you. Another expertly manoeuvred freak-out stoppage."

"I live to serve."

"And thank heavens for that."

"Damn. Baby, we're up," I look at the clock. Up and over. Boo.

"Okay. As always, hearing your voice has been enough to make me cry, I love you, and I can't wait to see you in 31 days and 13 hours,"

"Don't forget 17 minutes!" he chirps.

"We're pathetic." I laugh.

"And you wouldn't change a thing. Love you!"

"Bye."

It's the Saturday of that same week, and we've been trying to watch Mall Rats, but it's getting ridiculous. I'm in the middle with Jonas on my right and Kyle on my left and they keep taking longing sideways glances at each other behind my neck when the other one isn't looking. I've had about all I can stand.

So I jump off the couch, throw my arm into the air and shout, "That's IT! I can't take it anymore!" They both stare at me, stunned.

"Take what?" Jonas asks almost timidly. I glare.

"Oh, you know," they're both starting to look frightened, each thinking I'm talking about only him.

I sigh heavily and sit down on the floor facing them. Without my asking, Kyle stops the movie.

"I've tried to get you guys to talk to each other alone, I've been trying for like a month now. It's not working. So we're going to talk now, together. You both have things you need to say to each other, and if I have to sit here and make sure that you do, then so be it. I'm not going to do it for you, but no one's going anywhere until we've sorted some things out. Got it?" They glance nervously at each other before looking back at me. Nobody's talking. "I'll give you a topic. The party, you both got drunk - discuss." Jonas pulls off a smile at my coffee talk reference, but Kyle's frozen. I'm praying he'll look deeper into Jonas and see the love there. That he'll somehow be able to recognize it's for him.

"I really don't remember what happened," Kyle says, surprising me by speaking first. "But I know it must have been pretty bad, with the way you've been acting," he looks again over at Jonas. "I can only say I'm sorry, even though I don't know what I did to you. I don't know if I said something to you, or did something, but I know I hurt you and I'm sorrier than I can say for that. The way you've like wilted since it happened, I can't even imagine what it was. You're my best friend, I... I've never had a friend like you and that fact that I did something to fuck that up will haunt me for the rest of my life." Jonas's eyes are filling up with tears, I don't think he can believe what he's just heard anymore than I can. How did Kyle get this so wrong?

"Kyle," Jonas's voice is thick and tearful. "You didn't hurt me, that's not what happened. We fought, but that's not why I've been acting strangely."

"Then what is it?" I'm not sure he'll actually be able to say it. But I wait, hoping he will.

"We, we fought, and well after we, we um, kissed."

"Oh god, Jonas! I am SO sorry," he's paler than I've ever seen. To Kyle, this clearly is worse than anything he'd been able to come up with on his own. Jonas makes like a sad 'hunh' sound, like you can hear the sound of his heart breaking a little.

"Please don't be. I'm not. The only thing I'm sorry about is that I don't remember it better."

Here's me, being in awe of Jonas.

And here's Kyle, being speechless with his mouth hanging open. No words are



coming out of that guy any time soon. What he does instead is better.

He moves across the couch, and with hesitant, awkward, and yet at the same time, tenderly loving arms, Kyle envelops Jonas. I suddenly find myself thinking this isn't a moment I'm meant to see, but at the same time I'm swelling with pride for my part in making it come to be. If one of them doesn't start to cry soon, I'm gonna. I've never been so happy for my brothers, or so proud to love them.

"God, Kyle," Jonas sobs softly, hugging him desperately close. "I love you."

I slip quietly out of the room.

When I go back down about an hour later, they're still holding each other, talking. I sneak away from the doorway, not looking anymore, but I can't help but listen.

"I just can't believe how stupid we were!"

"I can," Jonas replies laughingly. I peek in again for a second. Kyle's gently smoothing out Jonas's dreads, and seems mesmerised by him.

"All this time Carrots was trying to get me to understand, but I wouldn't let myself see it. Man. I finally get why it was so hard for him to talk to Celery. I just thought he was being an idiot," love you too, Kyle, "but it's so much harder than it looks."

"You're telling me."

"Like, I mean, it was so hard, all the time," Jonas laughs. Kyle joins in. "Dude, I didn't mean it like that."

"Yeah, I know. But we're going to have to talk about that too. I mean, this is going to be considerably different than what we're used to."

"Tell me about it." Jonas must have heard the same fear creeping into Kyle's voice that I did.

"Are you really going to be able to do this, Kyle?" Jonas asks seriously. " 'Cause I know I love you. I've never thought about myself as gay, but, I want to be with you - in all the ways. If you can't tell me the same thing, you have to tell me now. Don't let me hope for something you can't give me," they must not have started talking much long ago. I get that though. It's a lot to take in, the love thing. I know I should go, but damnit, what if Kyle does something stupid? Someone's got to make sure he doesn't make it out the door. I hear a sigh, Kyle.

"It's going to take some getting used to, and I can't promise you there won't be moments of extreme weirdness - but I don't think you can promise me that either. What I can say," he clears his throat nervously, "is that I love you. And I want to be with you too. Jonas, without a doubt, I'm IN love with you. It took me by surprise, but I don't know why. From the first time we met I knew there was something special about you. Something that made you fit with me. Why do you think I stopped going to parties or whatever else with that whole university crowd and started hanging out with guys all the time? Last year was really weird for me at first, I felt lost so much of the time. University and everything else - it was like my life was changing but I didn't know what into. I was just starting to try to reconnect with Carrots when he and Celery got together and then suddenly there you were. This lippy friend of my brothers. Except - I never saw you like that. I tried, maybe 'cause I felt something that scared me, but I always knew you were different. That you were my way back into the life I was supposed to have. Jeez, that sounds awful! I don't mean I was using you, just, you were the thing with a strong enough pull to bring me back, you know? Maybe I loved you from the very start. I just never thought about it like that, 'cause I was always so sure I was straight. Who knows, maybe I am. But I love you. I think you're beautiful, and," major pause. Way nervous laugh. "Really, um, hot. You turn me on, every part of who you are and how you look. You're a guy, I know, I also don't care. It took me long enough, but I really don't. Hey, I'll probably even get to like it." That's the infamous Vasskez brother a little too much serious emotion in the mix let's end with a joke pattern delta gamma. Couldn't have done it better myself. Still, I don't have to see his face to know how overwhelmed Jonas must be.

"Thank-you, Kyle," Jonas whispers.

I force myself to leave them to their moment once more. It's already late by then. I end up not talking to them again for the rest of the day. I kept my distance, letting them do their thing. I knew there were a million things for them to sort out that I didn't need to be a part of.

When I wake up Sunday morning, it's absurdly early. Like seven o' clock early. I throw on a sweater, grab an extra blanket and take a second to microwave myself a cup of hot chocolate before slipping outside. Fall is my favourite season, and this is my favourite kind of fall day. Even though it's November, we still don't have any snow. Pretty rare in Manitoba. Anyway, it's a beautiful day. Cool without being freezing cold, the air is crisp. I love leaves. I like the reds best, but we just have elms on our street, so it's mostly yellow and orange. That's okay though. Celery always used to tease me about my "leaf fetish" as he called it. This was years before we got together. We've always walked to school together - duh - and I'm not sure exactly when, but some fall he noticed the way I would walk, going out of my way so I could step in leaves. I can't help it. I love the crunching. I always feel better when I'm walking

through leaves. Like it transports me back to simpler times I've never even had. I mean, this is something I did when I was 7. What idyllic youth was I trying to recapture then? My pre-school glory days? You get the picture. Hopefully. I never know with you. You're not really all that bright sometimes, has anyone ever told you that? Other than me I mean.

But anyway. I was talking about fall. It's an underrated season. I don't go for all the summer hype. Summer's gross. Fall is perfect. Not too hot, not too cold, you can do everything in the fall. Okay, you can't swim outside, and I guess there's no snow, but you can be outside for as long as you want and you won't get too hot or cold, and if you're Celery, you can skate for hours. I love the FEEL of fall. Only other people who like fall will probably get what I mean, so I'm not going to bother trying to explain it. There's like, something in the air or whatever. Today, as I previously mentioned, is my ideal fall day. It's cool, maybe even cold, but nowhere near freezing, a bit windy, even from the steps I can see the leaves are crisp. I'm liable to do something really silly and kiddish like make a pile to jump in pretty soon if something doesn't happen. You know, like...

JEEZ!

How 'bout Jonas sneaking up on me from behind? It's a good thing I'd already finished my hot chocolate, or I would have spilled it all over myself. Give me a second to catch my breath.

"What the hell, Jonas?" He smiles.

"Sorry. I thought I was being pretty loud."

"I was kind of lost in thought."

"Ahh."

Our porch isn't all that big. We don't have like a deck or anything. But three or four people could sit comfortably on one step. Jonas is standing on the uppermost step, rubbing his arms in an attempt to warm himself up, cheeks already starting to get rosy. Since things started to get cooler I've noticed Jonas and cold weather really don't get along, and he's only wearing a thin coat over his pyjamas anyway. Actually they're more of Kyle's spares. Hmm. I offer him some of my blanket. He dives under quickly.

"We can go inside if you want."

"No, that's okay."

"Are you?" He turns from the street and looks at me directly. His face is total bliss.

"I've never been better in my entire life."

"Is that so," I say humorously. He just sighs.

"Yeah. He loves me, Carrots. He actually loves me," I laugh.

"I tried to tell you, dude," he grins.

"I know. I was stupid - so was he. That means we deserve each other, right?" He's positively gleeful. I simply nod.

"I think it does."

We just sit for awhile, thinking. Jonas is radiating joy and love. It's a nice thing to be around. It's a wonderful thing to know my brother (I don't mean Kyle, but, him too) is feeling.

"I have to thank you, Carrots," Jonas says, breaking the moment. What can I tell you? The guy's a moment breaker. But he always does it right.

"For what?"

"Don't even try the modest routine with me, droogie. You know what you did. If it weren't for you we'd both still be lying to each other now. Probably to ourselves as well for that matter."

"Maybe. You would have figured it out eventually."

"On our own? By then it would probably have been too late."

"I'm just happy to have helped."

"I want to apologize too."

"Why?"

" 'Cause I've been really self involved lately. You've been so great and supportive, all this time, but I know you must still be hurting over Celery. It's like I sort of forgot about that with all my own shit. I neglected you." I HAVE to laugh at that.

"You're trying to apologize for being a less than stellar friend? YOU? Don't even go there. Man, you and Kyle SAVED me. I never would have like made it to this day without you guys. I would have disappeared into darkness, into the hole Celery's absence left in me - if it hadn't been for you and Kyle. I'M the one would be apologising. I was such a rotten prick to you guys up until Thanksgiving. You were already dealing with this stuff, plus trying to help me, and I barely even noticed. And WHEN I

noticed, I didn't throw you any bones. It even made me mad a lot of the time. There I was wanting to stew in my misery and you guys kept not letting me. So, I'm the idiot here, okay?" Jonas smiles.

"Forgiveness all around and let's forget about it?" I nod.

"Sounds okay to me."

"I want to tell you that I love you, Carrots. When you told me that morning after my drunken hurling in your bathroom, it really meant a lot to me. More than a lot. Then later I realized I never said anything back, and felt like a total bastard. Well, I'm saying it now. Sorry for the lateness. I love you a lot. You really are my brother from another mother, no kidding around. And I don't know for sure if I'm going to be able to swing it, but I hope someday you'll be my brother-in-law as well." The hug instead of responding in words thing has done very well this season, so I decide to get with the times. We're still hugging when Kyle joins us.

"Tart," he scolds, shaking his head.

Jonas lets go and immediately lights up like a Christmas tree. I think it's the combination of embarrassment and being happy to see him. They don't say 'ain't love grand' for nothing I guess.

"Hi," he says. Kyle smiles.

"Hi." They're SO cute. They totally don't know what to do. I can tell they want to like hug or something, but that they're both all shy and stuff. Awww!

Kyle shyly takes a seat beside Jonas and then after a minute or two - though to them I'm sure it felt more like forever - he puts his hand cautiously on Jonas's knee, moving it down his calf until he's sort of hugging his leg. Over the blanket, but still. Jonas responds to this almost instantly, snuggling against Kyle, resting his head on Kyle's shoulder. It takes them a few seconds to get used to it, but then they settle into each other, serene smiles on their faces.

They're so beautiful together. For one thing, Jonas is a LOT better looking than he thinks he is. In my opinion this is especially true for when he isn't wearing his array of contacts, like now. I'd like to see him with his natural hair colour too. But I'd love that disorderly mop of dreads any colour. As for Kyle, the fact that he's my brother doesn't prevent me from recognizing that he's tremendously good looking. It's his family resemblance to me, you understand. They match well. It's another case of light and dark. My hair and eyes may not be able to make up their minds, but Kyle's know exactly what they are. His dark, sometimes broody, eyes are the colour of really creamy milk chocolate or coffee with a bunch of milks

in it. His hair has that same, deep rich tone. He's taller than me, by maybe an inch, and more muscular. Not weight lifter big, or even like Celery (whose muscles are very like stretched and not very showy) but Kyle's strong. Less of my lank, more solid. If he wasn't my brother, I'm sure I'd think he was totally hot. I DO think Jonas is hot. He looks nothing like the Hollywood conception of what male beauty should be, but Jonas is a sensation. A little, short, bleached blond sensation. I'm sure Kyle convinced himself it was only Jonas's personality that drew him so strongly, but I know better. Hopefully now Kyle does too. I'm sure he's not totally used to it yet, but at least he's acknowledging it.

We sit together on the steps in a truly loving and peaceful silence that goes on for maybe an hour. Just watching the street wake up, enjoying the cool fall breeze, each others' company. Don't even start about how corny that is. You don't think I know? Well guess what. It's also true. So who the hell cares if it's corny? I say take joy when you can get it and never mind the rest of it.

Someone has to break the moment, and fittingly, Jonas is the one to do it. His stomach really. And the growling. Kyle's smile is instant. I know that look. It's the `everything you do is so impossibly cute and wonderful' look. I've felt it on myself and seen it on Celery a million times. Now I'm seeing it on my brother. There's nothing more I could hope for him, except what he's getting right now, which is that same look right back.

Here's another thing I've noticed after watching them for give or take an hour. You can just tell they haven't kissed yet by the way they're always staring at each other's lips in this half hungry, half-terrified way. It'll take them awhile to get to that level of comfort and confidence, but what they're doing is good for now. I mean, they're not flinching at each other's touch or anything, and there has been serious touch action going on. The shy, timid kind, but you can so totally see the love there. I'm not kidding.

"Food?"

"Yeah, we can be the good children and set up brunch for everybody. Kyle, Jonas, you guys can even go to the bakery and pick up our order. I'll be table setting guy," they grin.

"Okay!" Try not to sound eager there, Jonas, we don't want him to think you're easy or something.

"Great idea, Carrots."

Fine, then be that way. Two silly peas in a pod. Definitely they deserve each other.

"See you in little while!" Jonas calls from half way down the driveway as Kyle pulls him gently but excitedly away.

"Bye," I wave.

Newlyweds are so cute. What with all the delight in each other's company and discovery and all. Uh-oh. Feeling a little bit of self-pity coming on. Me and Celery are still like that. I wanna be rushing off with him in the Le Baron to pick up baked goods on a cool fall morning. Phooey. No, wait - it's passing. And back comes the happiness for Jonas and Kyle. That was a close call. And much boo-ness, I'm pretty sure it's not going to be the last one. Oh well, no thinking about that now. I've got tables to set, best friends and brothers' happiness to bask in.

CRAP!

Parents and family to tell. Oh man. I do NOT think they've thought of that. Phew. This is going to be one interesting Sunday brunch. I think it could be one of our best. (You're going to learn to pick on my sarcasm one of these days, right?)

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Twelve  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Mon, 26 May 2003 21:29:04 -0500

Mom's hip to the strange right away. I'm only half done the table setting when she comes downstairs, dressed and ready to go do the job that's already being completed by the birds of the love variety.

"Up and getting brunch ready? I wish I could come up with something more original but who are you and what have you done with my surly teenage son?"

"Surly?" I gasp. "I've NEVER been surly. A little morose maybe, but surly. That's a complete fabrication." She smiles.

I really like my mom, you know? Not just the how great she's been to Celery and supportive of all the gay love stuff either. I mean I really like her. As a person. She's funny and has a huge tolerance for lame jokes, sarcasm, and all other manner of my foolishness. Okay, so that's the only way she's gotten through raising me (and let's not forget Kyle, Celery, and the rest of this family) mostly sane, but still. She's way cooler than most moms. But we already know how freakishly lucky I am, so that's old news.

"You get better at stalling every time we talk. What's up?" I shrug.

"Nothing with me."

"I see," she nods, and I really think she does. I try to tell by looking at her, but moms are good at not giving stuff away. Bah.

"Mom?"

"Yes, Carrots." Not bad at the even, measured, gives away nothing tone either.

"It's not anything bad." The smile's a bit tight, but it's real.

"Anything I might need to be sitting down for?" I shrug.

"I don't know. And I'm really not sure if you do, but let's not talk about this anymore, okay? It's really more of an altogether thing." She nods.

"Sure honey. I assume your brothers are out getting the food?"

You see that! Cool. Because she meant both Kyle and Jonas. He has a great family, I know this, well, not because I've ever like, met them, he's told me so (don't laugh!), but he's got another one right here if that silly biological one if his ever falls through. He knows it too. That's gotta



feel good. In fact, those of you with good memories will remember that he's told me that it does. But we all know how shitty your memories are, so I figured I'd better remind you.

"Yep."

"Well then I'm going to go back upstairs and wake the rest of your siblings and make sure your dad hasn't fallen back asleep. I'll see you in a little while."

"Kay."

I finish the job and then sit down on one of the chairs to think. Whatever she might be thinking this is about, I don't think it's that Jonas and Kyle have fallen in love. I mean, how smart is my mom? Me and Celery were by all accounts totally and ridiculously obvious about it. I don't think the same can be said for Kyle and Jonas.

"We're back and we come bearing organic baked goods!" Jonas shouts with 'I'm in love and the whole world's in love with me' exuberance.

He walks into the dining room carrying heaps of nummy treats, followed by Kyle, who's smiling like, well, someone in love. There's going to be no waiting to talk about this later. Everyone else at the table would have to be blindfolded to not see what's going on. I'm not even sure blindfolds would be enough. It's like they're carrying their love around with them like it's an extra person. Damn, I love that part.

"Guys."

"Yeah?" Talking at the same time. Giggling afterwards. Oh no. This isn't INCREDIBLY obvious. Not at all.

"Um, everybody ready to come out?" Well, that got rid of those dopey lovesick smiles pretty quick. Smooth, Carrots. Very smooth.

"What?" I sigh.

"Well, it's like, pretty obvious, you know?"

They look at each other. Not something I'm thinking they were ready for. They're barely handling being out to each other. No, this can't happen yet. It's brilliant scheme time.

Damn. I used to be better at scheming.

"Oh."

I know this is like a bad moment or whatever, but I have to tell you about what Kyle just did! When Jonas said oh, all pathetic and little, Kyle went to him right away and started rubbing his shoulders! Like, that's the sweetest thing I've ever seen! And it was KYLE! My stupid, insensitive, sarcastic, pompous, older brother! I'm gonna cry.

"It'll be okay. Not like they'll care. You know how freakishly supportive my parents are. It's in their blood. Anyway, it's not like this is bad news. I want them to know about the best thing in my life."

And to think, there were all these girls out there on whom he wasted all his charms... Poor things. No more of that for them. You should SEE Jonas. He's all with the glowy happy again.

They share a quick hug. It's clearly all still a bit new to them, but they seem to be trusting their instincts more, acting and doing instead of wanting and imagining.

When Mom, Dad, and whole rest of the crew arrive only seconds after they'd broken their embrace, Jonas and Kyle promptly go back into their shells and stay that way over the meal. Kyle is especially quiet. If it hadn't been for the twins and their endless chatter about soccer, video games, and this girl they both claim the other one likes, there might not have been any talking at all. Everyone gets on board teasing them about it - even Jonas - but Kyle remains conspicuously silent.

Brunch ends and the table gets cleared. Kyle's had that 'working up the courage' face for like the past five minutes. Mom and Dad are doing the dishes in the kitchen and we three are sitting around the cleared table. The twins are already back in their room playing video games and I don't where Kara went. I like that girl, but she never talks. She's super independent too. Like a little elfin grown-up. She's also very serious, the way Celery was when I first met him.

"Okay," Kyle says, having made up his mind. "That's it. I'm going in," Jonas pushes his chair back, but Kyle shakes his head. "No, stay here."

"I'm not letting you do it alone!" Jonas protests, indignant.

"I'm going to get them to come out here," Kyle explains.

"Oh," Jonas says more calmly. Kyle smiles.

"Thanks though."

"Don't mention it." Kyle takes a second to squeeze Jonas's hand as he passes, and then walks into the kitchen. We hear the sound of talking but no words, and Kyle returns followed by the olds.

"Kyle, I thought you said you wanted this to be private," my mom says. He nods.

"Yeah, I do." She looks at me questioningly. I shrug and try to smile cheerfully.

"Moral support."

"Jonas?" Oh like he can talk right now, real good, Mom!

"Uh."

"Him too," I say quickly.

They shrug and sit down. Everyone's wearing serious looks and worried half-smiles. This is all going so well.

"So, what did you want to tell us, Kyle?" Dad asks. Dad's solid. Really calm and understanding. Mom is understanding, just not at all calm. Now you know where I get it from.

"Um, I... I'm," he pauses, unsure of what to call himself, and, I'm guessing, if he'll even be able to go on. It takes only a small smile from Jonas to revive him, and in a clear and definite voice Kyle declares, almost triumphantly, "I'm in love with Jonas." Mom and Dad stare blankly for few LONG seconds.

Broken by, "Oh, thank goodness!" Poor Kyle. Who wouldn't be totally thrown. They shake their heads.

"We thought you were " Mom stops abruptly half way through her thought, "Did you say Jonas?"

Kyle's face falls into misery. Jonas looks stricken.

"Yes," Kyle whispers. More silence and blank staring.

"Well, that's a surprise," Mom says eventually, almost humorously. Maybe even just plain regular forget-the-almost humorously. Dad nearly chuckles, and then catches the pair of scared and confused looks on Kyle and Jonas.

"Not one we have ANY problem with. It's just, well, going to take a little getting used to. We didn't expect this." There, that's pretty calm. Told ya.

Mom's staring at Jonas. I don't think he's in love with the experience. Going by his nervous fidgeting, I'm thinking no love whatsoever.

"This is wonderful!" Mom suddenly exclaims.

"What?" Oh I am right there with you, Kyle. Wonderful? She smiles.

"Oh well, I know it's not the easiest path you can take - and yes, not one we really expected you to go on - but I believe that the more love you share the easier it will be and I can see it in both of you. You love each other," she's going into proud tearful mother mode! This really IS wonderful. "And Jonas, I'm so very happy it's you."

"You are?" He's obviously having trouble finding a way that makes sense.

"Of course! Here I was, already loving you like a son, hoping you and my other boys weren't going to grow apart as school friends sometimes do, but now we all have one more connection with you!"  
She looks sharply at Kyle. "You better treat him well."

"Mom!" This is just too much fun. I can't even tell you how glad I am I stuck around. Moral support never felt so right.

"He treats me fine, we're pretty new still," understate much, Jonas? "But don't worry. This is one of those for the long haul kind of things - I hope," Side moment taken for Jonas and Kyle to smile shyly at each other. Feel the love! Feel it!

"I hope it is too, honey, but even if for some reason it doesn't work out, I hope you know there'll always be a place for you with us anyway."

I know what you're thinking. How unreal this is. How this would NEVER happen. Well I'm telling you, that's what she said! That's the kind of thing that happens in this family. Don't you just hate us?

"Thanks, and yeah, I know." Who's up for a big, warm, fuzzy feeling inside? I know I am.

"When exactly did this happen, just for the sake of my curiosity?" Dad asks. Kyle shrugs.

"Um, which part?"

"How many parts are there?" Funny, Dad!

"I meant, the getting together part or the being in love part?"

"Both."

"Well, the love I guess was pretty much from the start and the getting together was just yesterday."

"Still - that's less than 10 years. You beat your brother." Hey!

Kyle smiles. "Yeah, but he helped so... I can't really take credit."

"Really, we were sort of hopeless without Carrots," Jonas affirms.

"Always looking for new recruits, eh?" Man, I told you she was like me.

"Sure, Mom. Wanna sign up? I've been told we don't have nearly enough lesbians." Mom rolls her eyes and Dad snorts a laugh. Knowing me has had such a cooling effect on my parents. It's almost frightening to think how sad and mean they might be if it wasn't for me. Lucky I'm around.

"I'll pass. On a serious note, Kyle, why the change? Have you known you were gay all this time? I should you think you would have known you could tell us."

"There wasn't anything to tell. I dated girls because I liked to, I am mostly straight, I think."

"But you're in love with Jonas." Not judging or criticising, just the gentle statement of facts. Trying to understand.

"Well yeah. But... Jonas is special," Mom smiles.

"He certainly is." And he's adorable when he blushes too!

"What about you, Jonas?" He shrugs.

"Oh, Kyle's not really all that special. He's just convenient. I mean, I'm over here all the time anyway. Might as well get two birds with one stone." That's why I love Jonas. He always gets his own back. Kyle's crimson and we're all laughing.

"You suck," Kyle mutters. I grin at Jonas, but he shakes his head at me. Too easy.

We talk for awhile longer, and I get the feeling Mom and Dad have already gotten more comfortable with all this than Kyle and Jonas.

"But hey, how come you were so like relieved at first? What did you think I was going to tell you?"

"Oh, well, it seems so silly now. We thought you were going to say you were dropping out of University."

"What?" Yeah, me too. Where'd they get that from?

"Sure it sounds ludicrous now, but it was all we could think of. You'd been spending all this time at home instead of on campus, you weren't showing much interest in all those 'college' type parties and activities. We thought maybe you were losing interest in your courses as well."

"How were we to know all this time you were really just falling in love?" They're pretty cool as a team too, Mom and Dad.

"Humph," says Kyle. Jonas pats his knee.

"Dude, just be happy everything worked out so well and don't even worry about the other stuff. So what if they were worried you were thinking of dropping out, isn't that better than them being worried you were going all gay?" Kyle smiles. Score another point for Jonas. They may just exhibit some quality teamage themselves. No real big change there though.

"So everything's officially cool?" I can see him needing to be extra sure.

"Very."

"And totally."

"Great," Kyle says, letting out his final bits of nervousness in a long sigh. Jonas grins.

"Hugs!" Mom says, jumping. Kyle laughs, but he hugs her back tight. Then it's Jonas's turn, and it's the same for him. Dad just gets up and smiles at them. Hugging's not really his thing.

"Thanks, you guys."

"We love you, Kyle, and you too, Jonas. There's nothing to thank us for."

"Still, I'm grateful."

"Did you hear that, Jerry? A grateful teenage child? Where did we go wrong!" Dad (that would be Jerry) leads a mock tearful Mom gently away and we all let out another breath of relief once they're gone.

"That was fucking incredible," Jonas says, a little head shaking action going on.

"We're that kind of family."

"Yeah. It's 'cause of him," true, true. Try it without the sarcasm and you'd be right on Kyle.

"You're no great shakes, but your family makes it worth the trouble."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whatever. You know you love me." Jonas grins shyly.

"Okay, so I do. Gotta problem with that?"

"No," Kyle says, smiling softly. So much shy action to be had.

Jonas gets a call from his parents late that afternoon, and is forced into the near impossible task to dragging himself home. Away from Kyle. Who - if he wasn't already - has become the centre of Jonas's universe. Sensing he wants to talk but doesn't want to have to ask, I simply follow Kyle up to his apartment after their drawn out and most adorable goodbye. Who knew shyness could be so amusing?

We sit on his couch. There a 'let's catch our breath and take stock for a minute' silence, broken eventually by Kyle's loud sigh. I smile.

"How you doing, bro?" He shakes his head, smiling, but obvious a bit in over. "You look a little dazed."

"He slept in my bed, Carrots," Kyle says, like he still can't get over it. "I mean we were fully clothed and everything but - in my BED. It was just so... strange." He stops, and then rushes out, "Good strange - but strange. I don't know what do to, like, it's all, so."

"Foreign?" I'm a very helpful guy.

"Yeah. I know what to do with girls. Like, not just you know, sex - everything. How to kiss them, hold them, what they like. I mean non sex wise." As scarring as it truly is to hear my brother say stuff like that, I'm also really proud that he's able to. "I don't know what to do when it's another guy."

"So don't think of it like that. It's not 'another guy' - it's Jonas. Another person. One you love."

"I'm trying, but, it's going to take awhile."

"Then take awhile. As long as you're both in there, willing to do what you have to to make things work, how long it takes couldn't matter less. It's all about being willing to try, not about instant success."

"I had no idea I had such a profound effect on you."

"Huh?" He grins.

"Well you sure didn't get this wise on your own," I laugh.

"That's the asshole I know and love." Just before I say what I'm about to, I remember with a grin the thing just like it Kyle said to me when me and Celery first got together, "It's good to see love hasn't changed you too much." Kyle gets the connection and grins also.

"Well you know, no sense messing with perfection and all that."

"It's going to work out, you know?" He sighs, happily.

"I know."

We talk and talk, until we're getting dangerously close to the talking-all-night mark. I'm sure for Kyle it all felt like one long minute, he was so wired. I get him to sleep somehow, mid sentence about how much he still can't believe this is happening. I take a good look at his couch on my way out and give it a little pat. I know! Many of you feel sorry for this couch! That is because you're crazy! It has no feelings! And the new place Jonas is sleeping is MUCH better. Man I love that commercial. Well, not that that's the exact way the commercial goes or anything. But, you've seen it. You know what I mean. If you don't well, that's nothing new. Just ignore it like you do everything else I say.



Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Thirteen  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Thu, 29 May 2003 19:21:06 -0500

You know, it's really quite funny. I thought I wasn't getting any sleep when they WEREN'T together. Now I've got happy, delirious, in love conversations that go late into the night and wake me up early to deal with.

"Jeez, Kyle! Why didn't you wake me up a little earlier?" He grins.

"Bro! You're missing all the fun!" I stare at him like the crazy person he so obviously is.

"All the really, really, really, early Monday morning fun, you mean?"

Kyle continues on undaunted. "Yeah! Come on, get up! Jonas is going to be here soon," Oh, well then.

"It's 7:14,"

"So?!"

"SO, Jonas isn't going to be here for at least another hour," School starts at nine here, for all you weirdoes who live in the states and have to start at like 7 or something insane like that. You poor bastards.

A pout immediately forms on Kyle's face. I'm sure if I was a little more awake I'd be finding this all very adorable, but, I HATE getting up. I hate mornings. I hate morning people. You already know how I feel about being told to rise and shine. I don't much like being told to get up 'cause my brother's boyfriend might be showing up at any minute or hour either. Not that I have a whole lot of experience with that or anything.

Sigh. He's still with the pouty face. And I'm starting to wake up. And this is all starting to be really cute. And hilarious. I laugh.

"Dude, you should see your face! Like it's a check out a mirror, take a picture face." He surrenders the pout for the original grin. I roll my eyes, but it's a happy eye roll. Don't you just hate contagious joy and happiness? Yeah, me neither.

The barrelling in of one Jonas A. Wheaten at 7:35 proves Kyle to be the winning Vasskez brother in this particular round.

"Hi!" Oh, you should hear him. So adorably way too happy to see Jonas.

"Hey, Kyle." They smile dope-ily at each other for awhile.

"If you're going to start making out, I'm leaving," I say, only half kidding. But, I'm more than a little sure they're not there yet, so, mostly joking really.

"Dude, shut-up," Jonas orders.

"Yeah. We put up with you and Celery." It's not even all the way out of his mouth before Kyle starts looks wicked sorry. "Oh bro "

"It's okay, Kyle. Don't worry about it," I cut in smoothly.

"No, I mean, I can't believe I said that."

"Neither can I, you doofus," Jonas says, shaking his head disapprovingly. I smile.

"Really, guys. It's not a problem. I can talk about him without like bursting into tears. Well, most of the time anyway. And I don't want us to like, not talk about him. We should talk about him. We should do it more actually. He wants to be with us here, we all know that. So let's include him the best we can, alright?"

"This is all because of some pact?" Kyle asks incredulously. I laugh.

"No, man. This is all because I'm in love. And that makes me fucking lucky, no matter what. I may not be in love with our current geographical circumstances, but that's all temporary. I know it took me long enough to get hip with the not being as depressing as the dead, but my current signs of recovery are not like all a dead cat bounce or whatever. I'm really getting better." They smile. Happy for a totally different reason, but maybe happier than I've seen them yet.

"It's about damn time."

"He means that's terrific," I smile.

"Yes, I know. But thank you, Jonas."

"No trouble whatsoever." Were you dead in the 80's? Did you live in a cave? Have you never seen Ferris Bueller's Day Off? Well go! Now! Rent it! And pick up A Princess Bride while you're in the neighbourhood!

Again, there's trouble getting them to part company (Kyle actually wanted to drive us to school, or at least walk with us) but I manage eventually. As we walk, I decide some talking is in order.

"So, Jonas."

"So, Carrots."

"Don't be difficult."

"Am I being difficult?"

"Yes, you are."

"Oh."

"Jonas."

"Carrots."

"Grrr," he laughs.

"So, right?" I nod.

"So what's the so?"

"The so is, so what are we going to tell people when they ask why you're floating around in a euphoric state?"

"Is that what I'm doing?"

"Yeah, Jonas, it is." He smiles.

"I like this," I shake my head, chuckling.

"Glad to hear it. But - my question?"

"Oh right. Um, we tell them I'm in love," the honest approach. I'm impressed.

"And when in the natural order of things they ask who with?"

"We say you and then hope that after the laughter stops no one remembers to ask the question again."

"That'll never work."

"Why not?"

" 'Cause 10 bucks says the first person we try that with glares at us, tells us they can't believe we'd do that to Celery and storms off in a very righteously indignant huff," Jonas laughs. "I'm serious, dude." He nods.

"I know. They love him over there."

"Not that you'd have a hope of getting him to admit it. Big modest goof."

"Carrots, man, Celery's not modest. He just honestly doesn't care about what anyone else but you thinks of him and as a result of this he doesn't NOTICE. He's popular and well liked, but he could care less. You've always been the only thing on his radar that was more than a quiet passing blip."

"You're not a blip!" He shrugs.

"Okay, so that's true. Me, Kyle, and the rest of your family. But that's it. In big letters on the middle of the dart board that is Celery's consciousness it reads CARROTS. You know I'm right," For such a smart, observant, intuitive guy, it sure took Jonas long enough to pick up on what was going on with Kyle.

I say that to make myself feel better because I think Jonas may be smarter than me.

"You always are." He laughs.

"That I am." The thing is, about me and Celery, he really usually is.

"Getting back to the so, what are we going to do? We're agreed your plan isn't going to work, right?" Jonas nods.

"Yeah. I dunno what we should do."

We discuss it the rest of the way to school, but arrive before coming up with a workable solution. Neither of us even brought up just saying Kyle and being done with it.

"I guess we'll just have to riff then," I say with a shrug.

"Yep," Jonas concurs. I smile, taking a stab at looking kind and reassuring. He smiles back, but I don't know if it worked.

"After all, we are the riff masters."

"Right," I keep the reassuring smile going.

"It'll be okay, man. People will be cool."

"I know," I pat his shoulder.

"Let's go find Alex and Brian."

I know I haven't been big on mentioning them, but they've been around. It's what they do. They hang out, give support. Good guys. I've never really been good enough back, but especially since Celery left. I'm really going to try to start working on that. I mean, really. I'm not joking. Or being sarcastic. They deserve better, and I want to start giving it. Kaleb too. He's been so great in all the friendliest ways, and even with the improvements in my mood of late, I haven't been giving him much of the time of day.

Brian and Alex are at a table in the caf, just like they always are. It's weird. They only met 'cause of me and Celery and our whole bridge the gap sit together at lunch project, but they're like best friends now. That's like the one thing that stops me from feeling totally guilty about not being a good enough friend to them every second of my life. 'Cause, even if I'm pretty useless, at least they've gotten something out of it.

"Hey, guys," I say, smiling.

"Hey."

"Yo." One of these days, I'm going to get around to making fun of Brian for saying `yo'.

"How's life?" They shrug.

"It's Monday."

"And I have detention again, all this week after school. Which is a major drag."

"How come?" Man, his girlfriend should like move or something.

"Same old, same old," I shake my head, but grin.

"You're a dog, dawg," Alex chuckles.

"Whatever, how was your weekend?"

"Okay," Jonas just smiles and tries not to blush. They notice right away.

"Oh man! I know that look! What do you think, Bri? Is it love?" Brian nods confidently.

"Absolutely. So tell us, Jonas, who's the lucky lady? Is Sam back in the picture?" Jonas sort of grimaces at the mention of her name. I wonder if there was more to their break-up than he said.

"No."

"But you don't deny that you're giving off some serious love vibes?"

"No," great riffing so far, Jonas. Really.

"Well then, share with the class. Who's the chick?"

"It's not a chick." They roll their eyes.

"Okay, okay. Who's the LADY?" He shakes his head. Fuck-me. He's gonna do it.

"It's not lady either," he shakes his head. "It's Kyle."

"Kyle?" He nods.

"Who the hell is that?" Jonas sighs.

"Carrots' older brother." Now for the eye bugging. And the jaw hanging.

"A guy?" Brian mouths.

"A guy."

"Damn."

"Yeah, I mean, we thought you were straight," Alex adds.

"I am. Or, I'm not gay anyway. I just... like Kyle. Most other guys, I don't feel anything for them. I like girls, but I also like Kyle. I LOVE Kyle." It seems to be sinking in.

"Okay. Well, that's cool. Like, you're our bud either way, right, Bri?"

" 'Course, dawg. It doesn't change anything," Jonas grins. Relieved even though most of him knew this is how things would go down.

"That's good to hear, you guys." They shrug.

"No problem."

"Word." I laugh, suddenly realizing Brian does all the gangster talk just to joke around with me. He winks, and I shake my head.

"I was wondering when you'd catch on, dawg."

"I'm a little slow."

"Huh?" Jonas.

"Never mind."

"Kay then."

Spending the day trying to get Jonas through classes makes me wonder how people ever put up with me. I mean, how far-gone on somebody can you get? Pretty far is the answer here. And I know I'm the exact same way whenever I've so much as got Celery on the brain, but knowing it is a totally different thing than seeing it. You don't even want to know how many times I have to like shake him or snap my fingers to get Jonas to even know what class he is in. By the end of the day, I'm like exhausted. Happy, delighted for him, and generally in good spirits all around, but exhausted.

"Carry me home," I order drowsily. He laughs.

"Not gonna happen, droogie."

"You were right before on the porch - you are a crappy friend."

"You're breaking my heart," above his voice, I hear a very familiar sound. The rumbling of the Le Baron. I'd know that sound anywhere. Have I mentioned that I love my brother?

"Kyle," I say once I've stumbled over to the car. "You're a life-saver."

"Sure I am - now, geek in the back," I laugh. I'm too tired to explain. Do some like research or something. I'm sure you could find where that comes from if you put a little effort in. Here's a hint - it's not from a movie.

I don't know what's wrong with me. I mean, I'm like, dead over here. I climb into the car and lie down on the back seat. I don't stay conscious long enough to hear Jonas get into the car. The next thing I know we're at the house.

"You okay, bro?" Kyle asks, leaning against the roof of the car, peering at me through the open door. I nod, or I move my head at least. I'm sure it resembled a nod.

"You never would have made it home," Jonas says, shaking his head. "I really **WOULD** have had to carry you. Or tried at least. What's the matter?" I've managed to sit up by this point.

"Nothing, I just haven't been sleeping a whole lot lately." They look at each other sheepishly.

"That's like pretty much our fault, eh?" Jonas asks with an embarrassed grin.

"Yeah, but don't sweat it. I am going to take a nap though. I'll take a rain check on the homework thing, if that's okay."

"We'll try not to miss you too much," Kyle says, at the same time as he helps me out of the car.

"You may not succeed, but I trust you to try your hardest."

In my exhausted fog, it takes me awhile to find my room, but I get there eventually. I never noticed how far my bed is away from the doorway. Maybe I'll just drop right here. My lids are already shutting down, why not the rest of me? No. My bed will be much more comfortable. Come on, feet. You can do it. Ahhh. That's nice. Good niiii....



Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Fourteen  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Mon, 02 Jun 2003 21:54:34 -0500

When I wake up a few hours later and emerge from my cocoon, the house is buzzing. Kara has Sue over and they're playing together in her room in the quiet and somewhat mysterious manner in which 11-year-old girls seem to do. Many chirps and beeps are emanating from the twins' room, as well as the occasional taunt or shout of either frustration or victory. Video games, dummy. I plod slowly down the stairs and hear telltale sounds of the news from the living room. It'll be my dad watching the BBC. He'll only watch news on the BBC. Which is weird. We're not like even British or anything. Dad was born in Canada and his parents are Romanian. Mom's not British either, but she doesn't listen to the news. She gets lots of newsletters and talks to people. I don't think she trusts mainstream media. And rightly so. Anyway, I don't feel up to a rant right now, so moving right along. The kitchen. I'm hungry, you see. I slept through dinner and I'm also used to having something to eat after I get home from school - I didn't get that either. So, the kitchen. There's Mom.

"Hi, Mom."

"Hi, sweetie. I saved you some dinner. It's in the orange Tupperware."

"Great, Mom. Thanks," I forage around for the orange Tupperware.

"Feeling okay?"

"Huh?" I shut the fridge. "I'm okay. Just a little run down or whatever," I put the food in the microwave and lean up against the counter. I smile. "Really."

"We haven't talked in awhile," I smile again, more ironically this time.

"I only recently started talking again, period."

"I noticed. The change, it was because of his visit?" I nod and shrug at the same time.

"That was a big part of it, but so was what all of you guys did for me. It was like all that help and caring finally caught up with me at Thanksgiving. Seeing Celery set it off, but I wouldn't have ever gotten to be okay again without all of you. I'm sorry I was so lousy to everyone all that time before."

"You were hurting."

"Still, I could have handled it better."

"Just be grateful you didn't handle it worse." She can be so gentle, my mom. You should hear her tone right now. It's so tender, so soft. And her smile's warm. You know how you just feel safe with some people? And better about yourself? That's how I feel with my mom pretty much all the time. Celery's another one of my major like that people.

The microwave beeps. Another moment broken. Where is Jonas anyway?

"How are YOU, Mom?" I ask, sitting down with my food.

"I'm fine, honey," I roll my eyes a little.

"Like that sums it up," she laughs a little.

"It's been a pretty strange few months, I'll give you that. A lot's happened, most of it not very good, but some of it wonderful. If you're referring to Kyle and Jonas, that's something I'm more than fine about. I really DO think it's wonderful, I really AM happy for them. They seem to be a wonderful match. I don't know why I didn't see it sooner, it was so easy to tell with you and Celery,"  
we're never going to live that down.

"Yeah, so everyone keeps telling me."

"You seem to think that's a bad thing. I hardly agree. It's a wonderful gift to be able to openly express your emotions. To be able to convey what you're feeling. Especially when it comes to love. Many people have been crippled by their lack of that gift." You're really starting to believe me about the whole her being great thing, aren't you?

"I guess," and she gets so much encouragement from me too!

"Have you talked to Celery recently about Christmas?" That's a jump in topic but I'm ready to go with it.

"Yeah, I mean, it's like one of our favourite topics."

"I'll bet."

"You and Dad are really okay about paying for everything?"

"You dare even ask me that question?" Her voice is all fierce, but her mouth's twitching, wanting to turn into a smile.

"Stupid question," I say with a smile.

"Not your first."

"Or my last!" I finish with a grin. It's a game we used to play. I was the kind of kid who asked the obvious a lot, just because I needed the reassurance. That developed into what you just heard over the years. All love and humour based of course.

"We love him, honey, of course we don't mind. I don't think I could stand to have it any other way. It'll be a great holiday with all of us together, one of those real seasons on love we're all always hearing about. You know we're flying him in the night you get off school, right?" I nod rapidly.

"Uh-huh, and he's staying until the day before school starts again," I almost want to die from the joy of it every time I think about two whole weeks with Celery.

"That's the plan. We're going to mail his tickets this week."

"So soon?"

"It's the Christmas season, you've got to book early, and besides, it'll give him something to hold onto to keep him reminded of what's coming," I laugh.

"He'll probably sleep with them under his pillow," Mom suddenly gets a little choked up. "Mom, what's the matter?" She smiles through her almost tears.

"Nothing, sweetie," I get up to give her a hug.

"I'm sorry, Mom. I know you guys miss him too. And I haven't really let anyone share that feeling with me. I want us to miss him together more, though. Don't hide it from me." She puts her arms around me and we stay connected for awhile.

When she lets go, she keeps hold of my arm, turning it over so she's looking right at my tattoo. It used to hurt so much to look at it. Now it fills me up with so much strength. I hope that's what she's getting from it.

"He's such a good boy."

"I know, Mom."

"It hurts as much as if it were one of-"

"I know, Mom," she looks up at me.

"He knows we miss him too, doesn't he?" There aren't even words for what kind of an idiot I am.

"Of course he does, Mom, he misses you too." She nods. That's about it for the breakdown. Strong dependable Mom is back.

"Okay. Finish your dinner, and then maybe you should go check on Kyle and Jonas," I smirk.

"How long have they been up there?" She shakes her head.

"Don't put ideas like that into your poor old mother's head. I'm going to go see your dad."

"Okay, Mom," I smile. "And hey, Mom, you know I love you, eh?"

"Yes, Carrots, I do." She starts to leave.

"Hey! Don't you love me too?" She grins.

"Stupid question," I shake my head and go back to my dinner.

Once I'm done that, I go upstairs and knock on Kyle's door. He softly calls, `Come in'. I step inside and see them tucked up together on his couch. Jonas appears to be asleep.

"Hey," I say quietly. Kyle's busy being enraptured watching Jonas sleep.

"Isn't he beautiful?" I nod.

"Like a super model." We laugh. You'd have to have seen Now and Then. Don't even bug me about why I have. I have an 11-year old sister. You figure it out.

"Why didn't I see it before?" I shrug, perching myself on the arm by Jonas's feet.

" 'Cause you weren't ready, I guess. You see it now, you know? Who cares about before."

"I think he does."

"That's bullshit, Kyle. Jonas beat you by like I dunno, a week. Maybe a little more. And that was just the luck of him being a little less drunk than you. There's no blame here."

"I think I knew I was jealous of Sam."

"Really?"

"Yeah. But, it was just that he was spending time with her, you know? It didn't have anything to do with romance - or maybe it did. I don't know. But, even at the party, I was kind of happy when she left. That was when we danced, you know?" How could I forget.

"Yeah," Kyle gets a distant, dreamy look.

"That night was so much fun. After when we got home, we talked like half the night. I guess it was more like all the way into the morning with how late it started out. We were SO tired, but as soon as we started talking it was like it was the middle of the afternoon."

He looks down at Jonas, and runs his fingers along his forehead. "If there was ever a time to pick out as when I started loving him, it was that night. We learned so much about each other, and all of it just seemed to bring us closer together. I don't ever want to lose him, Carrots."

"I know you don't, Kyle," I say, matching his conviction. Jonas stirs a bit. He really is asleep though. There's no way he could have been awake through that and not blush. Jonas is kind of a blusher. "And I don't think you will, if you make sure to tell him stuff like what you just told me." He half laughs, half groans.

"Then we're sunk," I tisk gently.

"You're doing okay so far." He glances at me with widening eyes.

"What did you hear?" I laugh.

"Nothing bad," now Kyle's blushing.

"I don't think I want to know."

"Dude, what have you been saying?" I ask, still laughing.

"Never you mind," I finish my chuckling and grin at him.

"You're a great guy, Kyle, Jonas is lucky to have you."

"Well, I don't know about that. But I'm doing my best to make him happy."

"Me?" Man! Give a guy a little warning for once in your life!

"You what?" Kyle stammers lamely.

"I heard what you said, Kyle," Jonas says with a smug little grin.

"How much of it?" Kyle asks with a gulp. Jonas crunches his brow.

"Just that last part. Why, was there something bad?"

"No! No, not bad. Just like, um."

"Really beautiful. I'll tell you later, Jonas."

"You will not!" That was too easy. I stick my tongue out.

"I think I was better off asleep," Jonas comments.

"You just woke up 'cause you missed me too much," Kyle states knowingly. Jonas actually blushes. Oh really, Jonas. Come on.

"Uh, actually, I sort of was dreaming about you." Oh, okay. That's blush worthy.

"Yeah?" Look at Kyle, all excited.

"Yeah." They smile.

"Privacy time, I'm out of here."

"No, Care, man, you don't have to leave!" Jonas is quick to protest.

"It's okay. I want to talk to Celery anyway."

"If that's why, then sure. See you later."

"Yep. Night if I don't see again."

"Bye."

"Night, bro."

I'm all excited to break the most excellent news to Celery, but as soon as we start chatting he's all about how excited for them he is.

Carrots: How did you know already?

Celery: Kyle e-mailed me like Saturday night already. Dude, you should have seen all the exclamation marks.

I laugh. Too bad he can't hear. No. Go away, bitterness.

Carrots: Makes sense. They're SO cute! I wish you could see them.

Celery: Me too

Carrots: Sorry! I'm such a loser

Celery: Baby, don't be ridiculous. Let's keep this happy, okay? Tell me more about Kyle and Jonas

So I do, and then we talk about missing each other (a lot about the talk with Mom), and what else has been going on in our respective worlds (very little) and finally about Christmas.

Celery: I so totally can't wait

Carrots: No kidding! I'll probably die of excitement the second before your plane lands

Celery: Don't even try it!

Carrots: Yeah, on second thought, I think I'll probably try and stick around

Celery: See that you do.

Carrots: Cel, I love you so much. Everything's been going really good, but I still can barely get through the day sometimes, I miss you so much. It hurts so bad being away from you

Celery: I know, baby. Don't push yourself too hard

Carrots: You promise to take your own advice?

Celery: I promise to try

Carrots: Yeah, that's about right.

Celery: I love you, baby, and I want to stay focused to how much I'm going to love spending Christmas with you and the rest of the family, rather than the time we're having to spend apart now. You with me on that?

Carrots: Yes, definitely

Celery: So tell me about all the stuff we're going to do once I get back

Man, you're dirty. Not that kind of stuff. We'll skip it anyway. We have the regular difficult drawn out good-bye and then all the usual signing off whatever. I'm still pretty zonked, so it's off to bed for this little Carrot.





Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Fifteen  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Fri, 06 Jun 2003 16:35:17 -0500

Jonas must not have slept over, 'cause Kyle is alone in the kitchen the next morning, eating cereal.

"Morning, bro."

"Hey, Kyle."

"Less with the tired now?" I smile.

"Yeah, I'm better."

"Good to know," I get my breakfast, and we don't talk much for awhile.

When Jonas shows up a little later, I almost don't recognize him. No contacts for one, and man was I ever right about his eyes being beautiful. Better than that even. I was even more right about his hair. I'm not even sure if I can describe it. It's like, sand. Not the white kind, the really glittery, slightly washed out, sun-baked kind. I won't even insult the colour it is by calling it brown. It's so much more than that. Like really dark honey almost. What the hell was he doing with that bleach crap anyway?

He's done something different with his clothes too. It's nothing big, he just lost some of the bulk. A long sleeved cranberry T-shirt instead of a hoody, jeans instead of the boxy cargos. A silver chain hangs from his neck.

"Hey, you guys," Jonas says, smiling nervously under our scrutiny. If you think I sounded impressed, you should see the look on Kyle's face.

"Jeezus," Kyle says softly. Jonas blushes and tries to hide his face. "You look amazing."

"I just took the bleach out, and no contacts. You know, trying the O'natural look for awhile," Kyle's still a bit tongue-tied. He's swallowed like three times trying get some kind of talk out of his mouth.

"It's definitely the look for you," I say, helping him out. Kyle just nods repeatedly. I'd laugh, but I don't want to spoil this for them. They need these kinds of moments if they're ever going to move past the occasional hug and snuck touch.

"Well, thanks, I guess."

"You're gonna have to get better at taking compliments if you're going to keep running around like that, man," I tell him seriously. Jonas doesn't seem too thrilled about the idea. He looks to Kyle for guidance.

"I already said you look amazing," Kyle says with a shrug. Jonas looks down himself, clearly not seeing what we're seeing.

"I don't really look that different," Kyle huffs a bit.

"Which would be part of the point. You ALWAYS look great, this is just a little extra great," Jonas frowns.

"I'm just normal looking," Kyle and I snort at the same time.

"As the gayest one here, I'd like to state for the record that's like the most bogus thing I've ever heard. Take it from someone who knows - you're very hot." Jonas blushes and looks upset.

"It's not like that's a bad thing, Jonas," Kyle says gently.

"I know, it's just, I'm not used to..." Kyle walks over and puts his hands on Jonas's shoulders.

"Don't worry about it too much, like, the ugliness that is Carrots will repel most of the attention anyway. You should be safe," sensitive bastard. But I'll let him get away with it 'cause of the smile he got out of Jonas.

"That's a relief." They grin and I glare. It's a fun time all around.

The fun pretty much continues until we have to leave for school.

A second before we're out the door Kyle catches his hand and pulls Jonas towards him.

"Hey, Jonas, wait," he says as he does. Jonas smiles and allows himself to be drawn into a hug.

"I love Jonas," Kyle whispers into his ear.

"I love you too, Kyle," Jonas replies simply, warmly.

Trembling slightly, Kyle's hand reaches over to touch Jonas's face. They both (probably unconsciously) lean in, and suddenly they're kissing each other. You never saw anything as beautiful as that kiss. So much love, trust, and affection goes into it. It's a truly pure moment.

Before it can go from pure to like, porn, they break the kiss and after a few seconds, I lead Jonas out the door. He practically floats to school. I actually check a few times to make sure his feet are still on the ground. Who knew Kyle had it in him?

I take Jonas home for lunch. I doubt he would have made it through the afternoon otherwise. Luckily, Kyle's there as well. I glare at him right away, picking up from the last time we saw him as if it was only a minute, not hours, ago.

"Thanks a lot, Kyle, turn him into a blithering idiot all day and leave me with the mess," Kyle just grins, totally unapologetic. If he was talking, Jonas would probably be babbling stupidly. Kyle must rock at kissing. But I really don't want to be thinking about that so, ewww!

"You know you love it," so many of the old hits. It's payback all over the world. I got a taste of being Kyle about the advice, and now it's with the dealing. I mean, I do love it, just, you know, it's the principle of the thing (bells should be ringing here, people!). It's still weird to have our roles so totally reversed though.

"Whatever," Kyle laughs, and then turns his attention to Jonas.

"Hey," big with the shift in attitude. Brazen and bad ass to sweet and loving. I'm a fan of the change. So's Jonas.

"Hey," they start walking towards each other, little smiles on their faces.

Jonas leans in like he's gonna whisper something in Kyle's ear, and then he just blurts,

"Wanna like go have sex?" Jeez! Kyle and me both go totally red, and Jonas cracks up. "You guys make it too easy."

"You're dead, Wepeel," I say menacingly.

"Not funny, Jonas."

"I actually think it was EXTREMELY funny - you should have seen yourselves. Especially you, Kyle. All horrified. Like I was going to force myself on you right here," Kyle's down to minor blushing now, and I'm feeling my bodily functions coming back.

"Love's not doing much for him either," I say sort of privately to Kyle. He nods.

"And in this case, it's really a shame."

"You're both assholes. Now come here and give me a kiss, Kyle," Kyle's mood takes another dramatic shift, and he's quick to oblige.

It's their second (non-drunk, non-making fun of me) kiss, but it could just have easily been their first. It has the same, shy, tender newness. Not awkward, just something that's clearly very different and unique for them. It's a newness they're obviously treasuring and that I hope can last for them for awhile.

The afternoon is easier. I guess Jonas got his Kyle fix at lunch or whatever. I mean, there were still moony off into space staring episodes, and on more than one occasion he got called on in class when he probably wasn't even sure which one he was in, but better than the morning. I shudder to think what he would have been like if we hadn't gone home.

Easier yet is the walk home. The problem was keeping Jonas from bolting before the bell rang. We walk just slow enough for it not to be classified as running all the way home. Tragically, Kyle's not even there. Jonas goes into instant pout.

This lasts about 15 minutes before he shakes his head and goes, "What the hell is wrong with me?" That's the Jonas I know and love. I laugh.

"It's called being in love, dude," he wrinkles his brow.

"It kinda sucks, eh?" I laugh again.

"Sort of, yep," he smiles.

"In the really good way."

"I really hope you're not talking about what my depraved brain thinks you're talking about," Jonas freezes for a second, stupefied in horror.

"DUDE!" I laugh triumphantly.

"That was for lunch, asshole," Jonas shakes his head.

"It's on veggie."

"Honey - I'm home!" Jonas snaps to attention. So much for that.

"Kyle!" Kyle smiles.

"That's my name, feel free to wear it out," Jonas gets up and they pause, still with the new and shy, but then hug. I smile, but it hurts a bit. What can I say? I'm jealous. And I miss Celery. But I'm still smiling, so don't get all upset.

"So what did I miss?" Kyle asks, as both he and Jonas sit down.

"Nothing," Jonas says quickly. I smirk. Kyle's curiosity is piqued.

"Something good?" I grin.

"Tell him and die, Carrots," Jonas threatens.

I tell Kyle anyway. He laughs, and I survive.

"You totally deserved it," he informs Jonas without sympathy. "I'm just sorry I missed it," he sighs.

"It was a thing of beauty."

"New topic," I've got one, so, okay.

"Well actually, there is some stuff we need to talk about. Or like, stuff you guys need to think about, anyway,"

"Like?" Kyle asks.

"Like, Kara and the twins - you guys going to tell them? I mean, it's not something you're going to want to be hiding all the time, right?"

"Sure we'll tell them. Not like it's going to bother them."

"I don't know. I think the twins might freak a little."

"Why?"

"Yeah," Jonas continues in the same slightly abrasive tone. "They handle you and Celery fine," points for not using past tense, Jonas.

"It's like, a pattern though, if more than one of us is doing it. I'm just afraid they're going to think it like runs in the family or something."

"That would be bullshit, of course."

"I know that! I'm just like worried that since they're still pretty young or whatever, David and Jon might not feel the same," with the help of Jonas stroking his hand, Kyle calms down a bit and actually takes a second to think about what I was saying.

"Maybe so, but we'll talk to them. Explain it doesn't work like that and everything. They're not stupid, and Mom's been insane about teaching them about gay people, so it shouldn't be too hard."

"That's probably true," I say, nodding.

"What about Kara?" Jonas reminds us.

"I don't think it'll matter any to her," I voice my opinion.

"Yeah, Kara'll be cool. She's so young still, she doesn't care about stuff like that yet. The fact that anybody is in love on the other hand - that's always cause for celebration in her books," Kyle concludes.

"So we're good then? Out we go?"

"Guess," Kyle seems suddenly less sure of himself.

"No matter what, they're not going to think less of you," I assure him gently. He smiles.

"Yeah, I hope not," Jonas is starting to look upset.

"What's there to think less of you about? I'm something to be ashamed of?" Surprise and panic hit Kyle hard and fast.

"What?! No, of course not!" Jonas smoulders for a second more, and then softens.

"Alright, I mean, like whatever."

"Jonas," Kyle pleads softly.

"It's fine, Kyle," Jonas says, mostly normally. Kyle looks at me, and I shrug. I don't know what the hell is going on.

" 'Cause, you know I didn't mean it like that," Jonas nods tersely.

"Yeah, I know. Just forget about it."

"I don't-"

"Kyle. It's fine. I'm fine. Let's drop it," Kyle nods, and we try to get back to work, but things remain strained and uncomfortable.

The real blow comes when Jonas gets up to leave after he's finished his homework. He never leaves anymore. Dinner with us happens at least twice a week, and always on Mondays 'cause his parents have dinner with friends every Monday night.

Kyle's lost, trying to think of what to do.

"I've got to go home," Jonas says, like he can't think of anything else, shrugging pathetically. This is so bad on so many levels.

"Why?" You wouldn't think a voice could crack so much on just one little word.

"I just gotta," Jonas says, not even looking at Kyle anymore. Kyle looks for a second like he's going to go over to Jonas and do something, but instead he closes his eyes for a really long time and then turns to start walking up the stairs.

"Okay. Whatever you need."

They both hesitate, but neither looks back. Jonas is out the door and Kyle's up the stairs and I'm left standing at the foot of the stairs right by the door, no idea what to do. Who to go after.

I decide on Jonas. I know where Kyle is, better to get to the one on the move. I guess he ran or something, 'cause Jonas is already way down the street once I'm out on the sidewalk. And like, I didn't even put my shoes on. My feet are going to freeze, but that's really not the most important thing right now. I sprint a little, and catch up with Jonas. We start walking side by side but he's all acting like I'm not there.

"Jonas," he doesn't look at me. "Jonas," I repeat more fiercely.

"What?" he snaps finally.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"You lie as well as you take compliments, Jonas," and as one hopes you recall, he's crap at that.

"I'm fine."

"Sure you are. Just like you told Kyle I don't know how many times."

"I meant it then and I mean it now."

"And I said you're a crappy liar. I meant it then and I certainly mean it now. Stop walking," I grab hold of him and force him to. "Stop lying," I look directly into his avoiding eyes. "And tell me what's going on," he holds strong for a minute, two, three and just when I'm about to lose MY resolve, Jonas wavers. The wavering continues until he finally cracks. He slumps down against a nearby tree. Man, I'm starting to hate elm trees.

"He could crush me in a second, Carrots," he whispers, eyes troubled, face contorted. "In a few words he could totally destroy me. I love him SO much and I don't know if I can handle that. Feeling this way, being so... vulnerable all the time. I can't..." his breath grows ragged. "I told you once I don't understand how you and Celery just trusted each other so completely and seemingly so effortlessly. I didn't get it then, and now, suddenly, when I'm supposed to be feeling it, I still don't get it. I thought, it'll just fall into place. When you fall in love like that, then you'll understand. But I don't. I LOVE Kyle. I believe he loves me, but, it isn't changing how I feel. I don't know how you guys do it," he's in actual anguish here. And I still have NO idea what to do.

"I don't know how we do it either - we just... do it. A lot of it, I guess, comes from the fact that we've been practising pretty much all our lives. It was strange at first, and it took awhile, but loving each other has come pretty naturally to us. The open, acknowledging part, I mean. I can't tell you how to act or what you should be feeling. You have to decide for yourselves how to make things work. I can tell you one thing though, Jonas, and I hope you'll take it to heart - you and Kyle aren't me and Celery. You're not supposed to or even expected to have a relationship like ours. I don't mean you can't love him as much, but it doesn't have to be the same. There are a lot of different kinds of love, and ways of showing it. It's not `be exactly like Carrots and Celery or fail as a couple'. Don't measure what you and Kyle have against how things are for me and Celery. You can't find happiness by being just like us, you have to find your own way."

"And if we can't?"

"I believe you will."

"What if I don't?"

"Jonas, where is this coming from? You've been so happy, I SAW it in you, you've been so filled up with joy since Saturday. What's changed?"

"I guess it's just been the euphoria wearing off and the cynical pessimist side of me coming back."

"What's up with that side anyway? For most of the time I've known you, you've been like the most centred, at peace person I know," Jonas laughs sort of harshly.

"Well, being at peace with your personal situation doesn't always mean you're doing cartwheels about it. I wasn't the happiest person alive, but I was content with my situation - more than content after I got close with you guys and met Kyle. I guess I just liked things the way they



were. Everything was so comfortable and familiar. I knew there were places I could still go, heights I hadn't reached, but I also knew the risks. I was content to leave the higher heights to the realm of dreams and enjoy what I had. Now everything's changing again and I'm afraid the risks are going to come crashing down around me. You think you know what it's like to have fears that are just in your head eat you alive, Carrots - but you have no idea. You've never been this close. I really might lose Kyle because of what I'm feeling. I'm so afraid I'm really not sure what I'm going to do - if I'll be able to go to him and talk and work things out."

What do you say to that? This is so beyond me, it's the farthest thing from funny.

"Get up, Jonas," whoa. Didn't see that coming.

"Kyle?" Jonas' head snaps up and he blinks a few times, not really believing what he's seeing.

"I'll spare you the crack about no - it's your fairy godmother. Just get up." Almost like he's just too confused to do anything else but meekly follow orders, Jonas does as Kyle commanded.

"What are you doing here?" Kyle makes a growling sound deep in his throat.

"What do you THINK I'm doing here. I'm in love with you, and right now you're being an idiot. There's really no other way to put it. I know that you're going through something right now, and that things are scary and confusing, but you need to talk to ME about it. I mean, you need to get over it, but first, we need to talk about it. No offence, Carrots, you know I love you to death, but this is just not your field. This is something you can't help much more with. Thanks for going after Jonas, I needed those minutes to get my own head back on my shoulders, but I have to take it from here."

I smile. "Kay, good." He goes back to looking at Jonas. "Take this step with me, okay, Jonas? Trust me enough to go back to the house with me, let me show you that it's okay. I love you - you said you believed that - well, put that belief into action. Please," Jonas takes the extended hand, and Kyle begins leading him back to the house.

Many paces behind, I follow, once again, in awe of my brother.

But not the surprised kind. More like the 'he's done it again' kind. What you've just witnessed is a classic example of Kyle at work. I know because of the countless times it's been me at the receiving end of Kyle's personal version of tender loving care. With Celery, things are pretty mellow. He'll talk you down slowly from a freak-out, with patience and calm, until you're ready to climb back down to happiness and sanity on your own. Kyle's style is more grabbing you by the neck, yanking you down and leaving the calm, talking things out part until later. It's a bit painful sometimes, or at

least hard to get used to - but there's no denying it's effective.

They don't come down for dinner, or at any other point in the evening, but in the morning, when Jonas comes walking down the stairs behind Kyle, he's like, well, butter. There's a blissful, dreamy look on his face far surpassing anything that came before it, and I think it's safe to say he's reached a whole new level of being at peace.

While Jonas calls his parents to reassure them he really was just over at our house, I walk up to Kyle and just go, "What did you DO?" Kyle laughs.

"Nothing," I roll my eyes and give him a very dry, 'yeah right' look. "I swear. We just talked and talked and it was really nice and comforting."

"You talked?"

"We talked," he smiles.

"What did you say?"

"Come on, bro, that's like confidential or whatever. But he's better, and I'm better because of it. Things were happening a little too fast, I think, and it left a lot of room for doubt and worry. We had to take care of that, and last night, we did." Fully convinced, I grin.

"That's great, man."

"I'm happy to see you approve."

"Approve of what?" What?! They're never up this early.

"Hey guys," I say, hoping it'll give Kyle enough time to get his heart out of his throat.

"Nice stalling," Jon says dismissively. "Approve of what?"

"Uh," Kyle says brilliantly.

"Er," I keep up the level of excellence.

"Out with it," Dave prods impatiently.

"It's something I need to talk to you guys about, but I want to wait until Jonas gets back, okay?" Kyle asks. They shrug.

We all head to the kitchen, and it doesn't take long for Jonas to wrap his call up. He rolls his eyes outrageously and mutters, "parents." Crazy ones at that. Every kid in this room knows what that's about.

"So, what's up?" I wonder, are all 14-year-olds this blunt?

"Something's up?" Jonas asks, innocent 'cause he doesn't know what's about to be discussed. Kyle raises his eyebrows and Jonas quickly gets the message. "Oh, right."

Kyle gets right to the point.

"Guys, don't be worried or anything, and hopefully you can just be happy for us, but Jonas and I are a couple,"

"Of idiots," Dave says, shaking his head. "We already knew about that."

"What?" Kyle half gasps. Jon rolls his eyes, and Dave huffs.

"Like, please. For one thing, we do spend SOME time at home. We see the way you look at each other - all moony or whatever, and anyway, we heard you guys talking and stuff last night," Jonas does a nice impression of a fire engine at `and stuff' and Kyle chokes back another gasp.

"What were you doing - listening at the door?" I ask, not understanding how they could have heard anything from their room way down at the other end of the hall. My room's closer and I didn't hear a thing. No talking and definitely no `stuff'. They grin.

"Dudes, not really?!" Jonas is comically (to all those not him anyway) horrified.

They shrug.

"We were just passing by, wondering how come you didn't show up for dinner, and like, heard stuff," Jon explains.

"What kind of stuff?" Kyle asks nervously. They get disgusted looks on their faces.

"Eww! Gross, not THAT kind of stuff. Just like you guys saying `I love you' and maybe like kissing," Dave's still crunching his face in distaste. I'm pretty grossed myself. Nobody wants to think about that kind of thing when it comes to their brother. I don't care who you are. That's just plain gross.

"Well, just, don't do that anymore, alright?" Kyle asks, still clearly uncomfortable with the whole thing. Make that Kyle and everyone else. Actually, the twins seem to be the only ones handling this well.

"We promise."

"Yeah, like what do you think we are anyway? Pervs or something?"

"No, just don't do it." Kyle takes a minute to regroup. "Did you say you knew and are okay with it?"

"Duh. We don't care about that kind of thing. The fact that we're cool with Carrots was sort of like a clue, you know?" Kyle smiles. They're certainly growing up to be little smart asses just like their big brothers. I wonder if Kara's going to be this lippy.

"You never know about stuff like that. Anyway, I'm glad everything's cool," they nod.

"But confidentially," Jon whispers to Jonas, "We think YOU could do a LOT better," Jonas laughs, but then grows serious. Looking at Kyle thoughtfully, stroking his chin.

"You know, I really could," Everyone (naturally not including Kyle) busts.

"Hey! You're not allowed to make fun of me anymore!" he protests.

"EXCUSE me?" Jonas scoffs. "I'm allowed to make even MORE fun of you now."

"Yeah, sorry, Kyle. That's how it works," I say nodding in agreement.

>From there, it's pretty much all with the fun. Breakfast type foods get consumed, jokes, insults, and all that other good stuff get exchanged, and eventually I trick Jonas into leaving the house and we get to school.

That afternoon, Jonas is kinda bummed 'cause there's no Kyle expected, but then he shows up anyway - late - but as the two people at the back who were paying attention will know - we weren't sure he was going to come at all, so no one's mad. It always warms my heart to see how happy Jonas gets whenever Kyle walks into a room, which he does a stellar example of this time. The only problem is, it also tends to hurt a little, too much of a reminder of Celery.

Kyle's not much like Celery however, and he usually manages to break the mood. I think he learned that from Jonas. Moment breaking. That time is no different.

"Helllloooo lunch." Told ya.

Jonas blushes crimson and I just snort. Once he's recovered, Jonas gives Kyle the finger. His response was to snuggle down beside him and make sad little puppy dog noises until Jonas finally can't take it anymore and bursts out laughing.

It's in that moment I realize something very important. They're going to be even more impossible REALLY going out and loving each other than they ever were when they were only joking around. Lucky me.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Sixteen  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Tue, 10 Jun 2003 16:10:54 -0500

Time goes by, you know? Well, of course you do. There are songs about it even. It sort of tends to go whether you're having fun or not, despite what that expression tells us. It goes by a little better when you're having fun, is all. Life's almost back to being good again. I'm as happy as I'll ever be without Celery right here with me, and that's not even that unhappy. Like, the missing is still intense, but the betterness has continued. Nights are still the worst, lying in the dark with nothing to think about but how much I wish he was there, and we still cry sometimes for no reason on the phone, but Christmas is getting so close you can taste the commercialism in the air, and off in the distance, if you listen real close, you can almost always hear tinny carols coming from somewhere.

Things are going well for Jonas and Kyle, and that's a huge contributing factor to my good cheer. They tend to be kind of volatile sometimes, and there are occasional clashes resulting in yelling and swearing, but that's mostly a joke. And even when it's for real, it's never about anything that lasts. They're big on not letting the sun go down on their anger. If it didn't gross me out so much to think about it, I'd say I bet they fight so much just for the making up part afterwards.

They're tight though - even with the volatile. As close as they ever were and growing ever more confident in their relationship and each other. Jonas is getting over his trust issues with the help of Kyle's own brand of comfort and assurance, and they're increasingly less weirded by the two guys thing.

And really, in most of the observable ways, they're staying pretty close to the way they've always been. I mean, I told you about that whole hello lunch thing. That's the kind of stuff they're ALWAYS pulling these days. They've just been their normal, insane selves, but to the like nth degree, and adding in the fact that they're in love with each other. They're so connected, the amount of evil they can get up to is extreme. It's like they're them to the max all the time, so you end up with Kyle and Jonas at either their best or worst depending on who you are. I complain about it some, but as you may have noticed, I often whine about stuff I really actually love and enjoy. Like, I love those guys. And they're so HAPPY most of the time - it catches on fast.

Not to say everything's perfect or whatever. I mean, you have no idea how weird it is to have to start giving Jonas and Kyle PRIVATE time. I mean, there have always been times when they went off and did their own thing, but this is like not that kind of private time. This is the people in love private time. They really need it too, 'cause well, it's still something

they're getting used to, and also, they don't really like to do too much of the love stuff in front of me. It sort of tends to make me a little depressed. Missing Celery and everything. I wouldn't like crank-out on them or anything, I just get a little glum or whatever. So they don't like to like, rub my face in it or something. Not like they act totally straight around each other or anything. They just aren't likely to start making out in front of me.

Anyway, when they're having their time, I often end up hanging out with Kaleb. In the totally platonic - he might as well be my mother, there's that much sexual attraction - friendly kind of way. So don't even worry about it. There is a problem though. And it's not Kaleb. It's Shane. When we hang out it usually ends up being me, Kaleb, Shane, and sometimes Matt and Aaron. But it sort of hurts to be around Shane. I mean, when I'm around him it's like he's all looking like Celery, acting like Celery. Sometimes I let myself get really carried away and it's almost like he IS Celery. This doesn't like fill me with the desire to jump Shane and start declaring my love or anything crazy like that, it just makes missing Celery hurt more. 'Cause, Shane may be a lot LIKE Celery, but he isn't Celery. There's just some indefinable difference that's the line between head over heels in love and simple friendship.

With me, it seems like everything always goes back to Celery. No matter what it is, at some point, my thinking will round back to him. I like it that way though, even if sometimes it hurts. It's how it should be, it's how I know it is with him, and it's one of the ways we're staying connected.

But anyway, getting back to Kaleb and those guys for a minute. I really like hanging out with them, they're a great and fun bunch of guys. Like, I always knew I could really like Kaleb if we ever had a chance of getting together as real friends, but the others are great too. Matt and Aaron are a riot, and Shane's super sweet and kind. He's actually even quieter than Celery, but whenever he does joke around, it's hilarious. Matt and Aaron though, there's nothing quiet about them. They're VERY straight, but that's just funny to me. The very in capitals is because of their rampant girl chasing. It's all mostly a joke, or at least kind of, but the guys are lady killers. New girl friends every week, each hotter than the last type deal. The girls seem to have fun though, so, who am I to judge? They goof on us about converting back sometimes, you know, pointing out supposedly hot girls and all that stuff, but they're really totally supportive, especially to Shane. He's like a kid brother type to them, even though we're all the same age.

Kaleb and I hang out at school some now too. Lunch I still do with just Jonas, Brian, and Alex, but we see each other at breaks and stuff again. And like, in class. It's great to not have to like worry about him feeling like he has to ignore me anymore. You know how I said way back when

I didn't think we would ever be friends? This is one of those times I sure am happy to have been wrong.

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On a cool Friday evening near the end of November Kaleb and I walk back to my house together after working on an article about being gay and out in high school for the paper. Jan Chong, the editor, sort of strong-armed us into it, but it was actually sort of fun.

We enter the house laughing, talking and generally being preoccupied with ourselves. As is pretty much my instinct and routine, I head straight for the living room. It's kind of like home central, you know? The epicentre or whatever. Usually something going on, someone around - oh dear god!

"NICE!" Kaleb exclaims appreciatively, causing Jonas and Kyle to spring apart. I'm still a bit tongue tied and wide eyed. I'm getting more used to seeing them kiss, but I've NEVER seen them kiss like that. Like, WHOA.

"Jeez, man," Kyle says, barely recovering from the surprise. Jonas is scowling. Not 'cause of what we broke up though, I don't think. I'm pretty sure he still doesn't like Kaleb for some reason.

"Sorry, guys, we were just like passing through."

"Where's Shane?" If you heard his tone, you'd get why I don't think Jonas likes Kaleb.

"He's at work," Kaleb says, shrugging. Either oblivious to Jonas's open dislike or choosing to ignore it.

"We were going to listen to some music and stuff, probably not as interesting as what you guys were doing, soooo... I'm guessing it's safe to say you wouldn't want to join us?"

Kyle is about to give me the 'and how' when Jonas stands up, "No, we'll come along, but let's go up to Kyle's - there's more room there," he's not even like TRYING to be subtle. Like, what's up with that? How could he think I would mess around on Celery? I'm not even like capable of that. Jonas should know me that well after all this time. I'm going to have to talk to him about this later.

Despite the total rage vibes shooting from Jonas the entire time, chilling out and listening to tunes in Kyle's bachelor type pad ends up being pretty cool. Kyle's always good for the ever fun verbal sparring constant jokes thing, and his like-me-ness kept Kaleb right up there with us. If Jonas had just gotten off his pissed-off horse and joined in, things would have been perfect. Well, I shouldn't get ahead of myself like that. I mean, PERFECT



is still and will always be a word reserved only for times that include Celery, but you get what I mean. As perfect as non-Celery time gets.

Once Kaleb leaves I grab Jonas by the shoulders and immediately proceed to march him up to my room, after curtly asking Kyle to give us a minute to talk.

"What's your problem, man?" I ask directly, turning back to face him after shutting the door behind me. He shrugs sullenly.

"I don't think you should be hanging out with those guys."

"Why not? Dude, Kaleb is NOT interested in me anymore, not even like a little bit."

"I know that. I didn't mean just him - all of them."

"Why?" I'm totally baffled about all this. There's some exasperation going on too.

"Well, because. Celery doesn't know him and it's like you're getting in with this whole new group that none of us fit in with." None of US?

"Jonas - are you feeling left out?" I ask in complete disbelief. He sort of looks away and nodding, lets out a sigh.

"You're like never around anymore."

"Dude! All I've been trying to do is give you and Kyle your space! You know - private time?"

"We see you Sundays and then maybe twice during the week. Even at school you're off with Kaleb a lot of the time. Kyle and I don't need THAT much private time."

"Jonas, I'm sorry if you felt like I was ignoring you. I really was just trying to give you and Kyle room to do your own thing."

He gives me a kind of resigned 'I get what you're saying' half-nod, but then continues, "It's like everything's changing all over again! I'm so happy about the changes with Kyle - it's everything I ever wanted - but I never thought things would change so much with you too." Big time aversion to change - even if it's good change - is one of the major things in common between Jonas and me. I know what he's going through and it bums me out that I'm the one responsible for it.

"I don't know what to say, man..." I'm not even sure he hears me.

"And I like wanted you to be around, you know - to see what's happening with us. I want you to like share what we're experiencing and becoming," I smile.

"I want that too, Jonas, but sometimes."

"It hurts too much 'cause of Celery?" I sigh.

"Yeah. I've stayed away as much for that as the space giving, but it hasn't worked. If it's not you guys, it's something else. Everything reminds me of Celery - makes me miss him more, wish he was around. It was stupid of me to think I could get away from that by not hanging out with you and Kyle as much," Jonas regards me sadly.

"Is there anything we can do?"

"Nothing you haven't already been doing. I'm the one who has to change some things around. Huh. AGAIN," I shrug, "I miss you guys a lot and I want us to get back closer to what we were - but I'm not going to entirely drop Kaleb either. Couldn't you try to like him? I bet you really would if you gave him a chance. Shane's great too - so are Matt and Aaron. How 'bout it, eh?" Jonas smiles.

"Okay. I guess. Let's start with just school though at first, alright? Just Kaleb and then we'll see about the rest of it," I grin.

"That's great, man. You really will like them though, I think. Like today - I bet you would have had fun if you hadn't been so busy being a bitch," Jonas smacks me on the back of my head.

"I don't know what I was thinking, missing a loser like you," I laugh.

It's good to be back.

Getting Jonas to warm up to Kaleb goes surprising well. I mean, I knew they'd like each other if they ever got around to giving each other a chance, I just had my doubts about that happening. But after only a few lunches and the giving of hall and classroom recognition, they're already almost what you'd call friends.

I'm glad about that, but I'm also just glad to be back more with Jonas and Kyle. Spending time with them again's sort of made me realize how much I missed it. Among other things, they're like a tie to Celery, you know? A big part of the world that includes him, past, present, and future. Hiding from that didn't stop me from missing him, and embracing them again hasn't really either, but at least I'm among friends, the people I love. Kaleb, Shane, Matt, and Aaron are my friends too now, but it's different. They're REAL friends, but, I guess, they're just not brothers, you know? That's

the only way I can think to describe the distinction.

Now that I'm more into it, I'm loving watching Kyle and Jonas develop as a couple. It's all the stuff I told you before and more. They're getting to be so that it's all very natural with them, but somehow they still have this huge level of newness and discovery all the time. I love being around them when they're like that. Even the hurt is almost like good hurt. I've decided I shouldn't mind it when something reminds me of Celery even if it does hurt. It's good to be reminded.

As if I could forget!

The fact that we talk or IM and e-mail everyday helps keep me sane too, and it's really what helps me the most, as much as I know I'm indebted to my friends and family here. We're learning a lot about ourselves, I think, over this separation. It's helping us to like shed what's not important and focus in on what is. In some ways, being apart has really given our relationship focus and direction. We know how important it is to work at it, because we know how dangerous not doing that can be. We've seen how bad things can get and it's really made both of us do the sit back and look thing, realizing the things that needed changing. Not just with the apart us, we're learning lessons that will help us when we're back together again as well. If given the choice, I'd still probably choose to have kept the slightly weaker us and Celery by my side, but since I never got a choice, it's a really good feeling to know that we're stronger for this time away from each other. There are a million scenarios in my mind where it could have all fallen apart, but so far there's just been too much love around us for that to happen, and I believe we'll stay strong and make it the rest of the way.

But okay, I admit it, this whole confidence kick could, possibly, have something to do with the fact that he'll be here in 14 days (!!!!), so don't get too proud of me and my newfound depth and maturity.

Everyone else is bugging about Christmas almost as much as me. About Celery coming home. Kyle and Jonas, Mom and Dad, Kara, the twins. The whole house is getting all Christmased up, we have the coolest tree ever. You can just tell the olds are going crazy with the present buying, when they're not going crazy trying to manage the bakery. We all help, but it's still insane. We close Christmas Eve, day, and Boxing day, but the orders are still nuts. It's not like killing the spirit though. It's fun working in the bakery, the whole pack of us. Somehow even doing millions of dishes can be fun when you've got people like Kyle around. I really love my other siblings too. I feel like I've kind of left them out of all this, but they're really important to me. It's just, with the age gap the way it is, and how close the twins are, we've always had these groups. Me and Kyle, the twins, Kara off with her friends. But when we come together, I'm always reminded how much I love all of them. The twins are as freaky as ever, and

their mouths get smarter daily, but it's like they're a happy reminder of my youth. Listen to me. They're 3 years younger than me. My youth. I don't know what I'm talking about. They have an innocence though, that I'd like to think I used to have and remember fondly. Don't know if it's true or not, but it's fun to think it anyway. And Kara's a SWEETHEART! She reminds me of Celery (yeah, I know, everything does! But this is valid!) She's shy like him, but she's got a sly sense of humour that always catches you at the weirdest times. It always takes me by surprise, and I'll look at her sometimes, wondering if she really said what I think she just said, and if she meant it to be funny. She'll always give me a grin, and I'll have to laugh all over again, knowing she did.

I don't remember feeling this excited about Christmas since I was a little kid - okay, since ever. It's such a high. Instead of being all miserable, missing him, I'm all charged up, knowing that soon he's going to be here. Like, when I'm trying to fall asleep at night, instead of the loneliness, instead of having the fear and doubts creep up, all I am is excited for the time when he'll be in bed with me. I'm not even talking about that kind of excited, you dirty person. Just like, normal excited. Little kid waiting for their birthday present excited. The something good's coming and you don't know if you can stand waiting for it anymore kind of excited.

Any communication with him is getting to be outrageous. We can't carry on a conversation (or even a chat) coherently. Whatever we try to talk about gets filled up with us moaning to each other about how we can't take the waiting anymore. One night, when we're chatting, he writes, "I need to touch you - soon," and I'm blown away. Celery's not the kind of guy who can just up and say stuff like that. I'm way less reserved, and I have trouble. It meant a lot, having him say that. I of course replied in kind, knowing exactly what he meant. This is getting to be too much. I'm happy-excited-anxious, but that doesn't mean I'm not also insane-anxious. I can't sit still much these days. I have to be doing something, or I'm bound to be going crazy. Sometimes I do the crazy thing whether I'm busy or not.

I'm either all the way turned on or all the way turned off. Hyper or listless. Not bad listless, just, I don't care what's really going on around me so long as time is passing relatively painlessly listlessly. Not the same kind as before Thanksgiving though. Not the really depressive, couldn't care less about anything kind. I just, need time to be passing. Right now I can't offer a huge lot of anything else. Everyone understands. Is cool about it. It's nice to be understood and accommodated, but Jonas is still on 'only to an extent' duty. He doesn't let me slip too far away from them. I love him for that. I also love him for a million other things, it's just nice to be able to acknowledge that I appreciate what he's doing instead of being a loser and resenting it.

Sunday afternoon again, not doing much. I'm fine with that. In the mood for

it. Hanging out, no activities. It's my kind of thing. I'm good at it. I'm good at lots of things that don't take much effort.

I'm alone too, which is sort of out of the ordinary, but I'm actually really enjoying it. The peace and quiet can be quite enjoyable when you do it right. I like to take my peace and quiet with whiny rock music and at least vaguely depressing literature. I'm sort of a wallower, what can I say.

Suddenly, my peace, quiet, and emo comes to an abrupt end when I hear the front door slam, and Jonas shout, "Grachny brachny!" that's dirty bastard in NADSAT. Jonas often likes to swear in Clockwork Orange tongue.

I get up, walk out into the hall, and see him fuming in the front by the stairs. Kyle must still be outside or something.

"Fighting again, I see?" Jonas shrugs, unconcerned. "You guys do that a lot." He shrugs again.

"It's just a joke."

"Most of the time, right?" He smiles ruefully.

"Right."

"What was it about this time?" I ask, walking with him back to the living room and sitting down.

"Nothing of consequence."

"I must know," he grins.

"Get used to disappointment," the grin, I'm guessing, is because I picked up a PB reference without bursting into tears, and what's more was able to continue it. Behold the magic of the happiness pact at work.

We don't do anything more and in less than five minutes Kyle arrives, grinning.

"Still mad?" he asks Jonas teasingly. Jonas glares at him, but his eyes are laughing.

"Come here, idiot." Kyle trots over and pecks Jonas's cheek.

I don't know if I'll ever get fully used to seeing my brother kissing another guy, especially Jonas, but the not quite used to it I am is a more happy feeling than negative. When they kiss it's like every time is the first time, and it always has that adorable, slightly awkward feel of their

very first. The way they kiss sometimes reminds me of two straight guys wondering where the girl's parts are, which I guess is sort of what they are. Not that I think they picture the other as the girl to be able to kiss or anything. They're both guys and they know it. I guess I'm just not explaining this very well. Oh well. You never listen to me anyway, and hardly ever understand me when you do, whether I'm making sense or not. Why mess with a good thing?

"Let's go see a movie," Jonas suddenly suggests.

A movie? We never go see movies.

"Like, in the theatre?" He shrugs.

"Well, yeah," I look at Kyle. He seems fine with the idea.

"So, what movie?"

"Doesn't matter."

"Doesn't matter?"

"Nope."

"There isn't something you want to see?"

"I don't know, I'm sure there's something."

"If you don't know what it is you want to see, how do you know you want to go to a movie?"

"I just do. It's something I haven't done in awhile. Renting movies is more your guys' style I know, but I like going to the theatre every once in awhile. Getting that whole movie experience, you know?" No. But hey, let's go anyway. I haven't gone to a movie in awhile either. Might even be some kind of crazy fun.

"Okay, so we're going to go see a movie. Someone get the paper at least so we can see what's playing."

"I don't really care what's playing," I roll my eyes. I know he's getting at something, trying get me to understand it's all about the experience or whatever, but come on.

"We don't want to like, hang around the theatre for hours, waiting for something to start, you know?" Jonas gives in a little.

"Okay, get the paper," I nod at Kyle. He sighs, but obeys.

"So, what's the plan? We find the right time, who cares what the movie is?" Jonas nods. It's his plan. I only shrug. I'll leave decisions up to him.

"We've got a 3:20 showing here, that's about right, huh?"

"Perfect, let's go," Jonas takes the lead, and Kyle and I follow.

"You know what this is about?" I whisper with a sideways glance. He grins, shrugging.

"It's Jonas, just a weird idea for fun, I think," I nod.

"Probably so."

The ride goes by fast. Jonas and Kyle play some silly game, duelling radio stations, seeing which one can find the worst song. Jonas wins when he hits "Skater Boi" by Avril Lavigne. I shudder when I even THINK of that horrible song. And I'm not even going to go into how much spelling boy with an "i" annoys me. I'm alone in the back, and it's a good thing the ride's short, 'cause I can't take too long back there alone before I start flipping out, missing Celery. The back used to be so cool. Now it's just lonely. Like so many things. But as always, those kinds of thoughts get pushed away. No time to feel sorry for myself now. We're going to some movie, right? Having fun.

Anyway, he'll be here soon. 14 days. Nothing to stress about.

In line for whatever movie starts at 3:20, a rather surprising thing happens. It surprises me anyway. Jonas is the first in line of all of us, and Kyle's right behind him. The second we get in line Kyle's arm slips around Jonas's waist, and Jonas leans calmly into him. Surprising. Like, we're in the middle of a mall, standing in line for some movie. Strangers everywhere. This makes the situation unpredictable, dangerous. But they're acting like it's nothing. Everything perfectly natural here. Wait a minute. I see what's going on. Jonas and Kyle are straight. What I mean is, they haven't grown up, being told they had to hide their feelings, guard their looks and actions. They're used to being able to freely express emotion and affection any time they want. A straight guy doesn't worry about whether or not it's safe to be hugging his girlfriend in line. They probably don't even get it.

Some guy behind us mutters, 'fags'. I hate those loud enough for everyone to hear mutters. It's like, why bother trying to sound like you're saying something under your breath, if it's going to be so loud everyone can hear it? It's just stupid. Anyway, Kyle and Jonas turn to me, all concerned, thinking the guy was talking to me. I almost laugh.

"It's not funny, man, he shouldn't talk to you like that," I shake my head, still biting my lip against the laughter that's building.

"Faggots!" the mutterer shouts. Kyle's about to charge when I grab his shoulder.

"Dude, don't bother."

"I'm not going to let him talk about you like that," I didn't want to tell them, 'cause I figured it'd shake them up, but like, something has to be done.

"He wasn't talking about me."

"So who was he talking about?" Kyle asks, still looking pissed. I sigh.

"You, dude, you and Jonas," Kyle looks at me confusedly for a second, before looking down Jonas's form. His brow is still knitted.

"We're like, holding hands, Kyle," Jonas says, shaking his head. I can tell he only just figured it out.

"So?" I had no idea it was possible to be this oblivious about something. He still doesn't get it. I'm thinking Kyle took my whole, `don't think of him as another guy, just as Jonas' lesson a little too much to heart.

"So we're a couple of guys! First we were hugging and now we're holding hands. What do you think that makes us, dude?" Kyle's starting to get pissed off all over again.

"Not fags, that's for sure," Jonas and I sigh. We've reached the ticket box by now. The poor kid behind the screen is looking weirded and nervous. I smile. I mean, it's not his fault, why complicate his day?

"Three tickets for..." I check the time.

Oh sweet fancy Moses. Maid in Manhattan?

I turn back to Jonas and Kyle. Jonas is now trying to calm Kyle down. "Dudes, the 3:20 movie is Maid in Manhattan - you couldn't pay me to see this shit." They stare for a second, and then Kyle laughs.

"Maid in Manhattan?" I nod, starting to understand why this is funny. Jonas is catching on too.

"Droogs, I don't even want to see anything anymore, let's just go home," Jonas gets out between chuckles. Through chuckles of our own, we nod.



On the way out, the mutterer calls us all fags, and I give him the finger while Kyle hugs Jonas defiantly closer.

"You're going to hell!" he shouts as we reach the doors.

"See you there then!" I shout back, following Jonas and Kyle out.

As we're getting into the car, Kyle stops for a second, grinning at us, "What I want to know is - what was THAT guy doing standing alone in line for Maid in Manhattan?" There's a moment of silence, and we all crack up.

Good times.

We keep having more of them. A lot of the time I spend all over the place emotionally, but there's nothing new, strange or unexpected about that. I miss him all the time, so the weird moments are always lurking ready to show themselves. That's okay though. I'm all about embracing missing him now. It's actually going quite well. In fact I miss him more everyday. It's getting too close. His arrival. I can taste it. I really can. I can see him, feel him, all that in the most painful almost way. It's days now. You hear that? Days. Not months and not weeks. DAYS.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Seventeen  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Thu, 12 Jun 2003 20:39:45 -0500

My brain waits until the exact minute I see him standing in the airport - until my first sight of Celery - to start laughing at me. It's definitely not your 'laughing with me' variety of laughter. It's a mocking laugh, full of ridicule. What a sad, deluded creature I was to think I've been okay these past months. Okay without him. Yeah, I've been okay. Okay if your heart has died maybe. Okay if you've been split in two. What about everything I've done, felt? Was none of it real? It felt real. But was it? Maybe Celery has to be there with me, experiencing the same things, for them to be real. Maybe that's what proves I've really done them, really felt what I think I've felt. I glance over at Jonas and Kyle. They're holding hands. So that happened at least. But did it happen the way I remember it? Did I do what I think I did? I don't trust my own memory. I turn my head away from them, back to look at Celery. His smile is fading now. Anxiety for me is replacing it. I start to cry and I can't move. This isn't how I wanted it to be. I wanted to run, you know? Jump into his arms and attack him with kisses, cause a scene. That kind of thing. Not this. He approaches until we're together, until his arms are around me, but I keep crying. Did he succeed where I failed? Is he realizing the same things I am as we stand here like this?

I can't tell you how long I cried, or how we all got out of the airport and into the Le Baron. I do know that I calmed down about halfway back, not back to normal, but not sobbing anymore. Able to look at him again. He smiles at me, glad to see the tears have stopped.

"Hi," simple as that. Nothing about my ruining our meeting, no questions, no pushing, just, 'hi'. And a smile. Happy to see me.

"Hi," mine's more loaded. The one word where I wanted to apologize, explain. But not here. I'm glad Kara didn't come along. Or the twins. It would have upset them. Of course, upset is what everyone else seems to be, so they'd be among friends. Only Celery seems okay. Why? Playing serene for me? Being my rock one more time as if the million other times he has before weren't enough?

"I love you, baby," he kisses my forehead, and my whole body shakes. My whole being longs for him. I lean into him like a small child, or a kitten, wanting to be petted. He strokes my hair and hugs me, which is better.

I realize happily that I'm not expected to talk. That he's fine with silence. Right now I'm not concerned with pleasing anyone but Celery, and if he's willing to be patient, then okay. We can just enjoy what's

happening now, being together, and worry about before later.

Later comes sooner than I would have liked. As soon as we get up to my room in fact. We were supposed to just be dropping off his stuff and then heading right back downstairs, but it doesn't really happen like that.

The whole, his arms around my waist as he asks thing softens the blow, but still, the facing my issues part is much less fun.

"No pressure, but those weren't exactly 'gee I'm happy to see Celery!' tears back there."

"No, they weren't."

"So, the no pressure thing stands, but can we talk about it?" I take in a deep breath, trying to calm myself by getting the smell of him into my system.

"Couldn't we wait? We could talk a little about other stuff first. Kiss and share I missed you?" He smiles.

"We could, but the enjoyment level might go down due to the fact that I'm going to be worrying and you'll probably still be silently freaking," he really doesn't miss a beat.

"Oh," I'm adding SO much to the conversation. Really opening up and helping out.

Celery walks over to my bed, and I follow. Not out of obedience or the willingness to talk, I just can't not be near him. It's like magnetic. We move together slowly until we're lying down, each on our sides with one arm tucked under a pillow.

I slip my hand under his shirt and start running my fingers along his chest. I'm not even trying to start something so he'll get distracted really, I just have to be touching him. Celery's the same way. His hand that was supposedly there to massage my shoulder has been moving higher. Fingers along my neck and cheek, hand-fuls of my hair being run through gently.

"People want to see you," I protest lamely at some point, as I feel his eyes focusing in on me, almost time to talk. Stupid. I don't actually want to leave, to go downstairs and explain to everyone. To be looked at funny, worriedly. I want to stay with him. I just don't want to have to talk about it.

"And they'll see me. We have some things to sort out first," I don't know about the rest of it, but there is one thing I can say.

"You don't think I like, didn't miss you, do you? Or wasn't happy to see you? 'Cause that's not--"

"I know, baby. More of a missed me more than you realized, a little TOO happy to see me deal, right?"

Sometimes, I really want to hate him for being so right all the time. The whole me being the brains of this operation thing is a big joke. Or maybe it's not brains. It's heart and sensitivity. Insightful. He's certainly that. I'm not really that open-bookee, just to Celery.

"I thought I was doing so well, like, making progress, getting better, and then when I saw you... it was just like I had a total meltdown. It was all a lie, I'm not better," he kisses my fingers.

"You are."

" 'Cause, I sure feel great!"

"Baby, I understand what happened to you. It was an overload. I felt it too, only, I don't know, it didn't affect me the same way. I was frozen just like you were, but when I saw you were crying, my body just took over. I needed to get to you, stop the hurt. What happened doesn't erase everything the past months. This was today, before was before. They relate, but one doesn't control the other. If you felt happy, if you laughed and smiled, for whatever moment that you did it - it was real. Trust me. This is just, I don't know, stuff catching up with us and the massive overload of suddenly seeing each other again. It's natural to be feeling this way. I mean, think about it. You hope and dream of something with everything that you are, for months, and then suddenly - it comes true. Like, who wouldn't be shaken up?"

Sometimes I almost forget how sensible he is. How clear he is at making things. The ease with which he always sorts through my ragged emotions, order in the chaos. Already anxieties are falling away, thawing is occurring, joy returning. Delayed excitement and bliss over his presence.

I close my eyes, just taking a minute to make sure the feeling will last, and discovering it to be growing, open them up again and give him the smile I wanted to in the airport. No jumping, but the full frontal lip attack goes well. This is how it's supposed to be. Right again. Whole again.

"You're a pretty swell guy, you know that?" I kid, some 15 minutes later when our lips are numb. Not that we care, it just felt like time for a breather.

He smiles, I love that smile. I missed seeing it. One of the

everything-about-him things I missed. It's his tender, sweet smile. The peaceful, loving one. Lips spelling out everything is right with my world and my world kicks ass.

"I do okay. Word is you're not so bad yourself," I chuckle. Such simple stuff. No big. Best thing in the world. More than I could have hoped for. Perfect.

"Is that right? Word on the street, huh?" He wiggles up closer, chest pressed against chest. Full contact. My favourite kind.

"Will you sing to me?" Huh?

"You want me to sing?" I ask, bemused.

"Yeah," he smiles with the kind of shyness only Celery has mastered. Kyle and Jonas have nothing on my boy. "I love it when you sing." That's news to me.

"But, I hardly ever even do it."

"I know!" His smile goes sort of wonky and his eyes shrug. "That's kind of like, why I want you to do it. I thought about this kind of thing a lot, you know? Stuff I really love that I never took enough time to properly appreciate before. The taking for granted, we have all the time in the world anyway, stuff."

"My singing was on that list?" I tease both of us, wearing an amused smile.

"Yes, now stop being mean and sing to me already, you awful person," I kiss his neck, tickling him with my tongue. He groans, "Or you could just keep doing that," I keep working on his neck, considering hickey possibilities, he groans again, "either way," I work on him for a few more minutes, and then see if I can hum and kiss at the same time. I discover that I can. So I bathe his neck in kisses and hum 'the luckiest' at the same time. Eventually I stop with the neck all together, and sing for real, perched, legs straddling his hips. Celery doesn't complain.

"I love you more than I have, ever found a way to say to you," I sing softly, "and I know, that I am, I am, I am, the luckiest. Next door, there's an old man who lived to his nineties, and one day, passed away, in his sleep, and his wife well she stayed for a couple of days and passed away. I'm sorry, I know that's a strange way to tell you that I know, we belong, that I know, that I am, I am, I am the luckiest," it's such a beautiful song. I highly recommend you listen to it sometime. It's by Ben Folds. Minus the five. Solo thing. So beautiful. I wish you could hear it. I mean, not when I sing it, but just hear it. You'd get why me and Celery are both sort of crying.

I give up on singing before I ever get through the song, worn out and overloaded again, but Celery doesn't comment or object when I simply drift off and lay my head down on his chest.

Tiring. Must have been, 'cause we fell asleep. Jonas and Kyle knocking on my door, shouting good-naturedly that it's time to open up, I've had him to myself for long enough. I'm happy to see them bust through my doorway, grinning and sticking close. They're almost as big into contact as me and Celery these days.

I roll off Celery and sit up.

"Hey, guys," Celery's still not quite awake. He's working on it though.

"Everything okay?" Jonas asks with a smile. I nod.

"Yep, all clear on the western front."

"And the other fronts, we don't need to know about," should have known Kyle would come up with something like that.

"Still a bastard, eh Kyle?" Not so much with the half asleep anymore.

Kyle grins, so does Jonas. They've missed him. I didn't know how much until I see how big their smiles are. The tears sort of involuntarily brimming up in their eyes. So I'm not alone. That's kind of nice, in the 'hey we were all a lot more sad than we were able to admit to ourselves' kind of way.

"I like to be consistent," Celery gets up off the bed and hugs each of them.

I get up too, wanting in on the happy homecoming action. We end up in a little huddle, arms around each other's shoulders. Like, you know what a huddle looks like. Don't know why I explained that. Anyway. There's a solid and massively comforting feeling of unity among us. So good to be home.

Right away after the mini love fest breaks up, the three of us drag Celery downstairs (not that he took much convincing) and we all have one major one with the whole family. Celery pays a lot of attention to the twins and Kara and they soak it up like the little love sponges that they are. He shares a couple smiles with my mom and dad too that seem a little special and secret, but I figure either way smiling is good, so what's it to me.

Later, when he kisses me, says he'll see me in a few minutes, and then goes away with my parents, I start to mind a little. Mostly I'm just insanely curious, but also, I have to admit, slightly peeved. I wasn't planning on

spending even a second away from him the whole two weeks, never mind already on the first day. I pout in a very obvious and childish fashion in the presence of Jonas and Kyle, but they wisely choose not to comment.

The 'few minutes' is actually almost 20. What's almost 20? Well it's 17 minutes and some seconds. I can't be exact. It's not like I have a stopwatch or anything. I'm pretty anal, but give me some credit.

"Sorry about that," he says, sitting back down. We're all in the living room.

"What's going on?" I say, real pouty. He puts his arm around me, and I feel a bit better, but I still want to know. I make that message pretty clear.

"It's nothing, I just, you know, wanted to thank them for sending me the ticket and letting me come here and all that stuff. Not because I feel like I OWE them anything - don't get pissed off - just because I love them and wanted them to know that." Suddenly, I'm not upset at all. I'm just stuck thinking how wonderful he is like basically all other times.

"You're giving me a toothache," I say, shaking my head. It's a Clueless thing, but it's also a serious, you're too fucking sweet for words thing. He gets it on both levels.

"It's nice to see you guys are as truly disgusting as ever," Kyle says, all sincerity and smiles.

"Sweet of you to say, Kyle."

"He's a sweet guy. Not toothache sweet, you understand - but pretty sweet," I roll my eyes at Jonas.

"You're like the funniest guy I've ever met."

"Thank-you for the compliment."

"I can't imagine you get paid them very often."

"Asshole," Jonas says, swatting me with a laugh.

Celery grins.

"This is so great!"

"What is?" I say, smiling but kind of confused.

"Oh just, like the way everything is normal and cool between all of us. I keep thinking one of the times I come back here, things are suddenly going

to be awkward, like we've all grown apart, and it just really makes me happy that that isn't true," my throat's gone all tight, and if I'm not careful, I'm going to start to cry right away.

"You really think that?" It's the only thing I can get out.

"Well, in a way I do. But, not about us. You and me," he nods sadly at Jonas and Kyle. "Just like the four of us - sorry, guys, I know that's not a very fair thing to think," Jonas and Kyle both seem upset, but also like they understand.

"It's not like we don't feel the same sometimes, man, just don't go believing it too much. We're always going to be brothers," Jonas makes a face.

"So much incest going around," we all laugh.

"Too gross, man," I say, frowning a smile. You really can do that if you work it just right.

"I want to hear all about that though," Celery says, seriously. "Like, I've gotten most of the details, but let's hear some dirt eh?" Jonas laughs, and Kyle groans. Actually, they both sort of laugh and groan at the same time.

"That's going to take awhile, and I suggest a change of scene, who wants to go out?" I shrug.

"I don't care, as long as I'm with you guys," Celery says with a shrug of his own, "but where would we go?"

"Well, like, nowhere special, Dairy Queen or something."

"It's fucking December, man," Kyle rolls his eyes.

"So we go for the hot eats then! Never mind the cool treats."

"Plus."

"Celery, I swear if a bad pun about queens is coming I'm gonna kick your ass," I cut him off. He grins, and I just have to kiss him. It feels so good that it gets a little out of hand, but Jonas breaks us up and we all agree that Dairy Queen it is.

It's not much of a walk, but it's freaking freezing and sort of late, so no one even suggests not taking the Le Baron. When we get there, it's not even remotely busy ('cause it's so close to Christmas and all, I guess) and we grab a booth after ordering.



Shakes all around (so much for the hot eats) and we do the major bonding thing. It's great hearing Jonas and Kyle talk about their relationship even though I already knew most of it, and you can tell they get a total kick out of telling it. The insults and sarcasms are thick, but the affection is thicker. There's no doubt in my mind that those two love each other.

"You really made out in the middle of Staples?" Celery asks, laughing, referring to a story he's just been told about the afternoon when they did just that. What else can you expect from two people who've been dating the opposite sex their whole lives? No shame whatsoever. Great huh?

"Yeah, we didn't think about it," Jonas admits, smiling guiltily. "I just really wanted to be kissing him and it was like, it never occurred to me that I shouldn't. I guess Staples isn't the classiest love nest in the world, but it was funny anyway. Plus, we weren't like frenching or something, it wasn't THAT bad," Kyle smiles, obviously remembering the event with fondness.

"The funniest thing was that I only did it 'cause this really hot girl was checking him out, and then Jonas got really into it," Jonas kicks him under the table.

"You're such a bastard, Kyle." Kyle grins.

"I know." They smile. They're always doing that shit.

"You guys are hilarious," Celery remarks, grinning also.

"We do it because we care!" They say together. This Hour 22 minutes. Funny show. You should watch. It was better when Rick Mercer was on though. Sorry, Collin. Go back to Whose Line.

"Anyway, you know you like it."

"Because you gotta!" he says, still smiling. Also 22 minutes. "And I was serious. It's tons of fun watching you - you act exactly like I figured you would."

"Dreaming about us, eh?" Celery just rolls his eyes and I shudder.

"That was WAY too gross, Jonas."

"I'm just warming up too," Kyle starts getting up.

"You do that, and I'll go to the bathroom."

"Kay." They squeeze fingers before Kyle walks away, and Jonas watches him

until he the door closes with Kyle on the other side of it. He turns back to us, a happy smile on his face.

"It's fucking ridiculous how much I'm in love with him," Celery and I look at each other, and do the beam thing. Happy for them, for ourselves, happy about life in general.

"It shows, and he feels the same. It's all pretty awesome," Celery says. Jonas nods.

"Especially with you here," Celery is clearly touched.

"Thanks, man," Jonas scoffs.

"Like you need to thank me for being honest. This one wasn't the only one who missed you like crazy," he says, thumbing to me and shaking his head. Celery looks down at his drink and smiles almost shyly. Jonas chuckles.

"You're adorable, man."

"Carrots Vasskez!" comes a rather high pitched near shriek from out of nowhere. I turn, and see Julie Brown quickly approaching. I do a double take.

Julie fucking Brown. Kyle's most serious and long term girlfriend. They were together off and on the last two years of high school, and into the beginning of University. They'd split up for a month or two, and sometimes start seeing other people, but they always seemed to find their way back to each other. Everyone thought they were eventually going to settle down for good and get married. Including (I think) both Kyle and Julie themselves. But then suddenly, two months into the year, everything fell apart. Big time apart. Permanent apart. By the New Year, they were hardly speaking. Even during their worst separations before, they always kept in touch. It was after the break-up that Kyle first stopped going to college type party stuff. Then a few months later Celery and I finally got together, not long after that Jonas showed up, and Kyle hasn't shown the slightest interest in that whole scene since.

"Hey Julie," I say, not knowing what else. Celery is sitting up straighter, keeping his arm around my shoulders, but tensed. Jonas is the only calm one of us. But, that's only 'cause he doesn't know who she is yet. I seriously hope and pray that Kyle will take a really long time in the bathroom and she'll just leave, not even knowing he's here.

"Where on earth have you been hiding him, Carrots!" she demands, but with a smile.

To be honest, I kind of like Julie. I really like her in fact. She was always a pretty cool girl in my opinion. Kyle really loved her too, or you know, I thought he did. I still do really. He's just not in love with her anymore, if he ever truly was.

"Hiding who?" I know, stalling - especially like that - is kind of lame, but I'm still hoping to get Jonas out of this one blissfully unaware. He's still got the whole jealousy, cynical, trust issues problem, and meeting Kyle's super long-term girlfriend probably isn't his idea of a dream evening.

"You're as witty and clever as ever," she says, shaking her head. You see, she's cool. She's kind of like a female Kyle, except, not such a bastard. "I ask because I care, no one's seen him in ages." Just to read that, or if it was someone else, you'd think 'what a bitch' but the way Julie says it, both kidding and also genuinely concerned about someone she obviously still cares about, you can't mind.

"I've seen him," I say, still being mister coy.

"Well done, but he lives at your house, so I must admit, I'm not too impressed. Really, has he been all right? He's been going to his classes, I know that, it's just... he hasn't seemed very I don't know, grounded, lately. It's been going on for months, it's like when he's in a room, you get the impression his mind is always elsewhere," I glance over at Celery, starting to get panicky. I'm supposed to answer her how?

"So you're a friend of Kyle's?" Jonas asks innocently enough. She smiles, noticing him for the first time.

"Yeah, sorry I didn't introduce myself, like how rude can you be! I'm Julie."

"Jonas," they shake.

"Do you know Kyle?" Jonas blushes. Man. That kid blushes over everything.

"Uh-huh."

"But, you're a friend of Carrots, right?" He nods.

"And Celery, we all hang out," she lights up, and then glares playfully at me.

"Don't tell me he's here!" She gives me a mostly teasing slap on the chest. I shrug.

"Not right here," Just then I see Kyle coming out of the bathroom. My eyes

focus in on him, and apparently noticing, Julie turns.

"Well, well, well," she says shaking her head. Poor Kyle's practically stricken.

"Uh, hey Julie,"

"This is where you've been hiding? Fast food joints with your little brother and his friends?" Jonas starts to glare at her, ears going a little pink. I quickly reach over and rub his arm, reassuring. He continues watching the exchange with suspicious interest.

"Who's been hiding? I've been around."

"No you haven't, you big liar. You haven't been to a party in months! The last one was before Halloween and before THAT it was like nothing for MONTHS!" He shrugs.

"I've been doing other stuff - did you meet Jonas?" Man. Like, smooth. I've been doing other stuff and other people! For example...

"Yeah," she smiles at him. Jonas that is. "Like most of us, he seems too cool to actually be subjected to your company, let alone spend time willingly."

"Well, say what you want. He's actually a really good friend," I can tell Kyle's trying, wanting to be able to say exactly what Jonas is to him, for both of them I know he wants to do this, but so far, it's no good.

She shrugs. I'm guessing Jonas isn't really who she wants to be talking about.

"I'm sure, but listen, you've got to start getting out more! How about the New Year's Party at Mike's house? It's going to be the party of the season!" She's half kidding around, not really a person known for caring about stuff like what the party of the season is, just really trying to get Kyle to hang out with her.

"No thanks, I've got like, other plans."

"Other New Year's Eve plans?" she asks, sort of suave sneaky, and a bit of teasing. I think mostly she's just trying to be a friend.

"Yeah," he's looking as far away from Jonas as possible.

"It'll be the first New Year's we haven't kissed since I was 14."

"I know," Kyle says softly, not doing anything about the hand she's

suddenly got resting on the base of his neck.

They were friends even before they started dating, and the kissing at New Year's is sort of a freaky tradition they have. Though I don't really think that would be of any comfort to Jonas.

"Fuck," he whispers so quietly only Celery and I hear him, and barely. Kyle definitely didn't, but he's looking pretty awful just the same. He's finally backed away from her hand.

"Yeah um, that's sort of like..." Julie smiles through his stammering.

"Ancient history, I know. Something you've made abundantly clear believe me. But I'd still like to meet the new girl in your life. We are friends, you know I care. Besides, she may not be worthy, and then I'll just have to steal you away again." She reaches out to brush at his hair and that's about enough for Jonas. He gets up, gives them both the death glare, and bolts from the restaurant.

Kyle hesitates for a split second, and then races after him.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Eighteen  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
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Julie is equal parts confused and concerned.

"What did I do?" I debate whether or not to tell her the truth, eventually deciding it's not my place.

"It's just personal stuff," she raises her eyebrows, but seems to understand I don't feel comfortable saying anything more.

"I guess I should probably go, I didn't mean to cause a big scene, I just wanted to say hello, and it really was nice seeing you again, Carrots, you too Celery, you look great, older," he smiles.

"Thanks I guess," she smiles back, in a sad but warm way.

"You guys are a beautiful couple, I'll see you around." We're left stunned, watching her leave.

"What a fun night, huh?" Celery says, still somewhat shaky. I laugh with matched irony.

"Oh yeah. Great fun." I take his hand. "But, you're here, so really with the yeah. They'll work it out - they always do. This is kind of a bad one, but they've had fights before, it's like their way or whatever," he nods.

"I guess. I'm still worried," I try to grin.

"Worry about how we're getting home, and who's paying for all the milkshakes." He smiles, a mostly sad one this time.

"You can never be serious when you're scared, you know that, right? That's how I always know when you're upset," I sigh, with a mostly sad smile of my own.

"I know. But I like that you always know," he draws me closer in the booth, and screw the looks we get, I rest my head on his shoulder.

"I missed you so much, Celery," I say after a little while of just breathing him in.

"I know, baby. I missed you too."

"We have to go find them, don't we?"

"I think so, they need some time to work this stuff out, but I feel like I need to at least know that's what they're really doing," I sigh. He's right of course.

"Okay, let's go. We'll just walk I guess, home first?" He nods.

"Yeah, like you never know," we might just get insanely lucky and find them both there.

I say nothing instead of my knee-jerk 'sometimes you do' and we get up and pay without further discussion. We sort of speed walk home, and find the Le Baron parked out front. Good or bad sign?

Inside, there's too much chaotic clutter to see if Jonas's shoes are there, but we go into the living room quickly. The twins are sprawled on the couch with their friend Brady, watching Much Music and talking.

"Hey guys, have you seen Kyle and Jonas?" They all seem rather nervous.

"Kyle got here a few minutes ago but he didn't say anything, he just raced up the stairs," Jon informs us, making my insides turn to ice.

"I think he might have been crying," Dave adds reluctantly.

Brady says nothing, and looks at his hands. I guess it's pretty weird for him. You don't normally see your friend's 19-year-old brother crying and running up the stairs on your average evening over.

"Okay, look, we've got to like, go talk to him, but don't worry," I say half of it as I'm already climbing the stairs, with Celery at my heels.

Kyle's lying on his side in his bed, with a look of absolute misery on his face. We stand there for a long time before he looks up or in any other way recognizes our presence. His eyes are red, but he's not crying.

"You couldn't find him?" I ask gently, sitting down and putting my hand on his back. He struggles to shake his head.

"No, but I didn't know where to look. He wasn't home and," he stalls for a second, like his brain is caught on the word, "I didn't know where else to go. We never go anywhere but here and like other places I know he wouldn't be right now," Celery's sitting down now too, and we've each got an arm around Kyle.

"It'll be okay. He's just like confused or whatever right now. You know how he can get," Kyle shakes his head somewhat bitterly, eyes closed.

"I certainly do. Fuck. Why'd she have to be there?"

"Random coincidences can suck hard," I commiserate sadly.

"But like, if he would have given me like FIVE seconds, I would have been able to explain. FIVE seconds!"

"He'll come around. You know he will. He'll stay all mad and scared for awhile 'cause that's the way he is, but you have to know that's not going to last. It may take him a little while, but Jonas WILL return to his senses. He's not a total moron," Kyle smiles.

"Don't let out the insult go on my account," I grin.

"Even though he did fall in love with you," finishing my unspoken thought from before.

"Do you think I should go looking for him around? It's not like I really scoured the city or whatever," my look to Celery for guidance comes up with a shook head, and that's my thinking too.

"You're probably better off just staying here. Like I said, he'll come around, and when he does you want to be here, right?" He nods slowly.

"The whole when you're separated from someone stay the hell where you are 'cause eventually they'll come back to the same place looking for you thing?"

"Yeah, that one." Celery's slipped his hand into mine across Kyle's back and I smile at him, letting him know I'm handling this okay.

"Sorry for like messing up the whole happy reunion."

"Don't be. We're together. Whatever we're doing, we'll always be taken care of just 'cause of that. Not that we're not really upset about all this, it's just..."

"Nothing could ruin this time for you?" We smile.

"Maybe nuclear disaster," I hypothesize.

"Or if..."

"Don't say it," I cut him off with a grin. Can you believe what that dirty kid was going to say in front of my brother? Shame shame shame.

"Thanks for being around," Kyle says, getting all emotional in the sad way again.



We sigh and rub his back some more. I'm out of practice with all this. Being the blissfully happy one comforting the one who's uncertain and in pain.

"He'll come around," Celery reiterates soothingly.

"Yeah," Kyle says, like he knows, but at the same time, doesn't quite believe.

"He really loves you, he's just not good at this sort of thing," Kyle sighs, more bitterness seeping in.

"He should know how I feel about him, I try to show him. I thought it was working but... obviously I was wrong. Why did he have to run like that?" I shake my head, and am about to say something terrifically comforting like 'I don't know' when the doorbell rings. We all straighten and sort of turn our heads.

"Door's for you, Kyle!" Jon shouts up the stairs. Celery and I grin.

"You guys go," Kyle says, killing our grins pretty quick.

"What if it's--"

"That's why I want you to answer it. Please. I need a few seconds to get a hold of myself." We look at him worriedly for a second, but then nod.

"Okay," I get up, and Celery takes me by the hand.

"We'll be back soon," he assures Kyle, who just nods distantly and goes back to lying on his bed, eyes half closed, taking deep breaths.

We descend the stairs quickly, but are met with a very unexpected end. Not Jonas. Julie. Standing in her coat, smiling nervously.

"Hey, he didn't want to talk to me, huh?" We look at each other uncomfortably for a second before turning back to Julie.

"Uh, he just didn't want to answer, period. We didn't know who it was. Why are you here?" Not to be rude or anything. Jeez. Just call me Mr. Smooth.

"I wanted to apologize, I never meant to cause a big scene. I came to tell him I'm sorry - I feel really bad," I suddenly realize standing in the hallway of our house is a very bad place for Julie to be right now. The last thing we need is for Jonas to show up only to find her here and then get freaked all over again.

"Now's really not a good time for that. Trust me - if you want to make it

up to Kyle in some way - leave. You can come back later or something but right now you could really help by just not being here," I try to use a tone that softens the blow, but I'm not sure if it works or not. She sighs.

"What happened? Why did that boy Jonas get so upset?" More shared looks of discomfort between Celery and myself.

"It's hard to explain, and personal, private," Celery says, also trying to keep his tone gentle. She stands with her brow scrunched for awhile until suddenly this look of comprehension dawns on her face and her eyes widen.

"Kyle's not INVOLVED with that boy, is he?" she practically gasps. Celery and I just stand there locked in a moment of total uncertainty and speechlessness.

"I'm not a fucking `boy' - and yes, he is. Gotta problem with that?"

I don't know about you, but I think that may have been his best moment breaker yet. And talk about stealth. I didn't even hear the door shut. Or, open for that matter.

"Goodness!" Julie exclaims, spinning around. "You surprised me," Jonas shrugs indifferently.

"Life's full of surprises." His expression changes when he turns his attention to me and Celery. "Look, guys, I'll be repentant guilty guy later, but right now I just really need to talk to Kyle," Celery nods, and I try not to grin. I was afraid it'd take him a lot longer than this.

"Sure, he's upstairs," I direct him. Jonas nods, sort of `soldier off to the front' esque and then mounts the stairs.

Julie's eyes follow him up in a look of disbelief.

"I don't understand how Kyle could do this."

"What - to you?" I say with scorn.

"Oh no. Not to me. To that poor boy."

"His name is Jonas, and he isn't a boy," I repeat what Jonas said to her with as much malice as he had.

"He couldn't be more than 14!" Ohhhhhh! I get it. Of course. She thinks Kyle's cradle robbing. It all makes sense now.

"No no, he's 17," she raises her eyebrows.

"17?" I nod firmly. "He looks so young,"

"Well kind of, but he really is 17. Just short and stuff," plus, okay, he has a baby face. But, whadda ya gonna do?

Julie's shaking her head, still trying to process it all. "You were right, I really should go. Tell Kyle that I'm sorry, would you? And Jonas too?" I nod. She closes her eyes momentarily. "This is all a little much right now. I won't tell anyone though," I nod again, gratefully.

"Don't feel too bad," Celery says, ever the gentle one. She smiles in a tired way.

"I'm just confused. Is he happy?" We both nod. "Then that's enough. Sorry again. Good night, you guys." We say goodnight, and she leaves.

We look at each other for a long time, for a million different reasons. But mainly just to be looking, taking each other in. Every moment with him is precious to me. It's what I try to convey during that long look, and it's what he sends me back. The moment ends with a soft brush of lips. Nothing is said. We go into the living room and sit down on the couch, holding each other tightly. Brady and the twins are nowhere to be found. They probably slipped out the back over to Brady's to avoid all the drama.

About an hour later, Jonas walks down the stairs alone, worn out and red eyed.

"What happened?" I ask, not really believing Kyle's not with him, that they didn't work it out. It was just a simple misunderstanding, right?

He sighs.

"We talked. It's better, but there are still things to be worked out. It wasn't Julie, really. She just triggered it, the other stuff. Kyle was great, as usual, and I expect things will be all the way back to okay soon, but not yet."

"What's the other stuff?"

He shakes his head, sitting down.

"It's just sometimes I'm so afraid. Afraid we'll end up... well - like everyone ends up. Hopelessly in love and yet somehow unable to convert that into something that lasts. And I wonder, I mean how many people actually get to be happy in this world? True love and happiness have got to be two of the rarest things going. Knowing that, just think about it. If not many people in the whole WORLD get it - how many people in one single family are

going to end up sublimely happy? Not many, right? It's just odds, isn't it? So, there's you," he says, looking directly at me. "And you have Celery, and you're sublimely happy, so does that mean Kyle as your brother can't be? Simple probability wise?"

Let me finish thinking of all the ways that's stupid and then I'll start yelling at you.

"First of all, I think your whole probability, not many people get to be happy, theory is seriously flawed. It's up to every individual person to be happy, a lot of the time, it's actually a conscious decision. I don't believe in fate or even random odds when it comes to happiness. I don't think that's the way it works. I'm not entirely sure how it DOES work, but I know it's not like that."

"As for being sublimely happy, I'd say that yes, I am. We are. When I'm not freaking out about nothing, or worrying for no reason. When Celery's not afraid he'll lose me either by loving me too much or not being with me enough. When the people who hate us because we're gay aren't trying to destroy what we have. When our personal doubts and fears aren't getting the better of us as then often do. When we're not missing each other so much we both want to die. "

"Jonas, everyone is scared, usually that's the case most of the time. The only way out of that is to trust someone enough that you can reach a place with them that when they're around, you know you have no reason to be afraid. That doesn't mean that no matter what when you're with them you never are - just that you know you don't have to be. Fear is okay if you know how to deal with it, if you know where to go and who you can depend on when you are. You don't have to be perfect and neither does Kyle for what you have to last - but you do have to trust each other." Celery gives my shoulder a squeeze, like he's telling me good job. I turn slightly to smile at him gratefully. I hope somewhere in my rambles there was something Jonas needs and can use.

"Should I go back up?" Jonas says after what felt like an eternity. I look up at him, confused.

"Why?" He grins.

"To tell him I understand now? That I get it, that I love him more than anything and I'm finally okay with it?" I almost laugh out loud, and Celery's eyes sparkle a beautiful blue.

"Might be an idea, man," Celery tells him, a voice full of laughter. Jonas springs up like a man with a mission. A good mission this time. Then he pauses, looking at me thoughtfully.

"When did you figure it out?" I do laugh then.

"It was your fault - so it's only fair I paid you back. Back in September when you first started kicking my ass about being happy again, that's when it started. Then after Thanksgiving, I knew what I had to start to do. It's easier to be afraid and angry, to hide yourself in depression, sarcasm, or cynicism, but that's not really even being alive. Happiness is the big risk, but even if you don't always succeed, no matter how much it hurts, trying is always worth it."

"Me huh? That's understandable. And you're welcome," I laugh again, louder, rolling my eyes. Jonas is back in form.

"Go," he grins.

"Also, thank-you," that said, he turns and runs for the stairs.

"You're amazing," Celery tells me after the sounds of Jonas's footsteps have died out. I smile at him tenderly.

"I am all that I am because I have your love."

"What a nice thing to say," he teases, leaning in to kiss me.

"What's nicer is that I mean it," I tease back, tilting my head slightly out of reach, quoting a line he used on me so many months ago. It's good to remember those times, our past, roots. Whatever.

"I love you."

"I love you too," I reply. He leans in again. I don't evade his lips any longer.

Later, when Jonas comes down the second time, Kyle is with him. They're pretty well attached, and wearing dopey grins.

"Thanks, bro," Kyle says to me right off. I shrug.

"Payback," he nods and they join us on the couch. I'm half on Celery and Jonas sits on Kyle, so there's plenty of room.

Jonas and I share a quick look of `god we're such the girls' and then snuggle down on our boyfriends.

The peaceful mood is eventually broken with Kyle asking this question:

"Okay, enough of this drama shit, we've got to make this the most kick ass time ever, what's the plan for the next two weeks?"

"A lot more of this," I answer Kyle, cuddling closer against Celery. I might start to purr in a second. Jonas is about the same. Kyle laughs.

"Yeah, come to think of it that sounds like my kind of plan."

Understandably exhausted by the evening's events, curled up in Kyle's arms, Jonas is asleep in no time. Absently, Kyle begins petting his hair.

"When I heard him coming up the second time, I didn't know what to think. I was half-sure he was going to blow up at me or something, but then when I saw the look on his face... I really meant that, thank-you, Care. You really got us through this one," I try to smile modestly, 'cause that's honestly how I feel about this whole thing.

"It was just payback, man. When I think of the stuff you've done for me over the years - what else was I supposed to do? Like, you're the one who got me to talk to Celery in the first place all those months ago, pretty much getting us together. Which is something I don't think either of us could ever repay you for," Celery nods heartily in agreement. "Add to that all the years of just being around looking out for me, the countless times you've helped me calm down about stuff, especially right at the beginning of our relationship, the way you and Jonas held me together after Celery moved... dude, the list goes on. But, okay, I didn't try to help 'cause I felt like it was my duty as someone in your debt. I did it 'cause I love you and Jonas and I want for you to be happy. I'm just glad it worked," Kyle beams down at Jonas.

"Me too."

We sit around talking for another hour or so, just doing more catching up and generally having a good time. It's a good time Jonas sleeps through, but that's okay. There'll be plenty of time for him, and besides, I think he needed the break. More so emotionally than physically, probably.

When the twins get home around 12 Kyle decides it's time to hit the sack.

"Good night, bros," we mirror his statement and then watch as he stands, gently lifting Jonas up with him.

"You're going to carry him all the way up to your room?" I ask, shaking my head. Kyle grins.

"He's not very heavy," I see Jonas's eyes flicker, and the touch of a smirk, but choose to keep it to myself. Let Kyle carry him.

In fact, a ride doesn't sound like such a bad idea. I turn my eyes hopefully to Celery. He laughs.

"No chance, baby." I pout, but to no avail.

"I can't believe you don't love me enough to carry me up the stairs - Kyle's doing it for Jonas," he's already in the process of it actually. Gone, probably halfway up by now.

He rolls his eyes, totally void of sympathy.

"If you don't know how much I love you by now, my carrying you up the stairs or not isn't going to change anything. Now come on, I've been dreaming of falling asleep with you in my arms ever since before the last time it happened, chop-chop," I raise my eyebrows at him.

"Uh, chop-chop?"

"Make fun of me once we're in bed, okay?" I have to smile at his exhausted eagerness. I reach over to touch his face with the back of my fingers.

"Sure you don't want to carry me?"

He gives no verbal response, but in one fluid motion he grips me tightly and hoists us up, taking me fully by surprise. I hold onto his neck tightly, trying not to laugh.

"My hero," I swoon, throwing my head back dramatically. He pinches my leg.

"One more word and I'll drop you on that smart ass of yours." Grinning but silent, I allow Celery to carry me up the stairs and into my room, where I am lovingly deposited onto my bed.

He's quick to join me.

With each other's help, we're soon both down to our boxers, lying facing each other on our sides, soaking up the moment for everything it's worth. It's like my every sense is alive to this moment, absorbing every detail of him. The other stuff was wonderful, but this is what I've been waiting for since the second he got off that plane - since way before that actually.

"I love you so much," I kiss him.

"I love you too, always."

So much for the boxers.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Nineteen  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Thu, 19 Jun 2003 11:31:46 -0500

In the morning it takes me forever just to recover from the impact of how lucky I am just to get to wake up beside him. Once done with the recovering I roll onto Celery and start kissing his neck.

"Good morning to you too," he gets out around kisses.

I barely pay attention. I want to take my kisses further down but I keep getting foiled by my desire for his lips.

Suddenly I'm hit with a totally different feeling and I break off the kiss.

"How are things at school?" Slowly coming back from lust land, Celery's eyes blink at me uncomprehendingly.

"What?"

"How's school?" He props himself up a bit on bent elbows, as I shimmy him down a little. We're able to look each other in the eye.

"You wake me up by sucking on my neck. You kiss me enough to make my knees go weak even though I'm lying down," large pregnant pause, "and then you ask me how school is," I smile sheepishly.

"I forgot before." He shakes his head.

"And you picked NOW to remember?"

"I got distracted," he sighs. "Don't be mad," he smiles.

"I'm not. Not really. It's just... I don't know. Few things would have been able to distract me by that point," I blush.

"It's just like important to me, how you're doing."

"I'm fine, wonderful," he says with a shrug.

"But how's school? I mean, how's stuff when you're not here?"

"That's fine too. You know all that. Grades are good, works good, we got so-so silver in provincials, I'll be starting basketball after the break, I've been lifting but always with a spotter, I've been hanging with Saul... Baby, wouldn't you rather do stuff we CAN'T over the phone?" I laugh.



"You're a hound," he shrugs again.

"Have I ever denied that you turn me on?" I roll my eyes.

"How 'bout the first 10 years you knew me?" He sticks out his tongue.

"Semantics."

"Hardly!" Through a laughing grin.

He starts stroking my back, looking at me imploringly. Who wouldn't give in?

"School's really fine?" With the last shred of my resolve.

He rolls his eyes in a very outrageous, long-suffering manner.

"Yes, it's great. Everything's fine. Are you satisfied?" I grin, already leaning closer.

"Not even close."

And then again, in the shower. So you can imagine why I'm like, you know, walking a little funny. Celery's all confused, following behind me back to the room.

"Are you okay?" I glance behind my shoulder at him and smile.

"Sure, great." He still looks concerned.

"You're sort of hobbling or whatever."

"Well, yeah."

"Why?" I wait until I've shut the door behind us to raise my eyebrows at him.

"Why do you think?" His eyes widen and he blushes.

"It was me?" I smile. He goes from surprised to upset.

"I hurt you?"

"NO! Not really. It doesn't hurt exactly, it's just like... different," not much easing of the guilty look.

"I'm such a bastard! I didn't even think about it," he falls onto my bed,

hands on his hair, lying on his back. "I just wanted to be with you so badly, make you to feel good - I didn't even think about afterwards," full of self-malice.

"Don't feel bad, please? I told you, I'm not like hurt or anything. I wanted you to, every time. But, it's just that you know, three times basically in a row is kind of a lot, you can't expect not to feel anything after," I'm smiling, and trying get him to understand that I'm happy and fine, but the message isn't being received.

"I'm a selfish bastard," I kneel beside him, hands on his back, pleading look in my eyes, if he'd only stop avoiding them and see.

"Celery, please don't shut off like this. I really really don't want that. Please, don't let this ruin it. Everything's wonderful and good. I don't want you feeling guilty 'cause I'm definitely going to want you to do it again - just not right now, you know like tomorrow or something?" Followed by one of my best weak please-laugh smiles. "Please, sweet one, tell me you're not upset," I'm pulling his hair back with my fingers, trying to see his face from when he rolled over with his back to me. He sighs.

"I just..."

"It was amazing, don't twist an amazing set of experiences into something bad, don't. I'm not going to let you." Finally a smile and his looking at me again. I slide down so we're chest to chest and kiss him.

"I love you."

"I'm sorry I hurt you."

"You didn't!" I glare all fierce and dramatic. I look so ridiculous he eventually has to smile.

"Okay. Still, I should have realized what would happen. Like, it's not exactly rocket science," I swear, he didn't mean it like that!

I kiss him again.

"Maybe you shouldn't do that," he reproaches. I roll my eyes playfully. I'm too happy to be upset about anything.

"I can kiss you without it leading to sex," he shrugs.

"I guess."

"You guess?" He grins.

"You're fairly irresistible," I tisk a little.

"Try to maintain," he rolls his eyes back and puckers all mock seductive and I laugh, shaking my head. "You're such an idiot," he smiles and leans up to kiss me. But just once.

"Let's talk, okay? Do you want to hear more about school?" I have to laugh at the table turnage, but I eventually nod, snuggling down more against him.

"Sure."

So we mostly just try to keep it to talking, but as it is, we don't get out of bed for the second time until around noon.

Once that major manoeuvre has been completed we do the downstairs, grabbing and engulfing some grub from the kitchen thing. Our next move is to head back upstairs and we then proceed to burst into Kyle's place.

Big mistake.

Jonas is shirtless, straddling Kyle on the couch, one hand in between Kyle's legs.

"Oh dudes!" I exclaim, recoiling in horror.

"What the fuck!" Kyle shouts, while laughing from surprise.

Celery's all blank with the horror. Jonas is blushing like a madman.

Covering my face, I try to apologize, "Sorry, dudes, I keep forgetting I have to knock for you now."

"It's okay," Kyle says, with a sigh. Celery's got his back turned and I'm still with the hand over my eyes.

"You can look now," Jonas informs me. Hesitantly I do, and he's got his shirt back on, Kyle's all, um, zipped up, and they're both sitting normally on the couch. Still, this couldn't be more awkward.

"We're REALLY sorry," I say. Celery nods repeatedly.

"REALLY," Jonas rolls his eyes, but with a smile.

"Don't worry about it. It could have just as easily as happened the other way, not like Kyle's ever heard of knocking," Kyle elbows him, but affectionately.

"It's cool?" They nod.

"Be that as it may, from now on I'm gonna remember to lock my door," Kyle adds.

"Good idea," I say with emphasis. They laugh.

"It's not like you haven't seen that kind of stuff before," Kyle convicts me. "Or done it," I make a face.

"Would you have wanted to see Celery doing something like that to ME, Kyle?" He gets the major grossed look.

"I see what you mean," with a final shudder.

Jonas and Celery look at each other. There's grin action and together, shaking their heads and rolling their eyes, they mutter.

"Brothers."

On Monday, we celebrate Festivus. No metal pole, no airing of grievances, and no feats of strength, but we do spend the whole day exclaiming "It's a Festivus Miracle!" every time something even remotely good happens. Celery and I go on a like, cough, date, to see Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, and have an excellent time. We laugh about priceless moments such as the many bizarre out of nowhere sinister eyebrow raisings of the actor playing Malfoy, his line, "I didn't know you could read" and the look of grudging respect that followed, and all the hilarious fluctuations in the voice of Ron's character. When Harry and Ron are together in the dark forest and Harry says, "shush Ron" is another cause of great amusement. We find this funny for private and mostly insane reasons.

The next night we introduce Jonas to our family's Christmas Eve tradition of gathering together in the living room to watch Christmas type movies, eat mandarin oranges and drink nog. We always watch The Christmas Story (you know, that's the one about the crazy kid who wants a Red Ryder gun for Christmas but everyone keeps telling him he'll shoot his eye out), The Grinch (NOT the Jim Carrey version - that's like a travesty), and of course Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown.

Another weird tradition Celery and I have is peeling each other's oranges. We don't like feed them to each other and shit after, but we've each peeled the other's orange since he started coming to this 11 years ago. It's like a competition or whatever to see who can do the best job, you know, getting rid of the most of that annoying white pulp stuff and everything. We'll literally take like half an hour to do it. There's never really a clear winner though. We both think that whole, letting the other

one win thing is totally lame, and since we both take like way too long, it's not really possible to judge.

I get my orange about the time Ralphie's friend Flip's getting his tongue stuck to the flag pole, about a minute after I handed Celery his.

"You are like extremely weird, O my brothers," Jonas informs us, as if we didn't know. We shrug.

"Being normal is for losers."

"Pipe down!" Jon shouts cheerfully from the floor. It sucks to be little in a big family. You always get the shaft with the seating arrangements. Well, not Kara, she's still so freakishly small she can sit on my mom's lap. Personally, I prefer Celery's.

I have to say, this is the most excited I've ever been for Christmas morning. Bar none. Not that it has anything to do with presents really. Nothing's going to beat just waking up to Celery, and I really mean that. It's enough that it's another day I get to spend with him, and that's what makes this the best Christmas ever.

"Merry Christmas, baby," he whispers, leaning over to kiss my nose.

"You too, sweet one," I whisper back, forgetting the nose and going for the lips. Quick and closed mouth 'cause of the whole morning breath thing, but still, I have needs.

"Why do I feel so much like a little kid?" I smile.

"It's 'cause you're feeling the Christmas type joy like you haven't since you were really little and still innocent and pure or whatever," he curls his lip slightly dubiously.

"The first real Christmas I ever had was when I was six, and I was pretty un-innocent by then," I hold him tight, hoping that will make the bad memory go away.

"Okay, then it's just 'cause you're so damn happy to be with me," he grins.

"That sounds more like it."

Even with my whole not caring about the presents thing, I'm still as eager as anyone else to rush down the tree. What can I tell you? I'm totally into Christmas trees. I love the way they smell, the way they look. The annoying needles that fall on the carpet that Kyle always has to vacuum up because vacuuming makes me sneeze. There's no downside.

Okay, there is one. Jonas isn't here. But, I guess, he does have his own family, and I guess they like to have him around sometimes. That's understandable. He's a pretty cool guy. I imagine if I were his parents I'd also want him around on Christmas morning. It's a natural thing. Kyle's handling it well, so all in all, it's not the biggest deal. We'll get him back tomorrow.

Oh, yeah. I forgot about the other downside. You should already be familiar with this one, since I introduced it to you during Thanksgiving. The food. I swear, there are DANGEROUS levels of food floating around right now. Like, you've got all the turkey, stuffing, potatoes, corn, weird salads stuff for the big meal, but then there's also the million dishes of chocolates everywhere, the heaping basket of mandarins, the candy canes (but who likes those anyway?) and all the like baked type goods. Shortbread and fruitcake and all that good Christmassy type stuff. I know it sounds impossible, but my dad actually makes a GOOD fruitcake - not an oxymoron any longer! I'm full just thinking about it, just wait until I've consumed half of it.

I won't bore you with my long list of presents. As I believe I've already mentioned, the only one that truly matters to me is Celery, and his tickets were a present from both my parents to us. Still, I got some good shit. The one present I will tell you about is what Celery gives me when we're alone in my room taking a small private break from all the festivity and family bonding.

"Turn around for a second," he requests. Happy to go along with whatever he wants, I promptly do. I hear him rustling around in his bag, and then he lets me know it's safe.

"What is it?" I ask eagerly, taking a step forward. He smiles, handing it to me.

"Check it out and see," I carefully unwrap his gift, and a killer lump immediately forms in my throat.

It's us. Arms slung over shoulders, big crazy 7-year-old grins on our faces. Our matching ninja turtle backpacks on the ground by our feet. We also have matching bad mushroom cuts. Oh well. Celery looks incredibly cute in his.

"When was this taken?" He smiles fondly.

"It was the first day of school, grade two if I recall correctly. Our first anniversary," he teases with a glimmer in his eye. I smile with a mix of emotion and amusement. "I found it in a box of pictures I have, copies your dad's given me over the years. It seemed so perfect, and I couldn't remember another one like it in any of the photo albums you guys have

here. Do you like it?" I want to be sarcastically snotty but I'm working too hard trying not to cry.

"Yeah," I whisper.

"Good," I give him a hug.

"Like, a LOT, Celery. It's perfect," he grins.

"I'm glad." Then he frowns. "So where's mine?" I laugh.

"Give me a minute," he sighs comically, but slips out of the room.

As soon as he shuts the door I start a mad scramble, going through everything in my room. No I'm not looking around my room for something to give him 'cause I forgot! What do you think I am? Some kind of a monster? What I'm doing is looking around trying to FIND what I got him. Don't you hate it when you put something in a 'safe place' and then totally forget where that place is?

Oh good, there it is. My gift's not really as cool as his, but I'm pretty sure Celery will still like it.

"You can come back in now," I inform him. He returns, grinning.

"Forgot where it was?" I glare at him.

"Shut up. Do you want your present or not?" He nods quickly.

"Okay. So, here," I say, thrusting it into his hand, suddenly nervous. He takes his time, reading the comics I wrapped it up in. "Come onnnn," I whine. He grins evilly, but then quickly finishes the job. His eyes bug out.

"BABY! Where did you find this?" I laugh.

"I have my ways," he's shaking his head, seriously blown.

"No seriously. They don't even like make new copies of this any more."

"Does that mean you like it?" He gives me the look I tried to give him before.

"You're like, the best best-friend slash husband slash boyfriend in the entire world," I smile proudly.

"I am pretty great, aren't I?"

He gives me a long kiss, pretty much letting me know his answer. Then he goes back to lovingly fingering the tape. I'll fill you in now. I got him Baker 2G. For those of you who don't skate, it's this really legendary skate video, which, like Celery said, is like almost impossible to get. He's been trying since it came out, but never with any success. I had a hell of a time, but it was worth it. And all the money I had to pay for shipping. What a bitch shipping costs are. Man.

"Thank-you," he says, kissing me again.

I smile.

"You're welcome."



Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Twenty  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Mon, 23 Jun 2003 17:07:27 -0500

Boxing Day is supposed to be all about like shopping or whatever, but since we're not really the shopping kind of gay people and we still want to do something, me, Celery, Jonas, and Kyle all take the Le Baron for a spin that eventually lands us in Kildonan Place, at the end of a ridiculously long line waiting to see Two Towers. This of course leads to me telling Cel about that other time I went to the movies with Jonas and Kyle, and then there's much laughing at their expense. They don't seem to mind though. Too busy holding hands and scoping out girls. Let's not even go into how weird that is.

"Hot! That girl is HOT!" Kyle suddenly gasps.

"Which one?" Jonas asks keenly. He follows Kyle's finger and drooling look in the direction of the allegedly hot girl. Jonas's face turns a million different shades of uncomfortable. He drops Kyle's hand.

"What?" Kyle asks, alarmed. After all, it's something they do all the time. I have no idea why, but they like to check out girls together. It's totally weird, but, you know, that should come as no surprise.

"Nothing," Jonas says quickly, clearly lying.

"Dude, tell me," Kyle begs softly. Jonas bites his lip and shakes his head.

"Don't worry about it."

"I don't like, I mean, you know you're--" Jonas smiles.

"I totally know. Really, don't worry about it." That's when I notice the girl is looking at us, and like squinting.

By the time I turn to ask Jonas if he like knows the chick or whatever, she's started walking towards us. Noticing, Jonas looks like he wants to die.

"Ben!" she gushes, waving. Celery, Kyle and I share a puzzled look. Ben?

"Uh, hi Erica."

"What are you doing here?" Jonas slash Ben question mark shrugs.

"Going to see a movie," she rolls her eyes, with a small grin.

"I meant the city, fool." There's no describing how uncomfortable Jonas looks.

"I live here now."

"You told everyone you were moving to Lethbridge."

"Well, plans like change," I notice he's still keeping his distance from Kyle.

"We've all wanted to call you or write or something, but when you never really sent anything back... I guess I finally understand why." She's starting to sound hurt and angry.

"I'm sorry, I meant to like let you guys know, its just... I've been busy." She gives the three of us the evil eye.

"With these people?" Okay. So it was possible for Jonas to look even more uncomfortable. Go figure.

"Yeah, Erica, these are my droogs - Carrots, Celery, and Kyle." She sort of scrunches her eyebrows at our names.

"Carrots and Celery?" We smile.

"Yeah, it's weird, we know, but we're used to them," she shrugs.

"It's um, strange and nice to meet you?" Now she's sounding a little more like someone I can understand Jonas hanging out with.

"You too," Celery says. I'm pretty sure it's all with the strange and none of the nice as far as Kyle's concerned.

"And you're Kyle?" He nods.

"Yeah."

"How'd you guys all meet Ben?" Again with that Ben crap.

"He goes to our school but--"

"Ben's my first name," Jonas explains quickly before I can even get that far. I nod.

"Ah," Erica smiles, all confused.

"What did you think his name was?"

"Well, since it's what he TOLD us, we sorta thought it was Jonas."  
Very nice, Kyle. You too can be a major bitch to the females from your boyfriend's past.

"You go by Jonas now?" she asks him. He shrugs.

"Yeah."

She straightens up a bit, "Look, can we talk for a minute? You know, privately?" She's looking nervous and hopeful, but Kyle's frown is basically gluing Jonas to the spot.

"Uh, we're like, in line for the movie and everything, this really isn't a good time."

"When would be a good time?" You have to admit, he walked right into that one. Jonas visibly winces.

"Um... I don't really know, like I said, I'm really busy," she sighs.

"Can I at least give you my phone number where I'm staying with my aunt?" His eyes dart nervously towards Kyle, but he's sort of turned to stone. Looking fairly miserable, Jonas nods.

"Okay, sure, I guess."

She writes it down quickly, using the paper and pen she whipped out from her purse. Then she lets out a like `well I guess that's it then' sigh. I think she's finally picking up on the really not wanted vibe.

"Look, it was really nice to see you again, um, Jonas." She takes his hand for a brief second, and looks soulfully into his eyes. "I missed you a lot this year. I've always been sorry for the way things ended between us and, there have been lots of things I've wished I could say. But I guess now's no better a time than it ever was. You'll call me though, right?" She doesn't wait for Jonas to react, already moving back.

She takes another step away, turns, and then turns back, smiling sadly, "Merry Christmas."

"You too," Jonas says weakly as she walks off. It takes him a few seconds to muster the courage to face Kyle.

"I..."

"Later." Kyle says shortly. "I'm going to need a few minutes," Jonas's face is extremely pained, but he gets it.

"Okay."

We see the movie, but not even me and Celery had much luck paying attention to it, and I'm thinking the chances of Jonas and Kyle retaining it any better are slim. It's all with the palpable tension the whole way home.

Suddenly, just as we pull into the driveway, Jonas starts to cry. Big, gulping sobs that wrack his whole body. It doesn't even take Kyle a second to get a horrified, panicked look on his face, and he tries to hold the shaking body of Jonas in his arms. Not an especially comfortable thing to do in the front seat of a car.

"Please stop crying, Jonas," he pleads. "You're breaking my heart here," shockingly, this only makes Jonas cry harder. Yes of course that was sarcasm! Really.

"Jonas, goldie, please. I'm sorry. I really love you, Jonas, I'm sorry for being stupid," Kyle's pretty much crying himself.

Despite Kyle's best attempts, there doesn't seem to be any calming Jonas down, so eventually we all get out of the car and like half carry, half drag him into the house with us. Everyone else is out somewhere doing the crazy Boxing Day thing.

His crying stops after about five more minutes, but it takes another 10 before Jonas starts talking.

"I'm sorry, Kyle," are the first words out of his mouth.

"No! No, I was the one," Kyle protests quickly.

"I should have told you about her, and I definitely should have told her about us," he sighs.

"Kyle, Erica was like, I don't know, my first love, I guess you could call her. We were best friends in junior high, well, since before that, we met in grade six. She was such a cool girl to hang out with, more mature than the other guys my age, but not stupid like most of the other girls seemed to be. She didn't care about stuff like dolls and make-up. She liked the same stuff as me and we had like the same sense of humour. We didn't start dating technically until grade nine 'cause my parents wouldn't let me until then. We were SO young, but totally convinced we were in love. Maybe we were. Anyway, we shared everything. She," he closes his eyes, stopping for a minute. "She was like my first, you know? My first and only until you," he shakes his head. "Everything was always fine, but then near the end of grade 10 it all started going to fall apart. We fought about everything, and even when we were like, at our closest, nothing was the same. I guess we just like grew apart without knowing it or whatever. By the time I found

out we were moving, we weren't even talking. I was drifting away from everybody, 'cause I felt like they were HER friends, not mine, so I guess I was happy about the move. School was kind of lame here too until I started lunching with you guys," he nods at me and Cel, but then goes back to looking at Kyle.

"Maybe you didn't want to know all this, or you don't think I needed to tell you, but I did. I feel like I've been lying and I don't want to be like that anymore. Kyle, I love you completely, but I still get afraid, and this is sort of why. Me and Erica were close too, and I thought I loved her... I guess I'm just like, afraid we'll end up the same way."

"There're no guarantees in life, Jonas," Kyle says sadly, with a shrug. Jonas eyes me and Celery. Kyle actually cracks a half smile. "But I love you too, and I don't expect to stop. I don't believe I ever will in fact. I get why you'd be worried, but maybe you can learn from your past and then escape the whole doomed to repeat it thing. I'm not that Erica chick. I plan to hold onto you freakishly tight, I'm never gonna let you go. Okay?" Jonas makes like what you could stretch into calling a nod, and Kyle pulls him close.

"Who feels like a voyeur," I whisper to Celery. He smiles.

"Let's go."

They don't even notice.

"That was weird," I pronounce once we're upstairs. Celery shrugs.

"Yeah, I guess."

"Whadda ya mean, you guess? Did you know something about this?" Celery gets a guilty look, causing my eyes to widen in my disbelief. "You DID! He told you?" Celery shakes his head.

"Not exactly," he sits down on the bed. I'm weirded, but I still go to him and nestle myself under his arm. "Mostly I put some stuff together on my own and as it turns out, I was right."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Well, from the way he shied away from Sam even though it was clear he really liked her, I figured there had to be some relationship in his past that was making him wary. Also, he'd watch us sometimes, the way we are together, and he'd get this haunted look on his face. I never for a second believed that line he always gave us about never being in love before," I shake my head.

"You're like, very scary sometimes, sweet one. And I do mean brilliant, but I definitely also mean scary," he grins slyly at the memory.

"So you've told me."

"Cel, if you just figured it out, what was with the guilty look before?" He shrugs with the shoulder not attached to the arm holding me.

"I still should have told you," I roll my eyes.

"You don't always have to fill me in on the details I'm too clueless to see for myself, besides you probably weren't sure you were right and didn't want to spread all this private stuff about Jonas either way."

"You're really way too easy on me," he says with a smile. I lean back, indicating I want him to lie down, which he does. I turn a bit so I've got a nice pillow in the form of his chest, curled up along the side of him.

"We're too easy on each other, but we're too far gone to start worrying about that seriously now. Just enjoy it," he sighs peacefully.

"I am."

We lie like that for maybe an hour or two. At one point, we hear Kyle and Jonas thundering up the stairs mad dash style, and then the slam of Kyle's door. Celery chuckles. I raise an eyebrow.

"What?" His smile grows.

"Well, what do you think they're going to do in there?" I'm puzzled. Celery makes an 'oh come on' face. I still don't know what he's talking about.

"What?" I repeat. Celery clears his throat.

"Think about it, baby. They just like, went through something, now they're into like, making up territory. What could they possibly be doing that they'd want the door shut and locked for?" OH! Oh gross! Gauh!

"Yucky!" I sputter, face contorted by the horror of it all. Celery laughs.

"Baby! Like, what's your problem? Surely it's occurred to you that Jonas and Kyle have sex," you never want to hear your brother's name and sex in the same sentence! Like, NEVER! I let Celery know it with my face alone. He just laughs more. "You're such a prune," I glare.

"It's horrible and gross," he smiles.

"Does that mean you're swearing to celibacy?" He finally gets a smile out of me.

"No," I mutter through my reluctant smirk. He kisses me on the neck.

"Well good, 'cause as we both know, I can't get enough of you," I run my fingers down his abdomen, resting at the top button of his jeans.

"Hey," he protests. "I thought you were sore," I eye him mischievously.

"Ready to try something new?" When he gets my point, Celery's eyes almost pop out. A second later, he's actually considering it. Finally, after about a minute, he grins shyly.

"Go for it, baby"

After (What's all the whining about? I thought we already established I'm not going to describe it to you?) Celery's total putty in my hands. For once, it's HIM curled up against me, being the submissive one.

"Why didn't we do that months ago?" he murmurs dreamily into my chest. I smile, among a million other mostly indescribable emotions, extremely proud of myself. I wasn't sure I'd be able to make it as good for him as he always does for me.

"I didn't think you'd let me," I admit. The putty thing stops abruptly. Wrong time for admissions, I guess.

"You didn't think I would LET you?" he demands, tearing himself away from me, that lovely half angry, half ready to cry combo, eyes all grey. I hang my head.

"Carrots?" I sigh.

"Maybe let was the wrong word. I just didn't think you wanted it." Slowly the grey recedes slightly, but he doesn't exactly return docily onto my chest.

"You thought I wouldn't let you?"

"Cel," I sigh.

"No," he says with a shake of his head. "That's what you really thought?" I sigh again.

"Not just that. Lots of things. One of the most important being it was never really something I found myself wanting. I haven't exactly been unsatisfied, you know?" He gives up a grudging half smile. "The FEW times I

thought about it, the combination of me not being sure you wanted it and me not being sure I wanted it always added up to me not thinking about it long."

"So why did you suddenly bring it up now?" He's really just curious, not accusing or upset anymore.

I've finally got him back lying close to me. We're facing each other now. I reach out and start playing with his hair. It's longer now, so thick and soft. Mine's longer too. It's as straight as ever, even if it is down to my chin in some parts. It's kind of like a round shaggy mop, almost beetle-ish, but longer than that. I think Celery likes it though. He's been playing with it a lot.

"You asked me a question awhile ago, didn't you?" I ask lazily after a handful of minutes have passed. He smiles.

"Yeah."

"What was it?"

"Um, why did you suddenly decide to give it a try now after always deciding against it before?" Oh right. Now I remember why I put that off. I blush. He grins. "What?" I smile sheepishly.

"Well, basically it was because I was really horny and I knew I couldn't have you the one way, so I had to go about it another way." He laughs.

"Not so much of a prune after all maybe," I kiss his cheek.

"Not when it comes to you anyway."

We have to leave the bed eventually to do the foraging for food thing, and we find Kyle and Jonas already in the kitchen doing the same. We all share sort of half-delirious smiles.

"Everything okay?" I ask them. They race each other to see who can grin the biggest fastest.

"Definitely," Kyle affirms, roping Jonas in close.

"Good," I take my head back out of the fridge. "Isn't there anything to eat?" Celery rolls his eyes. I shrug. "What?" He sighs.

"Baby, the house is like BURSTING with food."

"Find me something then if you're so smart," I challenge poutily. It takes him like five seconds to shove a pre-prepared plate of Christmas leftovers



into my hand. I guess I missed those.

"Thanks," I mutter. He shakes his head in that exaggerated 'why me' kind of way. Jonas and Kyle smirk and smile. Dude! That rhymes. Weird.

"So Jonas, are you going to call Erica?" I ask. Jonas nods.

"Yes," Kyle goes rigid, and since he's got his arms around Jonas, it's something he picks up on right away. "I have to, Kyle," he says, twisting to look at him. "I have to tell her the truth about me - about us. I have to tell her the things I was too proud, stubborn, angry and okay, chicken, to last time. I owe it to her and I definitely owe it to myself. Please let me do this," Kyle sighs.

"If you really think you need to."

"I do," Jonas states firmly.

"Then I'll like support you or whatever," Kyle says, shrugging slightly. Jonas smiles.

"Thank-you," Kyle kisses his shoulder.

"You're welcome."

"I've been waiting for this," Celery announces gleefully. Everyone turns to look at him in the very confused 'huh' way.

"What?" I ask. He grins.

"Making fun of Jonas and Kyle for being all cheesy and in love they way they always did us," I feel the start of my own evil grin, and we turn on Jonas and Kyle together.

"We surrender!" Kyle yields in advance.

"Oh come on, we could take them!" Jonas scoffs. Kyle sighs.

"So, it's open season then?" We all grin at him.

Now the holiday truly has begun.

It's all about getting gibes in whenever you can, catching every one of the other couple's moony looks, every spacing out while staring into each other's eyes, every sincere but totally cheesy line. It's about cheesy puns and bad jokes. Basically, it's all about crazy lame fun. When family starts gradually retaking the house, they all turn on us and me, Cel, Jonas, and Kyle have to band together against the assault, but that just

makes it all even more fun. It's so cool to have a family so supportive they can be totally evil to you and you get that it's all a joke. I really am a lucky bastard. And humble! Come on.

Carrots and Celery Part Two Chapter Twenty-One  
by Karla Schulz (lanky\_lanka@lycos.com)  
Date: Thu, 26 Jun 2003 09:20:02 -0500

In the morning, on the day after the one they call Boxing, I wake up to being kissed on my neck. Then fierce and passionate kisses for my lips. Lying down, my legs still turn to jelly. I'm practically biting my lip to keep from moaning when suddenly it all stops.

"How 'bout you?" What? Wait. No. Kissing my neck, weak knees...

"Oh, you bastard!" Celery grins all very self satisfied and smug.

"Really, I'm interested. I want to know," he's having way too much fun. I pout and glare combined.

"How could you do this to me?" He grins all the more smugly.

"You know what they say about revenge."

"It's best served cold?" He tisks.

"It's sweet! Now, roll over and answer my question," I sigh.

"You're actually going to make me ANSWER too? I thought you were just trying to make a point," his eyes are sort of sparkling in the evil and mischievous way.

"I am making a point, several points in fact. But the main idea is that you're supposed to tell me about school."

"It's fine, wonderful," I steal his answer.

"Now, now, did you let me get away with that?" More sighing on my part.

"But it really IS fine," he turns over onto his side, hovering over me. I'm on my back, still enjoying some pouting action.

"Liar," staring up into his eyes, I find myself unable to tell him anything but the whiny insecure truth.

"Okay, it's mostly fine but... you know, it's like suddenly all everyone talks about is graduation and what they're going to DO after graduation and apparently we're all supposed to have a plan, but - I have no plan! The future's all so uncertain. I don't know what I'm going to be doing in 10 years, where I'm going to be living. I don't even know what I want to take in University or if I should go at all! Maybe I should take some time off

or look at Colleges or go back-packing through Europe! There's just so many strange and scary options. And everyday I get asked by at least one person what I'm going to do with my life, the only answer I ever have is the trying to be joking 'I have NO idea'. That's not good enough!" I told you I was going to let myself get out of hand. Never say I didn't warn you.

Celery seems upset. I sort of closed my eyes there about half-way through. What part of what I said would upset him like this?

"Cel?"

"Your future's totally uncertain?" he asks, with a like quiver in his voice. OH! I take his face in my hands.

"Sweet one, no! I didn't mean it like that! Of course there's you - you're my future," I try to do the brave reassuring smile thing. "You're the one certainty that's keeping me mildly sane through all this. I don't know what I'm going to be doing, or where, but I do know I'm going to be doing it with you - whatever it is I decide. What WE decide," he smiles. Another crisis averted.

"Sorry for the self-doubt episode," I pull his face down for a light kiss.

"No apology required or desired. I love you, Celery, you're my whole life. You're everything to me. When I look into my past, there's you. Here and now, you're all I want and need. When I look into the future you're all I can see, standing out clearly against the rest of the insanity. Never doubt that I'll be with you," he kisses me again.

"Not much chance of that with you making speeches like that," in another rare burst of totally uncharacteristic seriousness I take his hand and press my lips to his tattoo.

"We said it, we branded ourselves based upon it, and I meant it. I promised you me forever, and that's the least you're going to get," he puts one hand on my face, looking down at me with a kind of raw intensity that blows me away.

"When did you grow up, Carrots?" His voice, his look, and his words together bring tears to my eyes. He cradles my head in his hands and I cry into his chest. I only half understand why. Everything and nothing right?

After the million years it takes me to calm down have passed, I finally open my eyes again, remove my face from Celery's shoulder, and look at him. He smiles sort of `hey there where'd you go' ish. I take some of those great gulping breaths you've been hearing so much about. And you know what? They're not very fun. You might think they would be, but no.

"So that was weird," I say shakily, with a like exhale laugh thing. Celery's all about stroking my face and twirling my hair. He's still giving me time.

"I love you, Cel."

"Baby, I know you do," he assures me, smiling tenderly. I sort of cross my eyes and bite my lip.

"I didn't really realize what was happening," I say, half to him, half only to myself. I search my memories for awhile before looking over to him again. "I'm sorry." His hand slips down my neck and he squeezes my shoulder.

"What on earth could you think you have to be sorry for?" I like whimper sigh.

"The like, changing," understanding causes head tiltage and rueful smiling.

"I didn't mean it in a bad way, baby," he informs, leaning over to plant a kiss firmly on my forehead. "Yes, okay, I'm sorry I like missed it or whatever, but the changes are good. And you're still my Carrots - even if you do suddenly have the ability to be serious for more than 30 seconds at a time," I actually grin for a second.

"A trait you seem to have lost," he chuckles, sliding me closer.

"See, baby? You're not such a different guy."

"Good thing too," I say, sighing with contentment this time. "After all, really, you don't want to see too much tampering with perfection," Celery grins at me, the way he does when he knows he's managed to bring me back again from one of my crazy places. It's always that same grin. Happy, triumphant, maybe even a touch boastful. I mind none of those things.

"Who loves ya, baby?" I laugh. It's a thing.

"You?" He kisses me.

"Yeah."

The next day just goes by, in this happy blur. And the next. Before I know what happened to the days, it's New Years. 2003. Last night we all stayed up just for the kissing at midnight excuse. We partied (pfft - partied, hardly) in Kyle's place 'cause according to Jonas that's like a hipper scene. They're all with the okay now by the way. Jonas hasn't called Erica ('cause he's too chicken to do it while she's still in the city and could possibly talk him into a in person visit) but he keeps maintaining that he

will. Though I can't exactly imagine Kyle pressuring him about it, so who knows when that will go down. Anyway, for the moment, it's all good with them. From the highly gross kiss they engaged in last night, I'm thinking extremely good. We all talked about resolutions, but agreed unanimously that no one ever keeps those anyway, and thus, they're quite lame. Frankly, they'd be lame either way.

Instead we made more pacts. The couples (first one for Jonas and Kyle) and then another one as a group. Simple stuff. Keeping up the good work stuff. Never losing touch with each other stuff. I needed that one, 'cause sometimes that really scares me. The idea that somehow Jonas and Kyle will end up one place, me and Celery in another, and we'll never see each other. Maybe Kyle was right and I was wrong and I always loved them more than I thought, but I know now, even if I didn't before, that I couldn't bear to lose them. They're my brothers and they're a part of me just like Celery is. He feels the same. They feel the same. So the pact. I take my pacts very seriously you'll notice.

We go to Two Towers again in the afternoon on New Year's day since none of us really got it the first time.

"That was way cool," Jonas gives his review as we're speed walking back to the car (it's fucking freezing! That's why!)

"Yep, amazingly cool in fact." I concur, teeth almost chattering. We all sort of dive into the Le Baron, and Kyle starts it up.

"I could have done with a little fewer battle scenes - though they were pretty incredible," Celery adds his thoughts.

"I could have done with a little more Legolas. Damn, he's hot."

"Hey!" Celery protests. "Sitting right here, sitting right exactly here," I smile.

"Did I say he was hotter than you?"

"Before you guys start making out again, let's get back to the movie. I like, can't believe how much I loved it. I keep trying to remember my favourite part, and I'll think of something, but then a second later I'll think of another thing I loved just as much."

"Totally. It's just a like, epic. I think I liked it better than the first."

"Yeah me too, it was way more exciting," I agree with Jonas.

"Still, I feel like a slacker for not reading the books," he admits. Celery

and I shrug.

"We haven't read them either."

"Peasants," Kyle says, all snotty and affected.

"Oh like you're so great, Kyle," I scoff. "You only read them 'cause you had to for school."

"So what, I still read them," he challenges on with Kyle like superiority, going unfazed.

"Yeah, yeah. Good for you."

"They're ignoring us again," Celery does the old stage whisper to Jonas, who nods back all very confidentially.

"I know," Kyle and I roll our eyes at each other.

"Another brother bonding moment ruined by attention starved boyfriends," I lament.

"It's a cruel, cruel world," Kyle commiserates.

"Nobody feels sorry for you," Jonas and Celery inform us at the same time. More mutual brotherly eye rolling.

"Just take us home, Kyle," I sigh. He smiles at me.

"Love to, brother."

A couple more days do the going by thing. There's a new routine type thing setting in. Mornings we spend alone, lounging, talking, etcetera in bed. We eat food at some point, which inevitably results with us meeting up with Jonas and Kyle who are doing the same. This whole shared nourishment time usually mushrooms into some kind of afternoon activity, most commonly dreamed up by Jonas. We'll eat dinner all together as a family sharing all the days fun and excitement in a very Leave it to Beaver sickeningly happy way. In the evening we might hang out in the living room with the whole crew, in Kyle's pad with just him and Jonas, or we'll secret away to my room and just chill together until we decide we want to go to bed for real.

It's near the end of like the eighth day of Christmas vacation and everything up to this point has basically followed the routine. Celery and I are snuggled together in bed, recovering from a tiring but extremely satisfying evening session of etcetera. By the time I start dozing, I wake myself back up enough to get ready for bed all the way and head for my bathroom to brush my teeth and stuff.

When I come back out of the bathroom I find Celery like curled on up his side, this sort of blank spaced look on his face. I quickly make the space between us go away.

"What's wrong, sweet one?" I ask, rubbing up and down his back like that's the solution to the problem.

"The day - it's gone. It's just gone, so fast. All the days," he shakes his head, still looking all distant and weird. "They're going so fast," he looks at me like I'll have the answer.

"Time does fly," I say lamely, smiling the same way. Celery remains mournful and confused.

"Yeah but I didn't want it to," I lie down behind him, putting my arms around his neck and shoulders.

"I know, me neither, but the whole not having control over time and space thing is still kind of an issue," I think he smiles at that, but I can't really see that well, so it's just a guess. You know. One of those hopeful ones.

"It's been getting--"

"I know," I stop him hastily. 'Cause maybe if we don't talk about it, it'll just go away.

"Care," so much for that dream.

"Well, I do," I pout. He rolls over, facing me now.

"What do you know?" Very nice. Make me the one who has to say it. I sigh.

"That things are becoming way too... like, comfortable. It's getting to be that we don't even freak out when we're not within a foot of each other anymore 'cause we're getting used to having each other again," I want to stop, to just start to cry or something so he'll comfort me and I won't have to say anymore, but I continue, "And that's sort of bad, because time's slipping by and it's all going to be so horrible when you have to leave again because I'm starting to let myself believe you AREN'T leaving. That this is real. That having you here can be an all the time thing again," Celery closes his eyes, just breathing for awhile, trying to achieve some level of inner calm or whatever. Enough to be able to open them and look at me anyway.

"Yep, that's the one," he agrees with sighing bitterness some time later.



"Is it really so bad?" I allow myself to ask. "I mean, so what if we're getting comfortable, right? I LIKE feeling used to having you around again, I like it," he nods.

"I know, baby. Me too, I just wonder... is it going to be the first months all over again if we let ourselves go too far with this? I can't go through that again - I definitely can't let YOU go through that again," I like wrinkle my brow with fretful understanding.

"I feel the same way, it's just... I can't pull away, and I can't let you pull away. I can't NOT feel like this. I don't want to feel anyway other than this. I WANT to not freak out every second I'm away from you because it's enough to know that you're near me. I can't give that peace up now that I'm so used to tasting again," he smiles ultra sadly.

"So we ignore what we know is coming? We do the blissful ignorance, river in Egypt thing?" I shrug.

"I can't do anything else."

"Okay then," he says, taking my shoulders and easing me down into his arms as he does.

"Wanna stay up all night frozen in the fear of missing even one second with each other?" I only half teasingly suggest.

"Yeah," he replies, the exact same mix.

We don't get to sleep until the early hours of the next day.

Waking up around 10 the next morning, we share a long hug and wordlessly rise. Once on our feet, Celery briefly kisses my forehead, smiling down at me. I test drive a half smile back.

"Hungry?" I shake my head.

"No."

"Okay."

Always when we don't want food we go to Kyle's, so we drag ourselves still pyjama clad over there, knocking on his thankfully locked door.

Jonas answers the door after a minute or two. I'm under Celery's arm, sort of curled into him, my face half covered, but I see Jonas smile uncertainly, exhibiting some concern. He opens the door and steps back so we can enter, still with the knitted brow.

"You guys are looking rather post-apocalyptic this morning," he observes as we crawl onto the couch. I immediately bury myself into Celery, too exhausted and upset to answer Jonas's questions.

"Yeah," Kyle emerges from his bedroom to add his agreement to Jonas. He looks us over with folded arms. "What's the deal? We're the ones who had to deal with awkward, potentially permanently scarring, scenes with each other's long time girlfriends in the span of one week." Doing the mocking himself so we'll feel better thing. "What's got you two so upset?"

"It's just the normal stuff," Celery says with a sigh. "You know. The fact that I'm going to have to leave soon and everything,"

"Man, I was hoping we weren't going to start being depressed about that until like two or three days before," Kyle admits, suddenly sounding very dejected and slumping into his only arm chair.

"Same here, and like, there's a whole week still," Jonas adds, getting himself comfortable on Kyle's lap.

"We know," Celery says, sighing all the more. "But last night it sort of hit home that we're like half done already and just that it's been maybe like too good, you know?"

I look up as Jonas speaks, "I get it. You're worried about the fall, right?" We nod. Kyle seems to understand as well.

"Don't do that to yourselves, little bros," he says with conviction. "I mean, that's the kind of thinking that's gonna ruin the time that's left, nobody wants that."

"We know that," I assure Kyle. "And we were planning to go back into the land of denial, it just sorta hasn't kicked in yet, I guess,"

"Let us know when it does, eh?" I smile.

"Definitely"

Then hanging out with Kyle and Jonas goes on for about another hour, and partial cheering does occur, but by the time we decide it's time for that food we didn't want earlier, we're both still semi in suck every minute dry, panic after everyone has passed mode. Cel catches my hand as I'm standing up after finishing my breakfast, smiling still in the half sad way.

"Wanna go for a walk?" I tilt my head thoughtfully.

"Do I get to go with you?" The half smile eye roll.

"Well duh," I grin.

"Then I absolutely want to go for a walk," he nods.

"Okay good." We get all bundled ('cause hey - freezing!) and then stand together in the front hall.

"So like, you know it's really cold out there, right?" I ask him.

"Um yeah," he says, in the exact same `well duh' tone he used before to say that very thing.

"Okay, okay, no need to get all huffy. I was just checking."

As he's leading me out the door with a hand on my shoulder Celery looks down at me amused, "Huffy?"

"Quiet."

We walk for awhile, each with a hand jammed into pockets, the free ones bare and joined.

"So are we just wandering aimlessly or does this little jaunt have a specific destination?" I ask after I figure I've had enough with the silence already, nice as it was.

"Mostly wandering aimlessly," he tells me. "I thought we'd just walk around, you know, make fun of the occasional set of really cheesy Christmas decorations, sing the first line of Christmas carols 'cause that's all we can remember... that kind of thing," I smile. I sort of do that a lot around Celery. Have you noticed?

"You call that a plan?" He puts on a defensive look, already knowing exactly where I'm going with this.

"Well, alright, so maybe it's not a plan exactly..."

"Admit it you have no plan."

"Okay fine, maybe I don't have a plan - Lord knows I don't have lapel bottoms," we just grin at each other.

Finally Celery sighs happily and takes back my hand, starting us walking again, "I'm telling you, the words I don't have for how much I love you, I mean, man, there are a lot of them," I squeeze his hand.

"You and me both, sweet one"

Just when I'm starting to think that I'm pretty freezing and that you know, maybe possibly going back inside might be a sound move, Celery starts walking with a new determination. Walking in a direction NOT of my house, keep in mind. When I start to figure out where we're going, I look at him suspiciously.

"No specific destination, eh?" He does the guilty grin thing.

"Yeah, that was a lie."

"I sorta got that."

"Sorry," I shrug.

"For what? I don't care. I mean, I don't know really why you didn't just tell me, but if you wanted it to be like a surprise or whatever, that's cool."

"It was just, I wasn't totally sure I wanted to, so..." I nod.

"Okay," I nod in the area of specific destination's general direction. "So are we going in?"

"Yeah," he decides.

Yes, I hear you. You don't have to shout. In where? Well, our old elementary school playground if you must know.

We step through the gate, a world of falling into the rabbit hole, our breath getting weird just 'cause of like, the weird. I haven't been here in like 6 years. We hung out here the summer after grade six, still using the basketball courts and all (sometimes to play basketball and other times to skate on), but that was it. Very `so weird to be back here'.

"So what is this?" The shrug, the lopsided grin.

"Memory lane."

"I see."

He starts leading us around, pulling me by the hand. We take a long loopy tour.

"This is where my life began," he says finally, taking a long deep breath and exhaling slowly. I smile at him, eye lockage and hand squeezage.

"Mine too," he shivers, but not one of those from actually being cold

shivers.

"You don't know how many times I've thanked whatever powers that be you sat down at my table," emotion locks up his voice for a long moment before passing. "That started everything for me - it's what made me alive." We've turned so that we're face to face now, left and right hands holding, his right resting on the curve of the my neck, my left on his waist.

"You and me both, buddy," I say almost gruffly, 'cause trying for expressing my actual current emotion never would've gone over without me crying. His hand gently guides me close, and I'm locked into one of his perfect hugs.

"I love you so much, you've done so much for me. I can't ever repay you for that, there's nothing I'll ever be able to do that'll--"

"Don't," I interrupt almost sharply. "Don't do that to this moment. Just hold me, okay? Focus on my love for you, not your worries about not measuring up," he nods into my hair, and we stay there for awhile, keeping each other warm.

"I wanna show you something," he says suddenly, breaking away and reclaiming my hand. I follow willingly.

"You wanted to show me the stairs?" I ask drolly, once we've stopped walking and Celery's got this `here we are' look on his face.

"No," he says grumpily before bending down and busily brushing away snow from the corner of the second limestone step.

"What're you doing?" I ask, leaning over him, trying to peek. He ignores me to continue the all consuming brushing process.

"There," he says with a mix of pride and nervousness, standing up and taking one step away. I look where he just finished the job. Letters etched in stone. I like can't even talk over here.

"How did this get here?" sort of falls out of my mouth on its own accord. He shrugs, shyness taking over his features.

"I told you I've loved you since forever," he reminds me.

"Yeah I guess you did," I acknowledge vaguely, fingering the letters, still a bit lost in the surreal beauty of this moment.

"I put it here the day I figured it out - that the word for what I was feeling was love, I mean."

"Weren't you afraid someone would see?" He shrugs.

"Not like many people would get what it meant. Anyway, I didn't even realize I was doing it until I was half done and by then I figured it'd be a lie not to finish the job."

"What'd you mean you didn't realize what you were doing?" I'm still partially detached, hazy, but genuinely curious at the same time.

"Well, I came here to think right, this freaked out little kid, 8 years old. I was just fiddling around with my pocket knife, more than half gone, and I started scratching away as my mind was going a mile a minute, repeating over and over this new truth, but I didn't even notice I was writing it down at the same time." I've finally pulled myself totally out of dreamland, and I kiss him hard.

"This level of amazingness shouldn't even be allowed," I inform him. He grins.

"I freaked out about a million times, thinking you were going find it, but you never did," I huff a little, feeling some honour defending is in order.

"Well, who looks at the far corner of a stair anyway?"

"Not many people, I guess," I lean up and kiss him again.

"He loved you too, you know? The 6 year old me, the 8 year old me - he loved you SO much - he just didn't know it yet," he smiles, holding me close.

"I know."

We just hug until we're both like immune to the cold, until it's getting dark and even more freezing.

"You still got that pocket knife?" I ask, raising an eyebrow, finally noticing the darkness, lateness and coldness. He shrugs.

"Sure, why?" I just hold out my hand and he gets it out of his pocket. I remember it now. The knife I mean. It was my dad who gave it to him, which I'm guessing is why he still carries it around with him.

I crouch down, and when I'm finished, right under "Celery loves Carrots" is written, "And Carrots loves him too".