



## Clay's Challenge

*Cassandra Gold*

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Tired of being judged by his appearance, Clay Pennington decides the time has come for drastic action. Partying and one-night stands have gotten old, but how's a boy supposed to find someone when nobody looks beyond his surface to the man inside? A wilderness retreat seems like just the ticket for proving he's more than everyone else believes—until he actually gets there.

Everything is a lot more difficult than he expected, including the man he's partnered with for the week. Sexy, surly Trent Raines is a puzzle Clay would love to solve, but the man pushes him away at every turn. Totally out of his element and stuck with a survival partner who barely tolerates him, it's not long Clay starts to wonder if he's made a huge mistake.

If Clay can get through the week, he just might find himself... and a lot more.

## Clay's Challenge Details

Date : Published July 3rd 2011 by Amber Allure (first published July 2nd 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Cassandra Gold

Format : ebook 142 pages

Genre : Romance, M M Romance, Contemporary, Novella

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## From Reader Review Clay's Challenge for online ebook

### Lara says

Cute & sweet & yeah, the abrupt ending sucked but what was there was very enjoyable. Trent is a big tough cop who's been through some trauma. Clay is an effeminate social butterfly who can't seem to find anyone to love him just as he is. Cue the meet cute on a camping trip and all becomes right with both of their worlds.

*Clay was exactly who he was supposed to be, and he was beautiful. \*sigh\**

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### Edina Rose says

Effeminate and proud. I like it. I think the romance and writing and plot are worth 3 stars, but the fact that the book is focusing on the treatment of effeminate men among gay people deserves a one-star bonus!

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### Susan65 says

A cute, fast read. Clay is just too adorable for words and just what a big butchy guylike Trents needs to keep him grounded.

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### Bubbles Hunty Honest & Direct Opinions says

[At the end after they both go their separate ways we only got Clay's POV and I would much rather have had Trent's POV in addition to Clay's during that time to know what he was doing during those months. Then when Trent comes back it's like ok you asked for a transfer but is Clay still going to be just a dirty little secret? We already know Clay is used to just letting people walk all

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### Td says

Another feel good, sweet, tender, realistic romance from Ms Gold...sexy, too. Clay's self-deprecating musings and insecurities, as understandable as they were, almost became too much to bear bordering close to the pathetic line for me but thankfully he didn't cross it and pulled through. I was left happy for them both, there might even have been a happy tear.

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### Lucy says

4.5, and with a slightly less rushed ending, it would have been a 5. Absolutely loved Clay. Always choosing the wrong guy, or else scaring guys off by becoming too clingy, but in the end, just wanting someone to love and love him for who he was. The online date, Mike, who supposedly got to know him and like him, then brushed him off with a "I don't date fems" was a complete asshat. Clay questions everything about himself then, and comes up with a negative. Too fem, too weak, too small, too nothing. He signs up for the Wilderness Adventure to prove to himself that he is more than that, even though, Clay, you always were. Having Trent, another confused and wounded soul, as his partner was the best thing that could have happened to him, though it doesn't seem like it at first. Trent is surly, uncommunicative and rude.

Once they hit the wilderness trail, seeing Caly blossom and show his strength was a wonderful thing. Things didn't seem too fairy tale throughout, and so the ending was a bit of a disappointment, but they are SUCH a great couple.

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### **Gigi says**

I loved this book about a frustrated effeminate gay man, Clay, looking for a long term relationship. He decides to take a wilderness vacation to boost his self esteem and during his vacation he meets and falls in love with a tortured and lost undercover FBI agent, Trent, who is coming off a messed-up undercover-op gone horribly wrong. Their week long journey of falling in love is absolutely magical and I was rooting for them the entire way and had pit in my stomach the whole time, wondering how they could possibly have a HEA with everything they were up against once they made it back to their real lives after vacation. But, of course, the author finds a way and I'm a happy camper, just like these two cute boys.

If you love male bonding in the great outdoors, hot fems boys, big, beautiful FBI agents with a bad attitude, great sex in the great outdoors and a romantic love story, I can **recommend** Clay's Challenge to you.

*I did have to knock a star off for the rather abrupt ending. I felt a bit cheated. If you read it, I think you'll see what I mean.*

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### **Heather C says**

**Loved this!!** This was such a sweet, simple, little story. I just adored Clay! I loved that he was *fem*, but he was always a lot stronger than he ever gave himself credit for. Trent was great, too. And he loved Clay no matter what.

Great comfort read that will make you smile. A lot of hot sex with little angst.

**4 stars because of the rushed ending.** This story would have been 5 stars if it was longer.

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### **Karen K says**

I enjoyed this story and the characters were both very likeable and easy to fall for. Clay's need to be seen as less of a fem and more of a man was sort of heartbreaking because he seemed quite fine the way he was. I was happy when he went back to his preferred hair and style. The wilderness challenge was definitely way

out of his comfort zone and I thought he handled it perfectly and "like a man". I'm glad he had such a great support system in Rex and his girlfriend - love to see a good brother bond in stories.

Trent was a bit of a mystery - which I suppose he was meant to be - and I really enjoyed watching him evolved and share his hardships and his life experiences with Clay. He sounded like a real hunk as well as a stand-up guy and I think he's perfect for Clay.

Though I liked the HEA or HFN ending, I have to agree with others that it seemed rushed. I think I wanted a little more angst of "is he gonna call me", "I don't want to get on with my life without him" - that kind of thing. I also would have liked to see some of the ending in Trent's POV to see how he was actually dealing with being back at work rather than just having Clay tell us about it.

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### **Lauraadriana says**

This was a SUPER sweet story.

Clay has been VERY UNLUCKY in love. Most guys that he dates just use him for a while and then get tired of him. The last person he liked, blew him off for being too fem and just left poor Clay devastated and doubting the way he looked, dressed and carried himself.

In an attempt to change things around he signs up for a two week Wilderness Challenge, if only to prove to himself he's not just some weak twink. He gets paired up with a pretty grumpy guy called Trent and thing can't look worse for poor Clay, but of course there is more to Trent than his surliness and the trip turns out being a revelation in more ways than one.

This was really cute, if a little predictable, but still I liked it a lot. Clay was SOOOO DEAR and Trent totally turned out to be a great guy. So for a little fluff and whole lot of sweetness this one is sure bet!

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### **Barb ~rede-2-read~ says**

This was a sweet story of Clay, who was very "fem", and Trent, who was very macho. They are partnered together on a wilderness adventure where Clay went to rough up his fem side after another bad experience with a man. Trent went to get away from the dark side of his undercover job which had torn him up emotionally during the past year.

Predictably the two get passionate then fall in love. The end was better than I thought it would be and the boys do get a HEA. It's a fairly short story, an easy afternoon/evening read that will put a smile on your face and a "feel good" vibe in your tummy.

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### **Chris says**

3.5 stars. Good m/m romance about a guy going through a crisis in confidence about how he looks after someone he met online isn't interested in dating him because he's "too fem." So he decides to go on a

wilderness adventure and prove to himself that's not the case. (Main character Clay was actually a minor character in Quinn's Hart.)

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### **Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says**

I adored this super sweet, adventure-style romance. This was my first read by Cassandra Gold and I was so impressed.

I loved that Clay was fem-y. I like 'em every way from uber butch to uber fem but the swishy guys have a special place in my heart. I'm always rooting for them extra hard, and I'm always thrilled when an author decides to dedicate a book to these men finding their happy endings. Clay was adorable. He was beaten down emotionally but still retained an optimistic outlook and a fierce determination. Cassandra Gold didn't make him appear weak and needy but admirably strong. It takes a lot to bounce back from what Clay had been through in his love life but bounce back he did. I also loved the close relationship that Clay had with his brother. Just wonderful.

Trent was also an interesting character. Reserved with demons of his own, he surprised me throughout the book. I also fell for him and loved his chemistry with Clay.

Now the ending... ::fuming over here:: It was so abrupt. I *needed* an epilogue, something to give me more closure. Don't get me wrong, this is definite HEA, but I wanted to see how everything truly played out. (view spoiler) I honestly could have used another 100 pages of development to shoot this up to 5 stars.

Okay, one last thing. Was anyone else a little icked out by the sweaty camping sex with no cleaning beforehand? I'm willing to suspend reality a little bit but butt sex can be a dirty business. After a long day of hiking and sweating and stinking, when fingers and dicks were put in asses... well, I was bracing myself for some dirty (and not in a good way) results. I just couldn't help think of what would happen in real life and it sort of grossed me out. A bit. then the hot sex helped me to forget.

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### **Macky says**

I actually found this quite a sweet story. It's mainly about not judging a person by looks alone and automatically stereotyping them, in this case it's two gay men - one whose looks categorise him as more feminine and one who is Bi but whose looks are totally the opposite, more manly, therefore making it more likely that people would class him as straight. The two of them meet at a wilderness training camp that they have gone to as a form of retreat for their own reasons (that are obviously explained in more depth in the book), Clay - who I had a soft spot for - to try and toughen up his image because he has been made to feel inferior by stupid judgemental people who have made him think he is less of a man because of his persona and Trent because he has just had a traumatic time in an undercover assignment, the rest of the story is no surprise but it's certainly no hardship getting through it. I found this a pleasant easy read and found the romance endearing as these two opposites connect during their wilderness exercise, then at the end you get to see the proverbial bully's get taken down a peg - and if that's cheesy then I like cheese! This story was what it was, a lightweight, non taxing m/m romance that filled a couple of hours nicely. Rounded up to 4, because

for me, even though it wasn't particularly original, it was much better than 3 stars which in amazon terms is "just OK " . 3.5\*

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### **Ami says**

When the last man he tried to date (from online dating service that promised to match men based on their compatibility) rejected Clay on first sight and told him that "*I don't date fems*", it's the last straw. Clay is then determined to prove that he is more than just his slender physique. So he joins "Wilderness Adventures", which partners him with sexy and brooding Trent. The close proximity between the two while camping opens new promise of a relationship ... but what happens when the expedition is over and they need to return to each other's hometown?

Thanks to Bubbles, I was reminded that Clay appeared for the first time in Quinn's Hart. This story gives a good insight on why Clay came on too strong to Quinn at that time. I find Clay here as totally endearing as he tries to prove to people that he can do different things and what people see is not always what people get. Clay's determination to keep track with the more "butch" Trent, being in the wilderness and survives in triumphs is a token to make me remember that people is more than just what's on the surface.

The love interest, Trent, is more mysterious to me though. I mean, the story is also told from his point of view -- and he does share part of his past, what drives him to do the same expedition, but I guess I'm too charmed with Clay that Trent is pale by comparison. Though after Trent opens up about why he seems so aloof and starts to make connection with Clay, I enjoy him more.

The part towards the ending is probably a bit rushed. But it's just a small niggle for me. I'm glad that Clay gets his happy ending.

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