

Note from Kele:

I decided to look through Star Crossed cuts today and stumbled across this scene. It's strange, but I had forgotten the challenge I faced with how to handle Wyatt and Jules' birthday in Star Crossed. That point with Jules secretly dating Romeo, there were a lot of unusual logistics, and I knew it was about the moment that everything needed to go really, really bad.

Because it was sort of a key moment, I played around with several different situations. This scene was one of them. I ended up having to

ditch the concept of a surprise birthday party when I wrote the scene of Nova showing up and telling Romeo he had to throw the fight. I obviously liked the Nova scene more than this one, and due to timeline issues, it was one or the other. I just didn't see Tino and Romeo being awake that early if they were up all night drinking their sorrows away with Nova.

The one sacrifice was seeing the deeper peek into Chuito and Alaine's relationship that we got in this little party scene. It was also a fun look into the Tino/Chuito bromance. I tell new authors that cut scenes usually end up being recycled in ways you never anticipated. This scene was part of those first concepts about

Chuito and Alaine's relationship, along with Tino's teasing friendship with Chuito. I got to explore all this later with Slayer, but as you can see, my heart was always in it with the dynamic threesome.

So clearly, this is not cannon, but still fun. . .

"I don't think this is a good idea," Clay said, looking around the diner hesitantly. "They're weird 'bout their birthday. It's sorta a party of two with them."

"It's *always* a party of two with them," Melody argued. "They both work themselves

near to death and no one ever does anything nice for them or even acknowledges it.”

Romeo watched the argument as Clay stood on a stool, hanging a happy birthday banner while Melody directed him. Paper streamers hung from the windows in varying spring colors and Romeo would've wanted to see this even if he wasn't secretly dating Jules. Something about Wyatt Conner having a pretty, spring birthday party was very funny.

“Who has a birthday party at six in the morning?” Tino asked, bleary eyed, with his hair sticking up at odd angles. He took a sip of coffee. “And look at how many people are here? There's something *wrong* with this town.”

“They’re morning people.” Romeo shrugged, drinking his own cup of coffee. “Not everyone stays out partying all night.”

“No, he’s right,” Chuito said next to Tino, his face buried in his folded arms as he rested against the table. “I’ve been living here for three years. I promise you there *is* something wrong. No one should have to get up at five a.m. to go to a birthday party.”

Just then Alaine and a group of young women Romeo didn’t know walked by, he saw the pretty strawberry blonde eye Chuito who was still hiding, but she didn’t say anything.

Romeo got it, but Tino didn’t.

He jabbed Chuito in the ribs, his voice loud on purpose. “Look, it’s your girlfriend. Preacher’s daughter. Not bad, *paisan*. Not bad.”

Chuito lifted his head, staring wildly to Alaine, who’d blushed and turned away when all her friends laughed. Then Chuito turned around and jammed his fist into Tino’s side, a kidney punch that had to be painful, but Tino just winced and laughed at the same time.

“*¡Bicho es!*” Chuito punched him again, looking more intent to murder the harder Tino laughed. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Romeo reached out, grabbing Chuito’s wrist before he could hit Tino a third time. “You’re

making it worse. Just chill out. You're not helping your case."

Tino fell into Romeo, holding his arms up protectively, still laughing his ass off. "Every time and all over a *pezzo di figa*."

"You ever think she's more than a piece of ass to him, asshole?" Romeo whispered, keeping his voice low because Alaine and her friends were still looking their way despite settling at a table clear across the diner. "Stop fucking with your friends."