

TASHATH
Queer as Folk Fanfic

The Ex-Factor



Brian and Justin are going through changes. Set after the Rage party.

Chapter 1

Justin

One week, one very long-ass week. That's how long it's been since the Rage party. I'd moved back in with my mom, but still hadn't gotten the courage up to go to Brian's. That is...until this morning.

I didn't leave Brian just to jump into another relationship. Ethan and I are friends, sure we enjoy an occasional fuck every now and then, but that's all it is. I'm not ready for anything more so it's casual and I'm okay with that.

Michael, NOW that's a different story. I went to talk to him about three days ago, just to feel him out about this Rage thing. He was pissed with me, I could tell by the look he gave me when I walked in the door.

"Michael, hey." May as well be civil.

"We need to talk," he says as he folds his arms defensively.

"Talk then."

"You know that we both need the money." He then shakes his head and looks at me adding, "I can't believe you did that to him!"

"I thought I told you to mind your own business!" He starts to protest, but I hold my hand up stopping him mid rant. "I don't want to hear that best friend bullshit, it's so old and tired."

"What if it was Daphne?"

"What???"

"What if you saw Daphne's boyfriend with someone else, what would YOU do?"

"This is not about Daphne!"

"Like I'd think you wouldn't let some little prick make a fool of her."

"Maybe I would talk to him first before opening my big mouth!"

"That's you!"

"You're right!"

"We're different and you just are going to see things your way, and I'm going to see them my way, so lets just drop it."

"Fine, consider it dropped!"

"Fine."

He hesitates and I know he's not finished. "I just don't understand after all he's done for you, how could you fuck him over like that?"

He'll never get it, but fuck it, I'll try anyway.

"Michael, picture yourself in a relationship with Brian," I say, knowing that it shouldn't be too hard to do. He looks offended, but at this point I don't care. "I'm not talking about your fantasy Brian, but the real Brian, the way he is now."

He thinks for a minute and, dammit, if I don't see understanding spreading across his face, which is enough to satisfy me.

"Well he's not here to defend himself, so let's just drop it!"

So that's exactly what we do and agree to focus on Rage.

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Now I find myself standing outside the loft door, not sure if I should knock or use my key. Shit, it's not my home anymore and I have no right to barge in, so I knock.

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Brian

I've been doing some self reflecting this last week. Wondering if Justin and I ever really had a chance. I tried, damn, I tried. I know he probably doesn't believe that, but I did. What Justin didn't understand is that, you can't change people to fit your own idea of perfect or what you think they should be. I can say that because I never wanted to change him. I never wanted him to be something he wasn't. What I did want was for him to be the best person he could possibly be.

I didn't want him being tied down to me, only to look back one day and hate me for all the things that he thinks he may have missed, all the coulda's and shoulda's. I wanted him to feel young and free, not like he owed me anything. So yeah, we did threesomes and foursomes, cruised the Baths together, sucked and got sucked, fucked and got fucked, dabbled in this, dabbled in that, but not because I didn't love him or care for him, but because I did.

I know that seems twisted, but I never wanted him to look back with regret or wonder if he missed out on life. I always wanted him to love me like.... (knocking of door)

Fuck.

"Justin" I say, not truly believing he's standing in my doorway.

"Hey" he answers back solemnly.

"Hey yourself."

"I've come to get my stuff." He looks scared and I suddenly have this overwhelming urge to put him at ease.

"I don't bite. Unless you want me to." I smile and so does he. Not his usual megawatt smile, but a smile nonetheless.

"I won't be long."

"Whatever." But, I say it in a soft tone to let him know he's not bothering me and can stay as long as he needs to.

I can't explain why, but I follow behind him as he makes his way to the bedroom.

So, um, "How's school?"

"Huh?" he says as he looks up from his packing.

I guess since we are no longer "together", I have no right to inquire about his life.

"Um, school's good, got finals coming up" he recovers soon enough to answer my lame-ass question.

"Going to summer school?" Geez, who writes these lines?

"No." "I'm staying with my mom and need to get my own place, so I'll be working full-time this summer."

"Oh. Where?" I ask. Boy, my chit-chat could use a "refresh" button.

"That fancy French restaurant over on Riverside."

"That's different."

"I guess. I was real lucky to get a job there, considering my only restaurant experience was working in a diner, but...."

"Hey!, you'll do fine" I state. I don't want him feeling bad or coming down on himself. That's my job.

"Justin."

"Yes?"

"Don't worry about school, okay. I made an commitment and I'll stand by it."

"I know."

Cocky little shit, what does he mean, he "knows"?

"You do, huh?"

"I think I know you well enough to predict, you won't go back on your word, no matter what happened between us. I also know if I refuse, you'll find some Kinneyesque way to just pay it anyway, so why even bother? I'm just saying, you know?"

"Fuck you!" I say jokingly. "I just don't want you to feel like you owe me anything."

"I DON'T owe you anything" he smirks at me.

"No, nothing" and I mean it, I truly mean it. I just don't want him to feel that way, at all, but of course he has the final say.

"Just my life" he whispers solemnly.

Dammit, I can't deal with this shit right now, and true to Justin "being on to me," he senses this and quickly barrels on.

"So, why didn't you ask me to stay?"

Shit. Classic Justin. Why did he have to bring this shit up? I'm not ready to deal with it, but fuck it and fuck him, because quite frankly, I'm tired of all this bullshit.

"I shouldn't have to ask you to stay. It's your choice where you want to be."

"What choice, Brian? You threw me off the fucking cliff just like you did Michael!"

So that's what he thinks, huh? Me, fucking Rage, was an attempt to push him out the fucking door!!! Little asshole. Well, it wasn't! I wasn't attempting to push him off a fucking cliff or to make some bullshit point. The real reason, I'll give you the real reason, Sunshine. I was hurt and felt betrayed and I wanted to lash out at him!

"I didn't fuck Rage to push you away, that's not what it was about."

"So what was it about then? Fucking, just to be fucking?? On possibly one of the biggest nights of my life??" he states practically in tears.

"I wanted to hurt you," I say simply.

"But why???"

"I figured if you could give it, you should be able to take it!?"

"That is so fucked Brian!!!!"

"Shit, you asked!"

He then looks at me with an unreadable __expression, so I take that as a sign to go right ahead and keep talking, because if I don't tell him NOW, how I really feel, I may never get the chance.

"You should have fucking told me you were no longer happy and YOU should have told me about Ethan! Those were your fucking rules Justin, not mine!"

"I wanted to be with you" he barks out, "and the rules were the only way I knew how." "I mean, what else do you expect? I was scared to talk to you because I didn't want to push you away."

"You knew who I was Justin. I never claimed to be anything else. Yet you stood here, in OUR kitchen and you baited me. You fucking wanted me to say things on YOUR terms, that my actions were already verifying!"

Fuck this shit. Now I'm really getting pissed. I think back to Justin telling me about how much Ethan loved him and how he was enough for just him. As I'm saying this, my hand, which was pointing towards the kitchen, is shaking slightly and I'm trying like hell to keep my emotions in check.

"You pushed me into a corner, Justin. You should have known better. What did you expect me to do? You can't goad me into saying something if I'm not ready, but that's what you tried to do!"

"Dammit, Brian, I needed to know!"

"What exactly did you need to know?"

"If you fucking cared, Brian! What else do you think??"

"Fuck you, Justin, I never said I didn't."

"I wanted to be enough for you. I didn't want you to need anyone else, and I wanted you to care if I was with someone else."

"Justin, listen, I didn't want to hold you back; you're young, you're beautiful and you're smart; you should take advantage of that!!"

"I'm a big boy Brian! I don't need you making decisions about my life. I loved you, I still love you, but I just wanted to be with you, that's all I needed, all I wanted, but I saw that it wasn't going to happen, so I left."

"If that's how you felt, then you did the right thing by leaving. I don't blame you for wanting more, needing more, but dammit, Justin, I gave you all I could, more than I've ever given anyone else."

"I'm sorry it has to end like this."

"Me too." Me too, I add to myself.

"Sooooo, that's it then?" he asks shakily, as he zips up his last bag.

"Yeah, I guess it is."

I look away. I don't want him to go, but I have nothing else to offer. Apparently, I'm not yet ready for a real relationship with him, but at the same time I know I want him in my life. If nothing else, just to be friends. I think he feels the same way, but who knows. I guess I could just ask him, but I'm starting to feel the telltale signs of a major headache and I just don't feeling like talking or thinking at this point.

"Need a ride somewhere?" I ask, picking up one of his bags.

"Got my mom's car" he says despondently, while dangling the keys in front of me.

"Justin, look..."

"Stop it! Ok! I want us to be friends too. This running around trying to avoid each other is stupid. We're both hurting, we both made mistakes and the fact we can admit that much, at least gives us hope of being friends."

I slowly nod my head in agreement, cursing the fact that he has, yet again, read my mind.

"Ok then, later."

"Later."

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It's been two months since that day at Brian's and I've just moved into my own place. It's not much, but it's all mine. Been making out pretty good at the restaurant, working double shifts and filling in when necessary.

Brian and I have sort of fallen into a nice little pattern. We do a few things together, nothing heavy. Just hanging out, some phone calls here and there, a movie or two, just simple kind of stuff. The great thing is, we are actually, finally getting to know each other. It's funny how you can live with someone and know nothing about that person, but then have a two-hour phone convo with them and suddenly have a whole new world open up to you. Anyway,

that's what has been happening with us, learning new stuff about each other, just enjoying each other. It feels good, it's more than we had right before I left.

I must say that the gang was a little worried at first, waiting for the other shoe to drop and whatnot. But, being that we'd laid most of our demons to rest the day I moved out of the loft, they have a long wait.

I check my reflection while bringing my thoughts back to the present, before heading out the door. I'm meeting the guys at Woody's tonight, to hang out for a bit and then get back relatively early. I have an early shift at the restaurant tomorrow and want to be sharp.

Brian

"Let's play pool," I say while racking the balls and looking around the table at Mikey, Em and Ted.

God, I wish Justin would hurry up and get here. I kinda miss him when he's not around. Now, I'd never admit that to his face, but we've been hanging together lately and it feels good to just spend some time with him sans the pressure and expectations of a relationship.

"I don't want to play," states Ted bringing me back from my reverie.

"Me either" Emmett yawns.

"I'll play," Mikey smiles at me.

"Play what?" Justin asks walking up to the table.

"Pool! What else hotshot!"

"Not me. I have an early shift tomorrow."

In the middle of listening to Justin, I can't help but to notice a guy looking in our direction. I follow his eyes and they land on Justin. I don't like this. Not one damn bit. Something about the way he's looking at Justin, makes me think they already know each other, and how much they know; well, that's the question. He starts to walk over. He's hot. I'd fuck him. Justin finally notices him coming and suddenly beams from ear to ear.

"Hey, Clyde what's up?"

"Just getting a drink. What about you?"

"Hanging with my friends. Let me introduce you. This is Ted, Emmett, Michael and Brian."

We all give him our respective forms of acknowledgment and then look at Justin for an explanation of just who this dude is.

"Clyde and I work together at the restaurant and he's also a student at PIFA. He's an artist. Just like me. Why he needed to say that last part is beyond me, and apparently also beyond the boys, who are looking at him incredulously, while eyeing Clyde on the sly.

He beams again at Clyde and they exchange a look of....affection, maybe?. I don't like this and I don't like HIM!

"So Justin, are you working tomorrow?" Clyde asks.

"Yeah, you?"

"Double shift."

"Me too."

"Sucks, don't it? Well, you wanna get together afterwards for a drink or something?"

Okay Justin, tell this Clive or whatever the fuck, NO! so he can get a fucking move on already. Sheesh.

"Sure."

Excuse me? Whoa, what the fuck???

"Cool. Well I'm off... Er, do you need a ride or something?"

"Uh well, I just got here, but since the guys are going to shot pool, I must as well leave and get some shut-eye."

He turned to wave goodbye to us as he followed this Clive, Clyde or whatever out the door. I stand still for a full minute in shock. What in the hell just happened? I mean, weren't we supposed to be "hanging" this evening. I don't know, but I can't stay here any longer.

"I'm fuckin' outta here" I say to no one in particular, not even waiting for a response.

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Justin

I met Clyde when I first started at PIFA and we'd become friends. He'd asked me out, but I was with Brian, so nothing ever came of it. We, however, remained friends.

Clyde's the one who got me the job at the restaurant. He'd worked there for over a year and was pretty cool with the manager.

"Daydreaming?" Clyde sneaks up behind me, jabbing my ribs.

"You ready?" I ask, taking off my apron and grabbing my coat.

"Listen, I thought we could catch a movie first, if that's okay?"

"Sounds great! Let's go."

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"I had a good time tonight Justin," Clyde says shyly.

We are standing in front of my apartment building, shuffling our feet, both of us reflecting on how much fun we had and neither of us ready to say goodnite yet.

"Want to come in?" I ask.

I have a suspicion where this will lead and the twinkle in his eye and small smile he gives me confirms it.

We step inside the building, making our way up the stairwell and enter my apartment. He gently wraps his arms around me, as I fall into his embrace. Damn, but it feels good. Slowly, he begins to kiss me, caressing me, then eventually, pulling my shirt over my head. I look into his eyes as his mouth crashes down on mine, making my cock stand at attention.

Finally, standing naked in front of my bed, I push him down and let the passion over take me.

It's now two weeks later and I've been with Clyde every single night. Sometimes we go out, other times we just stay in talking, watching TV together or just chilling out.

I'd forgotten how good it feels to be in a relationship with someone you really care about. I'd not had that since.... well, since Brian. Brian, damn. I hadn't seen him, nor spoken to him in two weeks and then he'd called out of the blue wanting to hook up at Woody's.

I'd agreed and then fretted over my decision. I don't know why, but I'm worried about Brian's reaction to my relationship with Clyde. Well, that's not exactly true. I know why I'm worried, I guess I just don't want to believe it.

Anyway, we're meeting the guys at Woody's for drinks and I hope all goes well. I mean I still love Brian, but I won't put my life on hold for him.

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Brian

It's been two damn weeks since I've talked to or seen Justin.

About a week after he walked out of here with what's-his-name, I went to his place intent on surprising him with a pizza and spending an evening together. Guess the surprise was on me.

I'd been outside in the jeep for around ten minutes, letting the pizza get cold while thinking of my opening line, when I saw them. Saw them coming up the sidewalk, kissing like they wanted to swallow each other whole. Then they suddenly stopped walking and Clyde said something in Justin's ear, which made him smile bright enough to light up the whole fucking street.

I continued to watch in horrific amazement at the manner in which Justin handled Clyde. The way he looked at him, smiled at him, touched him and I knew it. I knew right then and there that this was no fly-by-night piss of ass. This had the look of something bigger, like maybe a relationship? Fear and jealousy gripped at my heart, but I crippled that shit before it came down on me full force. I closed my eyes tight, trying to hold everything back, but finally just gave in. I let out a breath, and let a few tears trickle down my face.

"Fuck, this shit" I thought. There's no way I wanted to be caught outside my ex-boyfriends house crying while watching he and his new boyfriend making out. I mean how pathetic is that? So, I waited, until they went inside Justin's building. Then I started the jeep, pulled up to the nearest can to toss the pizza, before jerking away from the curb, tires screeching. Once home, I tried to lose myself in something, anything, but my mind keep going back to Justin.

Justin. I love him. I can admit that to my self. I want him happy, but I want him happy with me. Even still, I can't give him what he needs and I can't expect him to put his life on hold for me. So where does that leave me? Nowhere. Absolutely, fucking nowhere.

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"Hey! There's Justin with his new boyfriend, Clifford" Mikey points out looking towards the doors of Babylon.

"It's Clyde, sweetie. Well, are they coming over?" Emmett asks no one in particular, as we watch the two of them saunter to the bar.

"Boyfriend? Ted gasps. "What the hell happened to Ethan? I thought that was his boyfriend?" Ted asks with a look of disbelief on his face.

"Well," Emmett says, cutting his eyes towards the bar making sure Justin and Clyde have not moved from their spot, "did you see that bruise he had on his arm about a month or so ago? I'm thinking.... you know, that he and Ethan had an *altercation* or *something*" Emmett stage whispers.

"Are you insane?" Ted hisses, looking at Emmett like he's just lost his mind.

"You don't know how Justin got that bruise. He could've been moving furniture or...or anything." Ted sputters. "Plus, isn't Ethan off on tour somewhere? He's been gone for over a month, I think?" Ted says with a final shake of his head.

I glance at Emmett and wonder how easily he's forgotten just how strong Justin is. We've never seen him back down from anyone or anything. I mean does he know how strong Justin had to be to walk away from me? I guess not. Just as I finish reminding them of that fact, Justin and Clyde walk over.

"Hey" Justin says to the group, eyes trained on me.

"What's up?" I reply, while everyone else is apparently struck mute.

"Haven't seen you around lately, where you been hiding?" I say this with my usual, studied I don't give a fuck, bored stance.

"Working. Hanging with Clyde", he says with a nervous giggle.

"Is he your boyfriend?" Cool, Kinney, way to go.

"Yeah, he is. His name is Clyde, I'm sure you remember that." He says it a little defensively, while adding, "You okay with that?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" I sneer at him.

"I just thought that maybe...."

"What? That I'd go running and crying like some little fucking fairy with hurt feelings? Christ, Justin you should know me better than that."

"Um, right. Well, maybe we could get together soon and hang?" He looks hopeful and I almost hate to shoot him down, but...

"I'm busy" I say with gritted teeth.

"Okay" he says and then turns with "Clyde" to walk away, but I call him back.

"Hey Sunshine" he looks surprised at the old nickname, but walks back up to me, alone.

"Yes."

"Does he know about us?" I ask while turning my head towards Clyde.

"Yep."

"Everything?"

"Pretty much everything."

"And he's ok with us being friends?" Incredible.

"He's not threatened by you Brian" he states almost triumphantly.

"He knows there no reason to be."

What the fuck does that mean? Last I checked, we were pretty damn close. Not ready to get together, per se, but fuck me, to be told I'm not even a threat...that's, that's just fucked.

"I'm leaving" I announce, loud enough for everyone to hear.

"But we just got here" Mikey whines, finally spurred to speak after witnessing the latest scene between Justin and I.

"I need rest," I practically growl.

"Part of growing old I guess?" theorizes the loser known as Ted.

Fuck 'em, fuck 'em all. I'm not in the mood for his shit. I could say something about him, his Jerk-at-Work crap and his failed romance with the Queen, but fuck it, it's not worth it, plus I'm outta here.

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Justin

Unbelievable. I don't like the Brian I just witnessed. Not at all. I can see the walls rebuilding and there's no way I'm letting that happen, not after everything we've been through.

I hesitantly pull Clyde off to the side and tell him where I'm going.

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I find myself once again facing the loft door. I contemplate knocking and think, fuck it and instead use my key, which I've kept all this time. Brian's at his computer typing away.

"Can we talk?"

"What for? Go home to Clyde" he says with a strange tone in his voice.

"You might as well talk to me because I'm not leaving until you do."

I sit down on the couch and patiently wait for him to respond.

"Whatever. Just hurry the fuck up!" he practically screams at while moving from the computer to join me on the couch.

"I know you feel threatened by Clyde."

"Jesus, Justin. Why would I be?"

"Cut the shit, Brian, this is me you're talking to. Clyde's in my life, I think I may love him and he's not going anywhere" I rush out without taking a breath.

"So what do you expect me to do" he says wearily.

"Don't reconstruct the walls Brian. Clyde nor anyone else for that matter, could ever make me love you less. Just let me be happy and I won't have to choose."

"Are you saying that I'll lose?"

"I'm saying that I don't want to have to choose. We're not ready to be together, hell we may never be ready for that, but we both agreed to be friends. Are you going to let someone come between our friendship, like that?" I indicate while snapping my fingers.

"Justin..."

"Look, I love you and I want you in my life in some capacity. If you feel the same, then what does it matter about Clyde? He can never replace you, no one can. Shit, Brian, you should know that" I say, while rising to go to the kitchen for something to drink, suddenly my throat feels dry and constricted.

Brian

He's right and I know it. Damn him. I want him in my life, so why am I acting like an ass? He's returning from the kitchen with a bottle of water not quite knowing what to expect from me and dreading every step that brings him closer.

"I told you before, I don't bite. Now get your ass over here and sit down!" I exclaim. He smiles that Sunshine smile and plops down on the couch.

"Want to watch a movie?" I ask with the corners of my twitching into a smile.

"What did you have in mind?" he responds with a smirk on his face.

"You pick, no porn though!" Hee! The ___expression on his face is priceless.

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"What's up Mikey?" I ask opening the loft door and letting him in.

"Let's go out tonight, just the two of us."

"Got plans."

"Oh. What?"

"Not what, whom. I'm meeting Justin. You can join us if you'd like."

"No thanks, I'll let you make an ass of yourself alone."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"He's got a boyfriend Brian! You're playing with fire and somebody's going to get burnt" he yells at me.

"Stay out of it" I bark!

"Don't worry I will! he retaliates. I guess you're into pain, because he's going to hurt you again."

"I'll survive" I reply drly.

"Yeah, well keep telling yourself that" he says in a subdued voice.

"Mikey" I say almost pleadingly.

"Ok, I'll go, but think about what I said." That said, he walks towards the door and out of the loft.

I shut the door behind him and start thinking, which is never a good thing. It has been two months since the night we watched the movie together and we'd been together a lot in that time. I wonder what Clyde thinks about me and Justin spending so much time together, but fuck him, as long as Justin's not complaining, who gives a fuck what Clyde thinks

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Clyde

"Justin, let's not stay long tonight, I've got an early shift."

"All you have to do is say the word and we're out of there" he tells me.

We're meeting the guys, well Justin's guys at Babylon tonight and that's the last place on Earth that I want to be. I don't like being around Brian. I don't like the amount of time that Justin spends with him. I don't like the fact that he was Justin's first love, first sex partner, hell first everything. I can't ask him to ex Brian out of his life, because then he'll be forced to choose and I'll be the one hurt. So where exactly does that leave me? Stuck watching them, on the sidelines, accepting things. The way they look at each other, talk with each other, hell the chemistry that is them, alone is enough. I've started to feel this rage slowly growing inside me and I'm not sure how much longer I can hold it down. If I even want to hold it down. Where do you draw the line? When do you say, enough?

* * * *

We see them, at their usual spot at the bar, as soon as we walk in. Brian immediately senses Justin's presence, locking eyes with him and that's the way they stay until we reach them. Fuck me, I'd have to be blind not to see the love between them.

Brian whispers something in Justin's ear that I can't hear, but he's rewarded with a bright smile, the smile I thought he only had for me. I can feel the rage within myself fighting to come out. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, trying to maintain control.

"Let's dance" Brian commands, taking Justin's hand to lead him to the dance floor. Totally ignoring the fact that he's here with me.

"No." I say, pulling Justin back.

"Why don't we leave Justin. Let's go home now!" He looks from me to Brian with a confused __expression. What the fuck is going on? He can't understand what I just asked?

"Sunshine?" Brian asks, looking at Justin like he's the only person in all of fucking Babylon. I fucking hate it when he calls him that. I've heard others say it, mostly Deb, but when Brian says it, there is a difference.

"I'm ready to go and I'm ready to go now" I yell looking directly in Justin eyes. He's mad as hell, but I really don't give a fuck. That's also the moment Brian gets in my face.

"Then take your ass outta here, no one is stopping you." He says this in a deadly low voice that sends chills up my spine.

"I'll see to it that Sunshine gets home," he adds with a sneer.

"Fuck you asshole!" I get in his face like he got in mine. Fuck it, I'm not some twinkie assed punk he can just say anything to.

"You'll never get the chance!" he shoots back.

"Brian, lets go. I told you this would happen!" Michael shrieks while trying to pull Brian away, but he's not moving. Ben gently grabs Michael and tells him to stay out of it. I look over at all of them and feel not only out numbered, but out of my element. I then look at Justin.

"Well??" I ask . Justin finally speaks.

"Fine you want to go, let's go but this is not over." He turns to Brian, "We're leaving."

"The fuck you are!" Brian bellows and takes Justin's hand pulling him towards him. Then he turns to me, giving my shoulder a hard push, "Get the fuck out, NOW!" he demands.

Okay, now I know that he's used to barking out orders and getting his way, but not with me, he ain't. I've had this anger suppressed and growing in me for weeks and I'm not about to be pushed around by anyone.

"Don't ever put you're fucking hand on me" I scream while lunging at Brian only to be stopped by an iron grip that Justin suddenly has me in.

"Clyde, drop it. Let's go" Justin pleads with me.

"Fuck that!!" I scream trying to get free.

"I won't tell you again, I mean it" and I know he does, so I stop and look at Brian.

"See.You.Soon" I threaten at Brian, before I let Justin push me towards and out the door.

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No words are spoken until we get in the privacy of Justin's apartment. That's when he explodes.

"What the hell were you trying to prove?"

"Are you fucking him?"

"WHAT?"

"ARE YOU FUCKING HIM??"

"Don't go there with me, Clyde!"

"You know something, Justin, I don't need this shit. I'm tired of coming in second to Brian. I'm tired of having to watch you two together. Shit, I'm just....tired."

"What are you saying?" he forces himself to ask, as I watch the panic settle over his face. I don't say anything, because at this point, the tears running down my face are answer enough.

"Look Clyde, we're both upset, let's try and calm down and talk this through."

"Justin, enough, alright! I love you, but I can't do this anymore."

"I love you too! But, please can't we talk about this?"

"And Brian. Can we talk about him? Do you love him too?" He looks into my face, stained with tears, grabs my head and pulls me into a bittersweet kiss.

"Don't go" he whispers into my hair. "Give us give us a chance, I want to be with you."

"What about Brian? Do you want to be with him too." He steps back, a look of utter defeat on his face.

"I guess I have my answer then."

"What do you want me to do?" he asks breathlessly.

"Love me the way that you love him." Simple statement, complicated feelings.

"I do love you, why can't you see that?"

"Not like you love him" I state sadly, adding "I won't come in second anymore. I can't do it" I exclaim, leaning in and kissing his forehead, one last, final time. I then turn around and rush out the door before he can stop me.

* * * * *

Brian

I watch as Justin and Clyde leave, and, fuck me if I don't follow. I keep thinking about Justin being pushed and pulled between the two of us and I'm flooded with pangs of guilt.

I pull the jeep up to his apartment building, waiting. Clyde's up there, and for all I know, he could be there all night. I'm not willing to have Justin pushed between us again, so I pick up my cell to call. I just want to know that he's alright, that he's made the right decision for himself. I start dialing his number when I see Clyde come rushing out, like a deer caught in the headlights. I watch him stride quickly away until he is out of sight, then I go into the building, up to Justin's floor and knock on his door. The door swings open instantly and I see a very distraught Justin on the other side.

I don't say a word as I pull him into my arms, lay his head on my chest and close the door. He's holding me tight and his body is trembling from the force of his sobs.

"He's gone! He left me!" he wails out.

"I know" I say, running my fingers through his hair, fighting back my own tears and fears, while trying to soothe his. He's in so much pain right now and to know that I helped caused it, is almost too much to bear.

"I love him" he lets me know, holding me tighter.

If words could hurt anymore than that statement, it would be lethal. I knew he loved him, but it's just the way he said it and the amount of pain he's in, that's killing me. It's pain for someone else, not for me. I can't hold back anymore, and don't bother trying. I let the tears coming down falling on Justin's head. Suddenly, he looks up into my eyes, pulling me into a deep kiss. Tears mix together as our tongues dual for control.

"Brian, make love to me, please" he begs.

"Justin" I sigh.

"What? So now you don't want me either?" He steps back, a fresh wave of tears coming on. I look at him and I can't. I can't let him feel like this, unloved and unwanted. Plus, I won't him so much.

"Are you sure?" I need to know this. I need him to be sure.

"Yes, I'm sure. I need this." I go to him and pull him close to me. I then slowly remove both of our clothes. I want to savor this, memorize every moment. We sink to the floor, ready to give in to our passion, when we hear the lock turn in the door. We both scramble for our clothes as the door swings open.

* * * * *

Clyde

I'm half way home when I realize that I can't walk away from Justin. I keep thinking of him, begging me to stay, telling me how much he loves and needs me and I know that I have to go back. Back to fight for what's mine! Fuck Kinney! If he wants Justin, he'll have to go through me first. I walk up the steps, much more determined than when I left. Going over in my head what I'm going to say. I take out the key Justin had given me months ago and look at it. I remember vividly, the night he gave it to me. It was the same night he first told me that he loved me. I take a deep, calming breath as I put the key in the lock, turn it and open the door.

Chapter 2

My heart is beating fast. I can't breath. My chest is rising and falling, struggling for survival, as I lean against the doorframe for support. I close my eyes hoping to get the image of Brian and Justin naked on the floor out of my mind, but it won't go away. I slowly open them and see two very shocked expressions. Brian is the first to speak

"I thought you were gone" he smirks.

I don't answer. I can't answer. I numbly watch as Justin jumps up and throws his clothes on. Brian seems content as is. However, after seeing a fully dressed Justin, he slips his clothes on. I wearily turn to leave, only to be stopped by the force of Justin's voice.

"Don't walk away again!" I turn around to look at him and suddenly my weakness is replaced by anger.

"Why the fuck should I stay?"

"You came back, that means something" he sputters.

I look from Justin to Brian and I feel sick. My stomach lurches while my mouth fills with spit and I know I'm gonna blow. I run to the bathroom just in time emptying my contents.

"Are you ok?" Justin asks. He has come behind me, rubbing my back.

"Don't touch ME!" I rasp, pushing him away.

"You came back," he says again, softly this time.

"Where is Brian?"

"Gone."

"Why?" He doesn't answer. Just reaches out and tries to touch my face. I pull away.

"Why did he leave?"

"Let's talk" he soothes, ignoring my question. He walks out of the bathroom into his livingroom. I wait a few minutes and then follow.

"What do you have to say Justin?"

"Look Clyde, I fucked up."

"That's it? That's all you have to say?"

"I thought I'd lost you.....and....I don't know!"

"So, I'm gone all of five minutes and you run and fuck Brian!!?"

"What so you want me to say!?"

" Make me understand" I plead.

"Understand what?"

"You say you love ME, but when I leave, you go straight to BRIAN!"

" That's not what happened."

"Yes, it is Justin. Admit it to yourself. No matter how far I think we've come, all it takes is one look between you and Brian to let me know that I'm wrong to believe in us."

"I don't want you feeling like that"

"And I don't know what you want from me"

"Do you love me?"

"You know that I do"

"So let me love you, give us a chance"

"You love Brian"

"That's not going to change. I'll always love Brian"

"What the fuck. Do you expect me to just accept that?"

"We love each other. Yeah, I love Brian, but I'm here with you. Trying to make it work. How many ways can I tell you I love you?" That makes me think Brian's gone and I'm still here

"What are we going to do?" I ask

"There's nothing to do. Nothing to change."

"We need to talk about Brian and where he fits in our life"

"Don't ask me to cut him out. I won't"

"I know you won't" I sigh. "But your with him all the time" I add, feeling real sorry for myself. "Give me a reason to believe in us, Justin!"

"The only time I see him is when we hang with the guys, and I'm not going to give that up. That's the best that I can do right now."

I guess if I want to be with him, it's going to have to be enough. At least he's trying

"I love you" I tell him, opening my arms and taking him into them.

"Let's go" he purrs, releasing me from a fierce hug and leading me toward the bedroom. I follow, holding on to the fact that for tonight at least, I got my baby back.

* * * * *

Brian

I pick up the phone, then slam it back down. No! I'll let him come to me, I think. Shit. I don't know what I'll do. I have no clue what the hell Justin and Clyde are doing right now and it's fucking killing me.

I play the scene from earlier tonight over in my head again. Clyde, coming in and catching Justin and I on the floor. Justin, scrambling to put his clothes on and Clyde running off to the bathroom like a fucking drama princess. I'd grabbed Justin's arm as he turned to follow....

"Don't."

"I have to." He pulls his arm back.

"Then I'm leaving." He doesn't say anything, just heads toward the bathroom as I leave, slamming the door behind me. Fuck it. If he wants Clyde, he can have him!

I circle the loft mindlessly, bored out of my skull and restless as hell. [[I'd cut down on tricking a lot in the last couple of months being that Justin and I were spending so much time together. I mean I still pick up a quick fuck every now and then but it not the same the only one I want to be with is Justin. It almost happen tonightand then Clyde came and everything was shot to hell. Justin Had a choice he made it. Enough said expect I hope he knows what he's doing I won't put myself in that position again It's to fucking painful.]]

* * * * *

"Boy, what brings you around here?" Lindsay asks, opening the door and letting me in.

"Where's Gus" I demand.

"Sleep" she answers, as we walk into the living room and sit down.

"I'm surprised you're not with Justin tonight" Lindsay taunts.

"We're not joined at the hip" I state louder than I intended to.

"You could have fooled me! You two have been spending so much time together, I assumed it was only a matter of time before you got back together."

"Yeah, well don't hold your breath lady."

"Ok. What happened?" Damn, why does everybody think they know me?

"Nothing. Shit, he's got a boyfriend and I guess that's where he is!"

"I see. Why don't you ask him to come back?" Okay so, Lindsay's not buying my bullshit.

"Why should I?" I counter.

"Because you love him" she states simply in a soft tone.

"Get your head out of the clouds Lins. Nothing is that simple!"

"Maybe you need to get your head out of the clouds and tell him how you feel" Lindsay huffs.

"Maybe Mel can hold her breath and wait for that to happen" I retaliate.

"Brian, what exactly do you want?" she asks, totally exasperated.

"For you to leave the fairy tales where they belong. In a fucking book! Now, PLEASE go get my son!"

"He's sleep" Mel grits out, coming down the steps.

"Then go wake him up the fuck up!"

"Shouldn't you be in some alley getting your dick sucked or something?" Mel snarls.

"Is that a offer?"

"Fuck you, asshole!"

"Look you two" Lindsay stands up holding her hands out.

"It's okay, I'm leaving" I say, standing on heavy legs. I lean in and give Lindsay a kiss on the cheek. "Bye Mel," I smirk as I walk out the door.

* * * * *

Justin

I look at Clyde as he still sleeps. It's one in the afternoon and I'm just getting up. I make my way to the kitchen, get something to drink and then sit down to think.

Last night was a turning point, not just for me and Clyde, but also for me and Brian. I keep thinking about the ultimatum he gave me. Don't go after Clyde or he'd leave. His way of asking me to choose. If that's the case, I can already see the walls coming back up. There's no way he'll let me close to him again, but fuck it. I'm tired of worrying about it and whatever happens, happens.

* * * * *

"Sunshine!" Deb's popping gum and playing with a pencil.

"So, I haven't seen you and Brian together in a while. Anything happen that I need to know about?"

"Nothing," I say hoping that she will drop it.

"He loves you baby. He'll never tell you that, but he does. Maybe you should go talk to him."

"That's not a good idea." God, I know Debbie means wells, but her always butting in is so tiresome.

"Why not? Cause you say so? Just go talk to him and see what happens." Then she leaves me to my thoughts to go wait on a customer.

* * * * *

Fuck me, I'm standing outside the loft door again, thinking I'll just knock one time and leave. At least I can say I tried.

Knock

I turn to leave just as the door opens. Shit.

"Fuck you! What the fuck do you want now!!?"

"I came to talk" I simply say and walk in to sit down.

"Look, there's nothing left to be said" he closes the door.

"So, now we can't even be friends?"

"You make the rules Justin, not me."

"So, that's how it's going to be? We're back to square one?"

"You made your choice, Justin, so don't come in here with all this friendship bullshit just because you feel guilty. I don't need your pity or this shit right now. GET OUT!!"

"Fine! I'll go, but I'm not coming back! Do you hear me? Once I walk out the door, that's it!" As I get up and walk to the door, he appears a little shocked at my outburst, but I could care less. I'm sick of his games.

"Why are you still here?"

"You don't have to tell me twice Brian. Just remember, you made your own bed, so don't expect me to do anything but watch when you lie down and burn in the flames," and with that I turn and walk out, slamming the door behind me.

* * * * *

Brian

Fuck Justin. Who does he think he is coming in here talking about being friends like nothing happened? I won't allow myself to be pulled into his little drama anymore. He wants to have his cake and eat it too, well fuck that. It might be alright with Clyde, but not me. I'm not anybody's fucking puppet. He says he's not coming back, then good I don't want him back!

* * * * *

Justin

It's been an extremely long day. Clyde and I are both working a double shift and I feel like I'm about to fall down. I've been on my feet the last four hours nonstop.

"God, will this night ever be over?" Clyde asks pulling me close to him. I look around to make sure no one is looking, before I give him a quick kiss.

"Look, fuck on your own time, we're too busy tonight for that shit!" exclaims Daniel. He and his boyfriend own the restaurant and one of them is always here checking up on things. Daniel's usually pretty easy going, but tonight he seems agitated.

"What's going on?" Clyde asks.

"There's a very important businessman with his clients here tonight," Daniel states in an exasperated tone.

"So?"

"So....If he likes it, he'll bring more clients here. He'll tell his friends and they'll come as well. Do you know how much business that could lead to?"

"Daniel, the fucking place is packed every night! What are you talking about?" Clyde demands while rolling his eyes.

"And if he doesn't?" Daniel continues, clearly ignoring Clyde's outburst. "He'll blackball us and I don't even want to think about how many customers we'll lose."

Now I've seen some drama queens, but this guy is just being ridiculous. However, he's the boss, so we have to go along with the insanity.

"By the way Justin, I put them in your section. Their at table 8." Great, fucking great, I think to myself.

"I want your sole attention to go to them, so your other tables will be split between the other waiters. You got it?"

"Yeah I got it" I say dejectedly, as Clyde gives me a sympathetic look.

"It's okay, baby I'll give you a massage later."

"Promise?" I purr.

"I promise" he volleys back. He then leans in to give me a kiss and I actually start feeling better.

I walk to the table putting on my best smile and that's when I see him. Brian. Shit, so he's the important businessman. Please, please don't let him give me a hard time. I look around the table at his two guests and the only word that comes to mind is 'snob', from the vibe that I'm getting.

"Can we order now or are you just going to stand there all night?" demands the one sitting next to Brian.

"Oh, yeah, sorry" I stammer.

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"What will we have? What do we want to drink? Does that sound familiar?" Shit. I'm so nervous I can't even think straight.

"I....ah, well."

"Are you some kind of fucking idiot? What the hell's wrong with you?" The other one shakes his head and they both laugh. I feel myself ready to lose it, as I look at Brian who's ready to explode, and I step back.

"Listen." Brian says through gritted teeth. Nobody talks to him like that" He spits at the other men.

"The only fucking idiot's I see, are you two. He's got more brains the both of you put together and he doesn't have to take shit from anyone. Insult him again and I'll break both your fucking necks!"

I turn to the side and see Daniel and Clyde at the next table. Daniel looks mad as hell, but Clyde looks concerned. I look back at Brian, then walk away. I enter the kitchen and sit down.

"What the hell happened? Daniel screeches, coming in behind me. Before I have a chance to answer him, Brian interrupts stating, "Nothing, everything is fine." I look up to see him standing over me.

"You alright?" He gently asks.

"Yeah. Thanks." He nods his head and looks at the floor.

"I didn't cost you a client, did I?" He just shrugs his shoulders.

"I told them to fuck off. I'll deal with the fallout." He then smiles.

"Justin, you okay?" Clyde asked, giving Brian a hard look.

"I'm fine...I'm fine" I tell him, as I watch Brian turn to leave

"Hey, Brian" I call out. He turns around

"Thanks again."

"No problem Sunshine." And with that he's gone. I look at Daniel whose mouth is wide open.

"You know him?" He asks, shock written all over his face.

"He's the ex-boyfriend" Clyde answers for me, pulling me up to hug me from behind.

"You actually had a relationship with HIM? A real relationship?" Daniel states in total disbelief.

"That's over now" I say, hugging Clyde tighter.

"Damn!" Daniel walks off, still shaking his head.

* * * * *

Clyde

I go to answer my door thinking it's my parents on the other side. They said they would come by today.

Justin says I'm lucky to have both my parents in my life. They know I'm gay and don't care. They accept me for who I am. They also seem to care for Justin alot. I've met Justin's mom and she's cool. I've never met his father and from the way Justin talks, I don't think I ever will. Sometimes, when we're with my Dad, I see him grow sad and I know he wishes he had his own father in his life. I open the door expecting to see mom and dad, but it's not them. It's Jason.

Jason and I were each others first. Our relationship began when we were both sixteen and it lasted until we hit eighteen and he left to attend college. It's been two years since I last saw him and he looks good.

"Can I come in" he tentatively asks, brining me back to the present. I step back and let him enter.

"Well, this is a surprise. How did you know where I lived?" I can scarecely get the words out.

"Your mom" he states, while grabbing me and pulling me into a hug, which I return. I can't deny that it's good to see him.

"How long are you home for" I ask as he softly caresses my face

"Forever. I'm not going to leave you again." He says, likes it the most natural thing in the world. He leaves for two years and I wait for his return.

"Whoa, you pop up out of the blue and state that!" I can't fucking believe this!!! "Plus, I'm with someone now, who's very important to me."

"Oh. Do you love him?" he asks, undeterred.

"Yeah, I do." I look away, as he holds my face in his hands, forcing me to look at him.

"You could never love anyone, like you love me. He's not me, Clyde." Boy, he's sure of himself.

"I'm happy," I tell him, pushing his hands away.

"Tell me about him" he asks in all seriousness. So I do. I tell him all about Justin. I tell him about Justin and Brian. I tell him everything. Even everything that's happened between the three of us.

"He's going to hurt you again" he states all knowingly.

"No, he's not. You don't know him!"

"From what you tell me, he seems to love this Brian an awful lot and can't seem to let him go completely. He's going to hurt you and then I'll have to pick up the pieces."

"Shut up" I'm starting to get really upset.

"I'm not going to let anyone hurt you!"

"Like you did?" I shoot back quickly.

"I'll step in if I have to. You know that I will."

"Well, I'm happy I don't need your interference!"

"Whatever I do, will be because I love you!" And with that, he's gone, leaving me to wonder what the hell he's up to. I think about Justin. I don't want to tell him about Jason's visit, it would only upset him. He knows all about Jason. I never lied or withheld information regarding my "first". How much I loved him, how often I'd wished to open the door and find him on the other side like, I did today. But....but, this was all before I met Justin. No. I won't tell him. The last thing I need is him doubting our relationship and running to Brian for comfort.

* * * * *

Brian

I walk into Babylon and look around. I spot da boyz off to the side, holding up a wall. You know, the usual pot.

"Let's dance" Mikey, says grabbing a hold of my hand.

"Don't feel like it" I tell him, looking around for tonights fuck.

"Here comes Sunshine," Ted points to where Justin and Clyde are making their way toward us.

"They are just so adorable together, don't you agree Brian?" Emmett laughs, while fluttering his eyelashes.

"Boy Wonder, Clyde, what are you guys doing here? It's been a long time" Mickey smirks.

"Felt like dancing" Clyde easily replies. I glance casually at Justin and Clyde, then look away. I notice some guy with a huge smile on his face coming our way. He walks right up to Clyde, brushing past Justin, and kisses him full in the mouth.

"Jason" Clyde pulls back, a little embarrassed.

"Jason?" Justin eyes Clyde in disbelief. "You mean, THE Jason?"

"Yeah" Clyde looks very uncomfortable.

"So, you must be THE Justin!" Clyde sticks out his hand, but Justin's shooting him death rays. He smiles wickedly and rushes out, "I'm glad to see that you and Clyde can still be friends."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Justin demands, eyes darting back and forth between Clyde and Jason.

"I thought after Clyde told you we'd got back together, there would be some hard feelings. I'm glad to see that I was wrong. I chance a look at Justin, he's about to snap. Then I look at Clyde and I want to kill him, but finally he speaks up.

"Jason, I don't know what kind of sick game your playing, but it's not funny!"

"Oh shit! You mean you didn't tell him?" Jason huffs out.

"What the fuck is going on?" Justin grits out, looking at Clyde.

"Jason came by yesterday. We talked. I told him about you, then he left. I don't know what the hell he's up to now, but believe me when I say that nothing happened!" he cried out. He then pulled Justin to him, only to have him jerk roughly away.

"And why didn't you tell me about this?"

"There was nothing to tell. I didn't see the need to worry you."

Geez, I can't believe they are actually having this conversation in Babylon, in front of a nosy throng of sweaty, dancing men!

"Why would I worry? DO I have a reason to worry? Justin spat out.

"NO! Nothing happened. Nothing is going to happen!"

"Maybe it was nothing to you, but it meant an awful lot to me," Jason interrupted.

"What happened?" Justin asked again, looking at Jason.

"We made sweet, beautiful love. Clyde told me that he still loved me and that he would leave you!" Jason smoothly lied.

"That's a fucking lie! Justin, don't believe this shit!" Clyde screeched out desperately.

"Fuck you, Clyde, fuck you!" Justin yelled out, before turning and running out of Babylon. Clyde tried to go after him, but I grabbed his arm.

"Stay the fuck away from him!" I hiss, before letting his arm go and departing after Justin. I catch up with him outside.

"You alright?"

"I'm fine, Brian. I don't need you running to my fucking rescue!" He's mad at Clyde, but taking it out on me. I allow him this outburst.

"Need a ride home?" I ask as casually as possible.

"I don't want to go home, he'll just come there looking for me."

"You could come to the loft. No strings attached."

"Yeah, whatever" he says dejectedly as we walk to the jeep.

We enter the loft, Justin looking very unsure of himself. "You can sleep on the couch," I tell him, as I leave to get a pillow and blanket

"Thanks" he tells me when I return.

"So...uh, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I have no fucking clue."

"Do you believe this Jason guy?"

"I don't know what to believe right now. I just want to sleep." I can take a hint. I climb the steps to my bedroom, remove my clothes and slip between the cool sheets, trying hard not to think about Justin sleeping in the next room.

* * * * *

Clyde

Shit. Justin ran out of Babylon, with Brian right behind him. I turn to look at Michael, Ted and Emmett, but they look like they are ready to jump me, so I scramble out the door with Jason hot on my heels.

"Clyde, stop, I'm sorry!"

"No you're not. You knew exactly what you were doing."

"I only did what I had to do. I don't want to see you get hurt and that's what he was going to do. That was Brian who went running behind him, the guy you told me about?" I don't answer, no need to answer.

"I thought so," he says with a smug look on his face

"Fuck off! I'm going to find Justin." I start to walk off and he jumps in front of me.

"He's not home and if he is, chances are, he's not alone. Do you really want to walk in on that scene again?"

"You caused this," I tell him getting in his face."

"No, baby, I didn't make him love Brian and I didn't make him run to Brian. They love each other. They have shared history, just like we do," he purred seductively.

"He didn't run to Brian," I state emphatically.

"Fine, let's go to his place. If he's there alone, then I'll tell him the truth and never bother you again. If he's not, you come home with me."

"Let's go." All the way there I'm praying that Jason is wrong.

I open the door with the key Justin gave me, step in, and know in an instance, he's not here. My heart breaks, because I know where he is and what he's probably doing. I feel Jason taking my hand and leading me out the door.

"Take me home" I whisper. Fuck going to his place. I just want to go home, because I'm clinging to one last bit of hope that Justin will be there.

I walk in to an empty apartment and feel the tears fall down my face.

"Baby" Jason holds his arms out to me and I go to him. Fuck it, if Justin can do it so can I.

"I've missed you" Jason whispers, kissing my ear.

"you don't know how much" I pull his face to mine and slip my tongue in his mouth.

"Show me how much." I pull off my clothes as I make my way to the bedroom. He follows, doing the same.

"I don't want to fuck" he says while positioning himself between my legs. "Let's make love." He kisses me and that's it, I surrender it all to him.

* * * * *

Brian

I wake up when I feel movement in my bed. I glance over and see two blue eyes looking back at me. "Your naked" I tell him, feeling my cock start to rise.

"It's how I sleep" he smiles.

"Do you know what your doing?" I ask. He slides over toward me, as our eyes lock and I have all the answer that I need.

I ease myself between his legs and feel his arms wrap around me. We share a deep kiss before I make my way down his body. He pulls me up before I reach his cock

"I want you inside me now" he pants. "I don't want to wait any longer." So I apply the lube, get a condom and slowly work myself inside him. I lean down and kiss his forehead, each eyelid and finally his lips. I never want this to end. Never.

Chapter 3

I look over at Justin and see that he's still sleep. I think about last night and I have no words. I don't know what Justin's feelings are concerning me or Clyde. Last night was fucking amazing, at least it was for me. I hope Justin doesn't feel regret.

I shake Justin, trying to wake him. "Get up."

"NO," he says, turning over.

"I mean it, get up!" I tell him, yanking the covers away.

"What the fuck?" He looks at me, waiting for me to explain.

"Justin, last night was..."

"Beautiful," he assures me.

"No regrets?" I need to be sure.

"You wanted me and I wanted you, what's there to regret?" I think of a time before when I said those same words to him, and I almost laugh at the irony of it until I remember what comes next.

"So, this was just a fuck?" I ask him.

"It was, what it was, Brian"

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"It means, what it means, Brian."

I'm not going to get a straight answer ; he's talking in circles.

"When are you leaving?" I ask, getting up.

"Are you putting me out?" he asks, getting up also. God he's being so fucking frustrating; I don't know his problem is.

"What the fuck is your problem, Justin?"

"Don't start with me Brian."

"Start what?"

"Look, I'm not going to stand here and argue with you."

"Who's arguing? I'm just trying to figure out what the hell is wrong with you!"

"Last night was awesome. Why do you have to fucking ruin it?"

"What are you talking about, Justin, are you delirious?"

"No, I'm not delirious, Brian. You don't understand shit do you? God, when will you ever fucking get it?"

"Get what Justin? Are you high? I know you just woke up, but shit, I can't see any other reason for your behavior. What the fuck are you on?"

I don't understand where he is coming from; he's mad, that much I know, I just can't figure out why.

"What are you so fucking mad about, Justin?"

"I don't need you running to my rescue. Who do you think you are? I'm not your little fucking project to fix. The sooner you understand that the better."

"So you do regret what happened last night?" I'm starting to get really pissed with this little drama that he's putting on. "Fuck you, Justin, either last night was a mistake or it wasn't."

"Having sex with you could never be a mistake, Brian. God, do you ever just listen?"

Enough. I've had enough. "It's time for you to go, because you're fucking giving me a headache. I don't know what's going on with you, and I'm starting not to give a FUCK!"

He takes a minute to think about what I said, and maybe about some of the crazy shit coming out of his mouth, because he softens a bit before he speaks again. "Look, it just seems like you're always there picking up the pieces. I don't want to be seen as some weakling who can't take care of himself."

"What are you going to do about Clyde?" I ask.

"I'm gonna talk to him now."

"Plan on telling him where you spent the night?"

"I'm sure he knows."

I watch him get dressed and head to the door.

"I'll call you later, o.k.?" He says before he walks out.

Clyde

"Jason, we have to talk." He's in the kitchen fixing breakfast, like everything is fine and dandy.

"Let's eat first," He smiles at me.

"I'm not hungry. I want to talk now." He turns off the stove and comes to sit beside me.

"Don't say last night was a mistake," He warns me.

"Nothing has changed; I still love Justin, I still want to be with him."

"Sooooo, last night meant nothing?"

"I didn't say that. I just want you to know where we stand."

"Well, I don't know, and I don't understand how you could let Justin walk all over you. Do whatever the fuck he wants."

"Don't talk about Justin. You don't know him. We were happy until you came along."

"So everything is my fault?"

"You know what part you played."

"You seemed to enjoy yourself last night."

"The only thing I want right now is to talk to Justin, so I think it's time for you to leave."

"I'm not going to just drop this, Clyde."

"I know, but I need time to think, so for now, just leave." He gives me a kiss, then walks out the door.

I sit there for about thirty minutes before the door opens up and Justin walks in. We stare at each other for a few minutes before I finally speak. "I came looking for you last night. Where were you?"

He sits down next to me. "I think you already know the answer to that."

"I won't be fucked over, Justin. It is not Brian's job to step in every time we have a problem. Why do you feel the need to run to him? He's not the answer."

"I don't run to Brian, and I know he's not the answer, but I think we need to talk about Jason."

"Either you believe me or you don't."

"I believe you, but that doesn't solve the problem. Jason seems to want you back pretty bad."

"Well, he had me last night. He just left a few minutes ago." I look at him; he's hurt. Well, what the hell did he expect?

"Why would you sleep with Jason after what he did? I don't get it."

"And I don't get you fucking Brian last night, but that's what you did!"

"Maybe we need some time apart. The fact that we both sought comfort elsewhere does not sit well with me."

I love him, but right now I'm mad. Mad at him for fucking Brian and mad at myself for fucking Jason.

"A few days away from each other may not be a bad idea," I tell him.

"I think we should just end it here," His voice breaks and he looks away from me.

"So you can be with him, Justin? Is that it? You're dumping me for Brian?" My head is spinning and my cheeks are wet with tears. I don't want it to be over.

"I'm not going to be with Brian. I came here today to work things out with you, but after finding out about you and Jason; I don't think that's a good idea."

"Aren't you being a little hypocrite?" I sneer.

"Maybe, but I know we can't just go back to the way we were, and you should know it, too."

"Fine, whatever you want, Justin. You want it to be over, it's over. But don't expect me to pine away for your return. And maybe if you want to come back, I'll have moved on. Did you even think of that?"

"I guess that's a chance I'll have to take." He grabs my face and pulls me in for a deep kiss before he tells me. "I love you, Clyde, remember that."

Then he's gone, leaving me alone with my tears and broken heart.

Justin

I lie in bed and let the tears flow. Two days ago I was happy, now here I lie, brokenhearted all over again. I think about what Clyde said, and maybe I am being a hypocrite, but he let Jason come between us. As much as I love Brian, I never let him come between me and Clyde. Maybe he loves Jason more than he is willing to admit. I don't know, but I'm going to give him time to figure it out. Maybe we will get back together and maybe we won't.

The phone has been ringing since I came home. I don't answer; I don't care who it is. I'm not in the mood to talk to anyone, but now someone is banging my door down. I get up to answer, hoping it is not Clyde or Brian; I don't want to talk to either one of them. I open the door slowly and peek out. Shit. Fuck. What the hell does he want? I open the door all the way and wave Jason in.

"What are you doing here?" I demand.

"I think we should talk."

"What the fuck for? To hear more of your lies?" I shut the door and wait for him to answer.

"If you knew I was lying, why did you run out of there like that with your ex right behind you? I think I know."
"You don't know shit. But take a bow; you accomplished what you wanted."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It's over between me and Clyde. That's what you wanted right? What your little plan was all about."

"Yep. Glad to see it worked." I can't believe this guy — he actually smiles. He looks pretty pleased with himself.

"Get out," I tell him. I can feel myself getting angry and I don't know what I might do.

"Let me explain," He asks.

"Make it quick," I say resignedly.

"Clyde told me all about you and Brian. I don't want to see him hurt, and it seems that's what you were going to do. I couldn't let that happen; I love him too much."

"I love him, too. You should have stayed out of it."

"I think you should worry about Brian and let me worry about Clyde."

"Fuck you! Don't tell me what to do."

"I'm not your enemy, Justin. I'm only telling you the way things should be. You have to know that you could never compete with me for Clyde's attention, not for long anyway. It's best you cut your ties now, and go back to Brian where you belong."

I'm about to explode, but the knock at the door stops me. "Come in, it's not locked," I yell.

"What the fuck is going on here?" Brian barks out, coming in and slamming the door behind him.

"Nothing," Jason and I say in unison. Brian looks pointedly at me.

"Then what the fuck is he doing here?" he gestures to Jason.

"He wants to talk," I respond.

"What about?" Brian demands.

"Don't talk about me like I'm not here," Jason speaks up. Before I can answer, my door opens up and Clyde walks in. Talk about a cozy scene.

"What's...going on?" he stammers.

"That's what I want to know," Brian retorts.

"What are you doing here, Clyde?" I ask.

"Returning your key and getting mine back."

"You two broke up?" Brian asks, studying me intently.

"Yeah, that should make you real happy. It's what you wanted right?" Clyde sneers at Brian.

"Wait a minute, Clyde, don't blame this on Brian. I think we all know where the blame lies," I tell him and point to Jason.

"There's no way I'm going to let you put this all on Jason. Justin, you own some of the blame. You're not innocent in all of this, you know," Clyde tells me.

"He never said he was, so watch how you talk to him," Brian grounds out to Clyde.

"Why should he? After the way you to carry on, Clyde can say whatever the fuck he wants," Jason says, getting closer to Brian.

I step in and face Jason. "Don't get in Brian's face with your bullshit. You don't know anything."

"He knows enough," Clyde says. "He knows what I told him and he's not the only one here full of shit." I spin around to Clyde.

"So you're taking his side now, is that it?"

"Justin, fuck this. Fuck them! Let them have each other; you're better than this shit," Brian tells me.

"Look, Clyde, see how they defend each other. I told you it would only be a matter of time before they got back together. Shit. How could you be so stupid all this time?"

"Don't call him stupid!" I tell Jason, getting inches away from his face. "You've been gone for two years; you have no idea what the fuck you are talking about!"

"Oh, so now you want to come to the rescue?" he laughs. "What happened? Suddenly remember that Clyde was here?"

"Why don't you just shut the fuck up?" Brian tells Jason.

"Don't talk to him like that," Clyde tells Brian before turning around to face Jason.

"Don't fuck with Justin, or I swear you will be sorry," Clyde tells Jason. Jason only nods his head. Then Clyde turns back to Brian.

"Don't YOU fuck with JASON or you will be sorry, understand?"

"Look," Jason says, stepping between Brian and Clyde. "It's obvious there're a lot of emotions in here. Let's all just fuck and see where that leads us," he grins.

"Jason, you are not helping!" Clyde tells him.

"I'm just saying it might ease some of the tension."

"I don't think any one in this room is ready to be in a relationship," Clyde looks around at all of us. Then he takes my key and sets it on the counter. I get his and place it in his hand.

"Remember what I said. I'm not going to wait for you. So you just do whatever the fuck you want," Clyde says to me.

He gives Jason a stern look. "Let's go."

I don't watch them leave. I hear the door shut and then I raise my eyes to look at Brian.

"What the hell just happened?" I ask.

"Case of the ex or exes, I guess. How the fuck should I know?"

"What are you doing here?" I ask.

"You wouldn't answer your phone."

"I told you I would call you. What do you want?"

"Nothing, fuck it." He walks to the door.

"Brian."

"Look, I wanted to make sure you were alright, ok?" He yells.

"Don't yell at me, and yes, I'm fine."

"Well, I'm leaving." I don't say anything, just go into the kitchen and start to take out things for dinner.

"What are you cooking?" Brian asks, coming over to me.

"Why, you hungry?" He nods his head.

"I'm making lasagna. You can help."

"I'm all yours," he tells me. I look up at him and he looks away before he speaks.

"Justin. Whatever part I played in you and Clyde's break up"

"Don't." I tell him. "Don't try and shoulder the blame. What happened between me and Clyde isn't about you. Not directly, anyway." He shrugs his shoulders and the rest of the meal is made with small talk about school and work. We eat in silence. After we finish, we both wait, willing the other to speak first. Finally I just burst out laughing and he does the same.

"What are you doing tomorrow? Do you have to work?" he asks me.

"Yeah."

"With Clyde."

I nod my head.

"Is that going to be a problem?"

"I don't know. Maybe. But I don't want to think about it."

"Well, what do you want to think about?" he asks, brushing my hair back out of my face. I grab his hand and kiss it.

"I think you know what's on my mind," I tell him. He takes his hand back and gets up.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"I won't let you use me to get over Clyde."

"That's not what I'm trying to do. Brian, you should know better."

"I just want to be clear."

"How's Gus?" I ask, changing the subject.

"Seems like he gets bigger every time I see him, and he has your appetite, but I guess that's a good thing," he smiles.

"Depends on who's footing the food bill," I laugh.

"Speaking of which, I guess I owe you a dinner. How about Chinese tomorrow, at my place?"

"I have to work."

"Well, come when you get off."

"8:00."

He starts to laugh.

"What's wrong with 8:00?" I ask.

"Nothing. I'm just thinking about Ted and Em. "

"Don't tell me they're trying to start back up again."

"I think they've officialy become fuck buddies."

"Well, who are we to talk? Seems like no matter how hard we try, we just can't seem to say good bye to each other," I say.

"I've tried to get rid of you plenty of times," he smirks.

"Yeah. Well, I remember a time when you stopped me from leaving," I laugh.

"Yeah, well you know what that led to, rules on top of rules," he teases me.

"Fuck you," I smile. He pulls me to him for a kiss which leads to the bedroom and a long night of love making.

Justin

I walk into the loft after work and look around, expecting to see Chinese food everywhere.

"Where's the food?" I ask Brian.

"I thought I'd wait for you to get here, so you could order what you like."

"You know what I like."

"I used to," he shakes his head.

"Nothing's changed that much," I tell him.

"How was work?" he asks.

"Clyde called in sick. If that's what you want to know."

"Come here, smart ass." He pulls me to him and we share a short kiss which leads to a longer one and then a even longer one.

"Stop. I think we both know where this will lead," I say, pushing him away.

"And that's a bad thing?" he asks.

"No, but I'm hungry; let's order." I tell him what I want and he places the order.

"Were you disappointed?" he asks me.

"About what?" I ask.

"Clyde not coming to work?"

"If you want to know if I miss him, Brian, the answer is yes, I miss him, alright?"

"You must have loved him a lot."

"This jealousy thing does not fit you."

"I was just making conversation, Justin, don't read too much into it."

"I don't want to talk about this any more. How was work?"

"Good. The title partner carries a lot of responsibility, but you get used to it." The buzzer rings and he goes to get the food.

After we eat, I walk up to the bedroom.

"Let's take a shower," I purr.

"Later."

"Later?" I ask.

"Yes, later," he says, attacking my lips and pushing me down on the bed. The shower came much, much later.

Brian

I don't know what Justin and I are doing. We seem to be making baby steps toward a relationship. I know he's working tonight, and that's why I'm here at his restaurant. Hell, I could always say it's where the client wanted to come. I see Justin coming my way and I smile; so does he when he sees me.

"Hey," I say, before giving him my order. "See you later?" I ask before he walks away.

"You have to ask?" he laughs.

When he returns with the food I raise my eyebrow to silently ask him a question.

"Yes, he's working," he says. Just then the person in question walks by.

"Hey, Clyde, how's it going?" I can't resist. He walks over to us.

"Fine, I'm just getting off," he tells me.

"Why so early?" Justin asks.

"That's no longer your concern, Sunshine," Clyde answers in a mocking tone.

"Clyde," Justin looks taken aback.

"What would you like me to say to you, Justin? Should I be happy for you? Happy that you finally got your boyfriend back?"

"It's not like that."

"It sure looks that way to me."

"Well, you are wrong," I'm starting to get pissed. I don't like where this is going. It seems as if Justin is about to discount the last few days as if they were nothing. I'm ready to give off one of my smartass remarks when I see Jason come up. He puts his hands around Clyde's waist, then gives him a kiss before turning to Justin with a smug look on his face.

"Hey, Justin. What's up?" he smirks. Justin doesn't answer. He looks hurt, even jealous. It makes me sick that Clyde has this effect on him.

Jason turns to Clyde and asks, "Are you ready yet?"

Clyde turns to Justin. "Guess I'll see you tomorrow."
Justin mumbles something to himself.

"What did you say?" Clyde asks.

"I said, who is the fucking hypocrite now, Clyde?"

"I told you, I wouldn't wait for you."

"Just fuck off," Justin responds.

"What do you want Justin? Who do you want?"

I listen closely; I want to know the answer as well. I get up to stand beside Clyde. "Yeah, Justin, I'd like to know the answer to that myself," I say.

He looks up at me and Clyde, standing side-by-side. So close, that we are almost touching.

"What's it going to be Justin?" Clyde asks.

Silence.

"Well?" We both ask in unison. His eyes dart between me and Clyde a couple of times before he whispers.

"You. I want you."

Chapter 4

It's been three weeks since Justin chose me. He's had some problems with the ex, but that's to be expected. All I know is that we have another chance at a relationship, and I plan on making it work this time. He's supposed to

come over tonight; I bet that's him at the door now. I swing the door open and let him in. We share a kiss before I close the door and go to sit beside him in the living room.

"How was the first day back at school?" I ask.

"Intense," he answers.

"What happened?"

"You would not believe who I have in just about every class!"

"Clyde," I answer. He nods his head.

"Well, it could be worse," I tell him.

"How?"

"You could have Jason in every class." He laughs loudly at that.

"Now, that would be intense."

We share another kiss and I pull back and just look at Justin. I don't know what's wrong but for some reason I can't take my eyes off of him.

"What is it?" He asks, starting to freak out. Suddenly I just feel overrun with emotions.

"Brian, are you alright? You're really starting to scare me, you know?" Justin asks me. I don't answer. I can't. I don't know what the hell is going on. I'm here with Justin. But I'm not really here I'm just watching myself. Fuck. I don't know how to explain it.

"Should I call someone?" Justin gets up and makes his way to the phone.

"No. Stop," I manage to get out. He comes back to sit beside me and takes my hand inside of his. I look up at him. God he is just so fucking beautiful, sitting there staring at me with concern in his eyes.

"Brian, please, you are really starting to scare the shit out of me. What's going on?? I look at him, pleading with me for some sort of explanation. I can't fight it any more. My defenses are down; my emotions have taken on a life of their own. I meet Justin's eyes and hold his stare.

"What is it, Brian?" he asks.

"I just love you, that's all," I whisper and immediately my heart starts to beat faster and my chest feels like it's ready to cave in. Justin caresses my face and then places a kiss on my lips.

"I love you, too, Brian," he tells me.

"No, you don't," I say, sadly, shaking my head.

"You don't believe I love you?" He looks shocked. So I explain.

"I know that you think you do, Justin, but one day you will see that what you feel for me is not really love."

"I love you, Brian, just accept it."

"Then why did you leave? If you love me so much why did you leave?"

"You didn't make it easy to stay and if you loved me so much why did you let me leave?"

"I answered that before; I won't do it again."

"I'm not going to get into this with you. I'm not about to sit here and try to make you believe I love you when I know that you already know that I do."

"You loved Ethan and you loved Clyde, but where are they now, Justin? What happened to them?"

"I never said I loved Ethan."

"You didn't love Ethan? So why did you leave me for him?"

"Why are you doing this?"

"How am I supposed to know that what happened before won't happen again? I mean, I thought you were happy before. I thought everything was fine. But it wasn't. Why should I even bother to put myself through that again?"

"I don't have any answers for you. I can't give you any guarantees about any thing. I'm not sure exactly what it is you want from me."

I take a deep breath and think. I'm not sure what I want from him, either, or where any of that came from. "I think it's time for you to go, Justin. I want to be left alone."

"I think you need to be alone," he says, in a very soft tone. Then he leans in and gives me a kiss, which I do not return. I can't. Something's off with me; I just don't know what it is. All I know is that I want...him...gone.

"Call me later," he tells me, before walking out the door, not waiting for my response.

I stay in the same spot for hours and finally come to a very sad conclusion. I know what's got to be done and I pray I'm still breathing when it's over.

Chapter 5

***** Justin *****

I leave Brian's and go straight home, contemplating all of the things in my mind. I know what it took for him to say those words to me, being that he still doesn't trust me completely. I sit down with a beer and try not to think about it. I'm completely engrossed in some made-for-TV movie crap when I hear the knocking at the door.

Startled, I say, "Clyde. What are you doing here?"

"Just came to talk." I let him in and motion for him to take a seat.

As we take our seats on the couch, I come straight to the point. "What do you want to talk about?" I'm not really sure what Clyde is up to.

"I miss you, Justin" he whispers.

"Clyde" I sigh softly.

"I know you chose Brian, but why can't we be friends?"

"I never said that we couldn't, but...but you make it hard."

He looks at me and nods his head in agreement. "I know how I've acted, but I don't want you out of my life. If we're just gonna be friends...then fine, friends it is; I can deal with that. But what I can't deal with is not having you in my life at all." I think about what he's saying. I do want him to be a part of my life, but I think that it may be dangerous; no, I know it will be dangerous. We still have strong feelings for each other, and I don't want that to interfere with Brian and I.

"Do you know how hard it would be, trying to be friends?" I question.

"Yeah. As hard as it was for you and Brian to be friends when we were together" he states simply.

I wonder if he's serious or trying to be hurtful. "So how's Jason?" I ask, trying to steer the conversation.

"He's good."

"You two still together?"

"We're friends Justin. That's all we ever were."

"Yeah right," I snort. He gets up and starts to pace. I want to be his friend, really I do, but I know that I'll have to keep him at arms length.

"We can be friends, Clyde, I don't have a problem with that." He looks relieved and comes over to sit beside me. The sexual tension is so strong that it's almost choking me. I swallow a few times, trying to get my breathing under control. He leans into me and places a soft, sweet kiss on my lips. I can feel my breathing becoming irregular and I fight to stay in control.

"Clyde, don't. I can't," I whisper.

"But you want to." He breathes into my mouth and I find myself getting lost in his kiss. Then I think about Brian. What he said to me tonight. What it means. I think about his lack of trust in me and how I want to rebuild that trust in ME. How important it is for Brian to trust me again.

"You should go," I tell Clyde, pulling back.

"Brian," Clyde sighs.

"Do we have to go over this again?" I ask, getting frustrated with this whole thing.

"No," Clyde gets up and walks to the door. He turns to me, a look of regret in his eyes, before he walks out the door.

***** Brian*****

I think about what I want to do. Then I think about Justin accusing me of pushing him off a cliff before. It wasn't true that time. But that's exactly what I was going to do this time. The more I think about it, the more I think it's not a good idea. I can really fuck up sometimes. If I push him away, I'll be fucking up. I want to trust him, but I did that before and I got burned. Still he chose me over Clyde so.....

***** Justin*****

I'm in bed when I hear the insistent knocking on the door.

"Wait a minute! I'm coming!" I yell out. I go to the door and crack it open a little.

"It's me, Justin! Now open the damn door," Brian says.

I wonder what he's doing here. "Brian," I say, letting him in and closing the door.

"Whatcha doing?" he jokingly asks, pulling me against him for a kiss.

"I'm in bed. What are you doing here?"

"I thought I was welcome here anytime," he smirks.

"Are you okay?" I ask, thinking about earlier tonight.

"I'm fine." He shrugs his shoulders like he doesn't have a care in the world and I know that the topic is not up for discussion.

"Clyde came over tonight," I tell Brian, watching him closely to see what his reaction will be.

"What did he want?" he casually asks.

"To be friends." I can see him tense up and I know that that's not a good sign.

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him that we could be friends," I answer.

"Is that it?" he asks, while tracing little patterns on my kitchen counter. Trying not to look at me. I want Brian to trust me. I want to be honest with him even if it hurts. That's the only way we can make this thing work.

"He kissed me and I kissed him back. I got caught up in the moment, but just for a minute. "Then I asked him to leave."

"Justin. If you want to be with him....." he sighs

"I want to be with you," I interrupt him mid-sentence, taking his hand in mine.

"Yeah," he says, still not looking at me, and I know that he's having doubts. I can see the walls start to reconstruct. Brick by brick, I see them building back up. Maybe it was a mistake to tell him about Clyde.

"Brian," I say, running my fingers through his hair.

"I have to go," Brian states, getting up and making his way to the door.

"Brian, don't do this, please. You want to trust me. You want me to be honest with you, but when I do you can't handle it. What the fuck do you want from me!?" I plead.

"Nothing, Sunshine," he says, looking me dead in the eye. "I don't want anything from you." And then he's gone.

Chapter 6

Justin

"Brian, don't do this, please. You want to trust me. You want me to be honest with you, but when I do you can't handle it. What the fuck do you want from me!?" I plead.

"Nothing, Sunshine," he says, looking me dead in the eye. "I don't want anything from you." And then he's gone.

I consider going after Brian as he rushes out the door, but then think better of it. I refuse to chase after him, 'cause he can't have it both ways. Either he wants me to be honest or he doesn't.

Staring at the closed door, I realize just how tired I am. Exhausted even. I hit the sack, tossing and turning, only to be awakened by incessant banging at the door. I glance at the clock. Damn! 3:00 in the fucking morning. I can't catch a decent wink.

"Whatcha doing?" Brian asks, leaning casually against the doorframe. Huh? What am I doing?? He's asking me that at 3:00 in the morning? I give him my best, 'you've got to be fucking kidding' look, and stand aside to let him enter.

"You need to be honest with me, Justin," he continues, standing in front of me, looking me square in my eyes.

I stare back at him hard, and snicker. "Why? So you can go running out the door again?"

He ignores my sarcasm and repeats himself, "I want you to be honest with me." He says this while wrapping his arms around me and placing a soft kiss on my lips.

"Let's go to bed," he whispers seductively in my ear, before I have a chance to answer him. Now, I know that we should really talk about this, but hell, we're Brian and Justin or Justin and Brian (depending on how you score it), so that's what we do. We go to bed. Plus, I'm way too groggy to get into it with him right now.

We fall into bed where he spoons up against me, rubbing my forearm and places a small kiss on my shoulder before drifting off to sleep.

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I blink my eyes open from the sunlight streaming in, to find myself securely wrapped in Brian's arms. After lounging about for 10 minutes, we reluctantly get out of bed; I've got to get ready for school and he has to go to work. We make plans to meet at his place later.

I'm walking across campus on my way home, when Clyde ambles up to me, seemingly from out of nowhere.

"Where you headed?" he wants to know, keeping in step with me.

"Why?" I respond questioningly, hoping he won't come on to me again.

"Let's get some lunch," he suggests, smiling and giving me a friendly hug around the shoulder.

We decide to eat at a little restaurant close to the school.

"So, how's the semester going?" Clyde asks, popping a French fry dripping with ketchup, into his mouth.

"Fine," I say, watching him shove another fry in his mouth.

"I'm doing pretty good, so far, but it's still pretty early in the semester, you know," he states unnecessarily.

"I know. You can never tell when a professor will do something to totally piss you off," I laugh.

"How's your hand doing?" Clyde asks me, suddenly turning serious.

"It's fine," I reply, touched by his concern. He then reaches across the table, dragging his hand down my jawbone in a soft caress.

I involuntarily jerk back and remove his hand. "Don't do that," I exclaim.

"I'm sorry," he says, putting both his hands under the table.

"You don't have to hide your hands," I sigh, then smile to let him know I'm not mad.

"I know, but see, sometimes they seem to have a mind of their own, so it's best to keep them out of sight," Clyde grins, watching me as I devour my burger. "Forgot how much you like to eat," he comments wistfully.

"Where is Jason?" I ask, ignoring his statement about my appetite.

"I don't know," he shrugs, leaning back in his chair. I told you we're just friends."

"I don't really care one way or the other Clyde. If Jason makes you happy, then good for you. I was just making conversation."

"I know what you mean. I feel the same way. I want you happy, and if Brian does it for you, then who am I to complain?"

"Let's get outta here," I say, arising and tossing some bills on the table.

We walk side by side out the restaurant, when suddenly, Clyde pulls me into his arms for a hug. I tilt my head back to gaze at him and he takes the opportunity to place a kiss on my lips. We stand there, our tongues in a timeless duel, caught up in our own passion, before someone walks by and yells out "Get a fucking room." We pull back and eye each other sheepishly.

"You can't keep teasing me like this, Justin," Clyde breathes out heavily, grabbing my hand.

"I don't want to tease you," I rush out, not realizing I'd been holding my breath. I don't want to tease him and I don't want to have these feelings that I'm having for him either. It's not fair to love two people and have them both love you back, because someone is going to get hurt; it can't be avoided. I know that I don't love them equally, I love Brian with all my heart and soul, without a doubt, but it does nothing to dispel the fact that I still have feelings for Clyde. I still...love him, and...I don't want to. Brian and I have been through so much together — through hell and back — that we deserve a chance to be happy. He's trying so hard to trust me again, but I keep giving him reasons not to. I take back my hand, make some goodbye noises and head down the street towards home, away from Clyde.

Once home, I wash up before leaving for Brian's, considering telling him about my encounter with Clyde. God, I want to be honest with him, but really, how can he ever trust me if every time I see him, I'm regaling him another story of Clyde and I making out? My chest constricts with the burden I feel, making me tired. This whole situation is making me very tired.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

I slide back the loft door revealing a very subdued looking Justin, and I wonder what's wrong now. I don't question him though; he'll talk when he's ready.

"Want something to eat?" I inquire as he sinks deeper into the couch.

"I'm not hungry." He then flops back on the couch and turns his face into the cushions. Yeah, something is definitely wrong and I'm not waiting any longer to find out.

I slump next to him, flipping him over to face me. "What's wrong with you?" I demand.

"Nothing," he sighs, attempting to turn back over. What the fuck is wrong with him? Usually I can't shut him up, and now he's barely answering my questions. Plus, he's not hungry? Must be sick or something. I ponder this and

start to ask him if that's the case, when I hear the small snore coming out of him. He's fallen asleep, just that quick. I stare at the beautiful angelic face and decide to pick him up and carry him to bed. I remove his shoes and then walk back into the living room.

I must have dozed off, because I'm awakened by a hard shake from Justin.

"Hey," I say groggily, leaning over to give him a kiss that he pulls back from. Hold up...what-the-fuck?

"We need to talk," he says, running a hand nervously through his hair. Fuck me, I'm barely coherent and he wants to talk? Damn, I'm not gonna like this.

"I love you, Brian, you know that...." Oh...okay. That's how it's always starts – I Love You... and then, that's when it happens, a bomb goes off, fucking up your whole existence.

".....but, I love Clyde, too," he continues, looking at me, trying to gauge my reaction. I keep my face impassive, but my insides are churning. He's not revealing some deep, dark secret. I already know how he feels about his friend, I just can't figure out his need to keep telling me though. I cross my arms, pointedly looking over at him and watch as the tears build up in his eyes and spill over onto his cheeks. He takes his hand and swipes at them, only to have more fall in their place.

"I understand you love him, but what the fuck is really going on?" I demand, as he continues to wipe away his tears.

"Brian, I want to be with you, I want you to trust me, I don't want you to doubt our relationship," he sniffles.

"Is there a point to all of this?" I ask gruffly, losing my patience with this whole goddamn scene.

"I had lunch with Clyde today and we kissed again," he rushes out in one big breath. My first reaction is anger. This is the second time he's come to me with this bullshit. What the fuck is he trying to prove, anyway? What the fuck does he want from me? What the fuck is he expecting me to do? That's my first reaction, but then rationality returns to me and I think, about him not telling me and me finding out some other way. From someone else.

See, he didn't have to tell me. Not this time, or the one before, but he did, so I know that he's trying. It still doesn't excuse the fact that he keeps letting this happen. I know that he has some unresolved feelings where Clyde is concerned, and I also know that we can't move forward until he deals with them. I look up from my reverie and note that he's half-way out the door. He mistook my silence as a sign to leave.

He ain't going nowhere. "Where the fuck do you think you're going?" I speak.

"I uh, thought you wanted me to leave," he explains, pain evident on his face.

"Did I tell you to leave?" I sneer, as he comes back in and shuts the door.

"Look, Justin," I exhale noisily, "I don't know what you expect of me – we've acknowledged that you have feelings for Clyde, so work through them and then come back here."

"I thought you didn't want me to go," he softly speaks.

"I want to tell you what I have to say first, and then I want you to go." He nods his head slightly, so I continue on. "I'm not about to get into some competition with Clyde over you. You need to take some time, find out what it is that you want, and then make a decision. I don't have, and won't make time for this bullshit! You want me, you want to be with me, that's fine, because I want to be with you too. But if you want to be with Clyde, then that's where you need to go, because I won't go though this shit with you anymore."

He looks me over, his shoulders slumping forward and then goes to the door. "Bye, Brian," he tells me, before turning to walk away from me yet again, making my heart drop to the floor.

Chapter 7

Justin

I leave Brian and make my way home. It's fuckin' freezing out and I pull my coat tightly around me. I know I did the right thing...telling Brian. I have to be completely honest with him if we're ever going to make a go of some kind of relationship. Holding my feelings inside and sneaking around, behind his back isn't the answer, it's the problem. I walk inside my house, plop down on the couch and toy with the idea of calling Brian. I decide against it. He's right; I need to work through what I'm feeling for Clyde, before I can fully commit to him, to us.

I stare a long time at the phone and then punch in some digits...before I change my mind.

"Hello?" a voice answers.

"Hey, Clyde. Can you come over?" I have no idea where this will lead, but decide to take it as it comes.

"What's wrong?" Clyde asks, once he gets here, which is exactly twenty minutes after I'd called. I motion for him to take a seat and I sit down beside him.

"I called you over so we could talk. I mean really talk. I see the confusion in his eyes, and I wonder if he can read mine, because if he can, he'll realize how hard this is for me.

"We need to figure out just what it is between us, and then figure out what to do with it," I sigh.

Clyde

Justin's hurting, that much I can understand. I've been selfish; thinking of my own needs and wants, not caring about Justin and the effect all of this is having on him. I love Justin. I was happy with him, but I know I can live without him. I've had heartache over him, and I've survived. I know that it helps to have Jason available to pick up the pieces, just like he said he would be. I still think of Justin sometimes, though. That's what drove me to his apartment the other day – the need was so strong I couldn't ignore it – I wanted to be with him again. We kissed, getting a little hot and heavy, but in the end he pushed me away in favor of Brian. I knew then that we would never be together again; where his heart truly lay.

Earlier, when I asked him to lunch, I really just wanted to talk to him for a bit. Other than seeing each other briefly in class, we really don't have time to just talk. I just wanted to be with him for a little while; didn't mean to kiss him. I just sometimes take leave of my senses when Justin is around. I certainly didn't mean to add to his pain...I want him to be true to himself, sure of his feelings.

"Justin, could you see a life without me in it? Could you live your life without me being a part of it?" I see him roll the idea around in his head. He's really thinking seriously about it, and I know that I'm going to get an honest answer.

"I could live without you Clyde," he says rather bluntly. "I could live without you in my life. When I'm around you, old feelings flare up, when I'm not around you I hardly even think about you. I guess in time even those feelings will fade." He looks at me like he thinks he may have hurt my feelings, but he said pretty much what I thought he would say.

"What about Brian?" I ask. "Could you live with out him in your life?"

"That's something I'm not prepared to think about," he says, shaking his head.

"You won't even consider it?" I ask.

"No!" he says, a little louder, and I know this is the end of discussion on this topic.

"Then you have your answer, Justin," I softly tell him, taking his hand in mine.

"I don't understand," he says, caressing my fingers. "Even now I want to hold you, to be held by you."

"We were happy, Justin, and then all of a sudden it was over. Who knows what could have been, where our love could have taken us. I guess that's why neither of us can completely let go," I sadly explain. It's a fucked up situation that we're in, and it not only affects us, but also Brian and Jason.

"Maybe we should just give in to our passion and see where that takes us," Justin suggests, bringing his lips closer to mine for a kiss.

Justin

I get caught up in Clyde kisses, and soon, we both began to undress. He kisses my neck and it feels good. Familiar and good, but also...lacking. Something is missing; it's not the same. I feel myself aching for Brian's kisses, yearning for Brian's hands to be touching me, Brian's cock to be rubbing up against mine.

"Do you still keep the lube and condoms in the same place?" Clyde softly whispers in my ear. I nod my head and he goes off to get them.

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After we've finished and cleaned up, we put our clothes back on, looking at each other awkwardly.

"Not like it was before, huh?" Clyde poses.

"I guess we've moved on more than we realize," I sigh.

"Guess we have," Clyde nods in agreement.

"Maybe this is what we needed. I mean you're sitting here, but I don't have that old, overwhelming urge to be with you. I know that I love you; that's not changed. But I'm not sure if I can stop. When you love someone, I mean really love someone, you can't erase those feelings in just a few seconds. We loved each other. We still love each other. Maybe we always will, but there are two people we love more. So maybe what we have, what we feel, has finally been tucked safely away. Like it should be, so that we can focus on those two people and give them our all, like they deserve," I pronounce, feeling like I've lost 100 pounds.

"You think that Jason deserves my all?" Clyde smirks at me.

He sees I'm not going to answer his about Jason and asks one of his own. "What are you going to do about Brian?"

"Well, the first thing I'm going to do, is tell him what happened here today," I say, walking Clyde to the door.

"Everything?" Clyde squeaks out, looking at me with disbelief on his face.

"Yeah, everything," I say, and he opens the door and walks out.

"Good luck!" he yells back over his shoulder, making his way down the steps. I close the door shut, thinking how I'll approach Brian. I decide the best way is a direct approach; so I grab my coat and hightail it over to the loft to talk to him. When I arrive, Brian is not home – what a surprise. I have only one guess where he is and what he's doing.

Brian

Fuck! That little shit walked out on me again! Fuck him. I'm pumped up on stress and frustration and need to get outta here. I waver a bit on what to do and contemplate going to Babylon, but I know that's not what I really want,

to get lost in the pain and pretend that I'm not hurting. I've done that for so long it's almost comical, because in the end it's the same results....I always have the same problem I started out with. Go figure. With that thought in mind, I slam out of the loft, hop in my jeep and get on the street that'll take me to him...to Justin. Once there, I stand outside his place knocking for about ten minutes, listening at the door for any signs of life, before I finally give up. I consider where he might be, reluctantly conceding that he's probably somewhere with Clyde, fucking their twinkie brains out. I feel my temperature start to rise and the bitterness creep into my heart. 'But you told him to go with Clyde,' a little voice in my head tells me. I know what I said, but that doesn't mean that I have to like it. I kick the damn door in irritation, thinking that he will magically appear, but he doesn't, so I slink back to the jeep and think about my next move.

"Fuck!" I scream out loud, banging my fist against the steering wheel.

"Fuck it! Fuck trying! And fuck Justin!" I holler out into the empty jeep, as I start it up and head towards my castle, Babylon.

Once there, I grab the first decent looking, non-Blonde trick I see, take him into the backroom and bang away all my pain and frustration on his ass. When I finally release his limp body, I look up and see two cold blue eyes staring back at me. Justin. Shit. What the fuck is he doing here? I know, dumb question, but no dumber than my stupid ass timing.

"Are you finished?" he coldly asks, as I tuck my family jewels in, zipping up my pants. I don't answer; instead I ask a little question of my own.

"Where are you coming from? Fucking Clyde? Is he here with you?" I fire the questions out in rapid succession, sauntering towards the bar, sitting down. Justin follows and plunks down next to me.

"I'm coming from your place, asshole! I started to go home and let you have your fun for the night, but somehow I found myself here."

He stares at me, waiting for my response. Shit! All the time he was at my place, I was at his thinking the worst. "I went to your place; you were gone. I figured you were off somewhere with lover boy," I shrug.

"When are you going to learn that this is not the answer, Brian? When are you going to see that coming here, fucking, sucking, snorting, popping and swigging, is going to hurt you more than I ever could?" he sighs.

"Justin, you can't wave a magic wand and suddenly expect me to change the way that I've lived my life for the last ten years," I let him know, thinking maybe if he understands he'll drop it, but he shakes his head from side to side. What the fuck does he want? I'm being honest with him, but still it's not enough.

"No ones asking for 'suddenly.' You tried...you had kinda stopped, or at least slowed down a whole lot," he reminds me.

"Yeah, well, look where that got me," I snap.

"Listen, we have problems, Brian. Who the fuck doesn't!?" he cries, jumping up, coming to stand directly in front of me.

"I'm ready to go," I say in exasperation, getting up and exiting Babylon to get in my jeep. Justin is right behind me and climbs in the passenger side. "We'll talk at the loft," I tell him brusquely, effectively silencing him. This way I have time to get my thoughts together and as soon as we get inside the loft, I have my little speech ready.

"I know everyone has problems, Justin. But you love two men and you can't seem to decide between them. Just to let you know, I won't play second to anyone," I spit at him.

"You don't have to!" Justin yells. "I never asked you to! Never wanted you to." He's really upset now; I notice his face flushing and see him struggling with his tears. Fuck that, he's not getting off that easy. I didn't.

"What about Clyde?" I ask, suddenly afraid of his answer.

"I've dealt with that," he says solemnly.

"When?" I ask.

"Today. Earlier today," he answers.

"I thought you said..."

"...I never said that I hadn't seen Clyde today; I called him when I got home and invited him over."

"And?..."

"....And we talked, we tried to figure out our feelings for each other, and we ended up fucking!" Shit, I think to myself. I know I want him to be honest with me, but I'll be damned if the truth don't hurt.

"I know what I want, Brian," he interrupts my thoughts to whisper. I know whom I want," he continues.

"And? Who, is it?" I ask.

"You," Justin says, wrapping his arms around my neck, placing a soft kiss on my jaw.

"You still love him?" I'm not quite ready to just give in.

"I love you, Brian. I loved you first and I'll love you always. Anything I feel or felt for Clyde is put away, where it should be," he says.

"That's nice, Justin, but you didn't answer my question," I point out.

"You know the answer. Damn, Brian, why do you have to make everything so hard?" he asks, freeing his arms from around my neck. "I know you are trying to trust me, Brian, but damn it, I'm trying, too! He then shocks me with his next question. "Is it worth it?"

I don't answer, instead I turn away to look at the door, away from him. "Answer me," he insists, taking my face and turning it around to look at him. "Is it worth it for me to even try? Or should I just give up now? Do you love me enough to keep trying? Do you care enough to want to make this work?" he stands up. "If not, tell me now, and I'll walk out the door and never look back," he says.

I close my eyes, motion for him to sit down, and let out a deep breath.

Chapter 8

Justin

Brain motions for me to sit down, then takes a deep breath and reaches for my hand. "I'll try," he says, pulling me closer. "I'll try," he repeats, giving me a kiss on the lips. "Just keep being honest with me."

"I'll try too," I say, getting in his lap, clasping my hands with his and placing my head on his shoulder. We stay that way for a long time, taking comfort in each others arms.

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I'm supposed to meet Brian and am running late; the restaurant is really busy and two waiters called in sick. I haven't even taken a moment to call Brian and let him know.

Brian

Okay. Justin is now two hours late and I immediately think the worst. Maybe he and Clyde hooked up after work or something. I've called his place and hit his cell, no answer at either. Shit! After all we talked about, I can't believe he would go off somewhere with Clyde. Did he mean anything that he said? Was his love for Clyde stronger than what he thought? Fuck. I pick up the phone and call again, still no answer. "FUCKING SONOFABITCH!" I yell, throwing the phone against the wall. It crashes to the floor and cracks in three different places.

My first thought is to go to Babylon and get lost in the alcohol, drugs, and sweaty bodies. Then I think about what Justin said. I know that I can't keep hiding my pain, and I know that getting a blowjob is not the answer. But fuck, I'm too hyped up to just sit here.

I get out of my dinner duds and change into sweats. I then hop on the treadmill and start running, faster and faster, willing my mind to go blank. I've just stepped down and grabbed my bottle of water, when Justin walks through the door.

"Hey, sorry I'm late, we were really busy tonight and I had to work past my shift. I didn't even have enough time for a phone call," he rushes out. I didn't even stop to think that maybe he was still at work. I immediately thought the worst. Hell, he could have even been in an accident while I'm here thinking he's been unfaithful. He saunters up, wrapping his arms around me, giving me a kiss.

"I'm all sweaty," I say, pushing him away.

"I like you best that way," he smirks.

"I bet you do," I say, giving his ass a slight smack.

"Hurry and take a shower so we can go," he says, shoving me playfully away.

"Join me?" I ask, raising my eyebrow. He looks down at his clothes.

"I rushed over here straight out of work, so I guess I could use a shower," he smiles.

The shower is one of our favorite places to have sex. We start off there with a little foreplay and continue to the bedroom barely taking the time to breathe.

Justin

I was so sure that when I didn't come on time or even called to let him know where I was, that he would think the worst. Imagine my surprise when I open the door to find him there, exercising. Who knows, maybe he really is trying. I did notice a broken phone so maybe he was mad and then thought better of it.

Once Brian wakes up from our escapade, we hurry off to the diner to grab something to eat. The rest of the gang soon shows up.

"What's up with you two? You together, or not? I can't keep track anymore," Ted smirks.

"Maybe that's because it's none of your fucking business," Brian snaps.

"Oh touché. Somebody didn't get any last night," Emmett laughs.

"We're together," I say, thinking maybe they'll shut the fuck up about the whole thing, "plus, he got some this afternoon."

"I hope you know what you're doing," Mikey says, looking at Brian.

"I do," Brian says, before turning to me.

"Let's go."

Brian is spontaneous as hell, but he still manages to catch me off guard. "What?? Where?" I ask, jumping up and waiting for him to do the same.

"We're outta here," he says to the guys as we head out the diner door.

"Where are we going?" I ask once we get inside the jeep.

"Home," he says pulling into traffic.

I nod slightly, leaning back in the jeep and close my eyes until I feel it come to a stop. I sit up and see that we are in front of a video store.

"Umm...what are we doing here?" I ask, rubbing my eyes and sitting up.

"Look, do you want to rent a movie or not?" he asks me, getting out of the jeep.

"I get to pick?" I ask, getting out as well and going in the store with him.

"You pick one and I'll pick another," he tells me, stalking off to start his search. I turn and make my way toward the horror section. I go through a few tapes before I finally decide on From Hell. I walk over to Brian and see he's got The Sum Of All Fears. I show him my tape, which he snickers at, and we then pay for them and leave. I'm grinning from ear-to-ear as we make our way back to the loft. A Friday evening with my man, snuggling and watching movies.

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We get up the next morning and start off with a bowl of cereal. "I'm going to see Gus today," Brian announces between mouthfuls of cereal.

"I'll go too," I state.

"If you want to," he shrugs.

It's almost three in the afternoon before we finally get to the Munchers. Gus is on the living room floor surrounded by a bunch of toys. Before I can get to him, Mel yanks me off to the side.

"What's up?" I ask, wondering what in the hell she wants.

She does the universal *finger over the mouth, silent thingie* then whispers, "are you two back together for good, this time?"

"Yeah," I mock whisper back, even though it's none of her fucking business.

"Oh...Justin. When will you learn?" she sighs.

"What are you talking about, Mel?" My face is starting to flush with anger.

"He can't just stop cold turkey, Justin, you should know that better than anyone."

"Stop what cold turkey, Mel? What are you talking about?" I play dumb.

"Tricking. He can't stop tricking; I hate to see you get your hopes up only to be hurt again. Do you understand?" She looks at me, trying to see if I've got the gist of what she's saying. Of course she's not telling me something that I don't already know. Damn, why does everyone insist of trying to *tell me about Brian?* I fucking wrote the book on Brian. All I can ask of him, is that he try, and when that itch needs to be scratched, that he not do it in front of me, again.

"I can handle Brian," I inform her.

"Until he hurts you again," she says knowingly.

"It's between me and Brian," I say, walking into the living room letting her know that this conversation is over.

"Where ya been?" Brian asks, as I flop down next to him on the couch.

"Talking to Melanie," I answer, turning my attention to Gus, who is handing his daddy one of the little stuffed animals that he's playing with. Brian takes it, then turns back to look at me.

"About what?" he asks. I start to say nothing, but then I think better of it. Better if I tell him the truth.

"She just wanted to warn me that you might hurt me again," I say, watching him tense up.

"Fuck Melanie," he spits out as Gus makes his way to the kitchen.

"Don't speak that way in front of him," I tell Brian, pointing in the direction that Gus went.

"I didn't, he didn't hear me," he says, bringing me close for a quick kiss.

We linger for another hour then get ready to go. Before I can make it to the door, Mel pulls me back yet again. "I really want you to think about what I said, Justin. You know I'm right," she insists. Damn, I wish she would just drop it and let me live my own life. I've had enough of people and their so-called advice. I'm tired of people who think that they know what's best for me. I don't want to be treated like some child who can't even make an intelligent decision.

"Look, Mel, Brian hasn't hurt me anymore than I've hurt him. I'm the one who left, remember?"

"Yeah, with good reason!" she snorts.

"Mel!" I say in total exasperation.

"What, Justin? We both know that above anything else, the one thing Brian cares the most about is getting his dick sucked."

"You're wrong," I tell her, starting to get really pissed off with this whole attack on Brian.

"Since when?" she asks, giving off a little laugh of disbelief.

"You're on the outside looking in. You have no idea what goes on between us."

"Justin."

"No, Mel, stop talking and listen. I can't come in here and tell you how to handle your relationship with Lindsay. You'd never go for that shit. So please show me the same respect," I plead with her.

"Okay," she says, turning her back to me and walking away. Leaving me with her words ringing in my ear.

Chapter 9

Brian

It's been three months since that day at Mel and Lindsay's, and despite Mel's little warning, we're doing fine. We see each other most days, sometimes I go to his place, but usually he comes to mine. He still sees Clyde at work and around campus, but nothing has happened. I believe that because he's been honest with me, even when it hurt me, hell, even when it hurt him. So I'm learning to trust him again, believe in him again...

"Earth to Brian," Justin says, waving his hand in front of me. We're in the loft, watching some lame ass movie that Justin wanted to see. I remember him begging me to stay in like this when he lived here, but like hell, I would. I can't help wondering if I had, how different things could have turned out. Maybe he never would have left. Maybe he never would have started up with Clyde. Just, maybe.

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Justin

I'm in heaven! I love the way things are going between Brian and me, him starting to trust me again; believe in us. We've been spending a lot of quality time together; like now. We're sitting here on a Saturday night watching some crap ass movie I picked out. But Brian is here, right beside me, instead of out at Babylon or on the prowl God-no's-where. I reach over and ruffle his hair. He leans over and gives me a kiss.

"I love you Brian," I murmur.

"Me, too," he answers, and that's good enough for me. I snuggle closer to him and lay my head down on his shoulder, wishing for the millionth time, that I could freeze moments like these.

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Everyone has gathered at Deb's for one of her famous Italian suppers, and Mel decides this is the perfect place to give it one more shot.

"How's it going?" she casually asks.

"Fine," I answer, scanning the room for Brian.

"Is everything OK?" she digs further.

"Everything is fine, Mel. We're fine. I'm fine. So please stop worrying," I tell her, getting annoyed.

"Is he treating you right?"

"Mel!"

"I'm sorry, Justin, I just can't help worrying about you," she tries to explain.

"I can take care of myself," I tell her, and she nods her head, walking off as Brian glides up.

"She still on my case?" he asks.

"She's just looking out for me." I snort.

"Whatever," he says. Shit. I hate when he says that. 'Whatever.' Like nothing fucking matters?

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Brian asks, looking at my scrunched up face.

"I hate when you say that."

"Say what?"

"*Whatever*."

"I know, that's why I say it," he smirks.

"Asshole." Brian puts his arm around my waist and pulls me in for a kiss.

"Let's get out of here," he growls lowly in my ear. We're back at the loft in record time.

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Brian

We're supposed to hang out at Babylon tonight, and Justin is running late. I'm just stepping out of the shower when he rushes in.

"Where were you?" I ask, drying myself off.

"Had to go see my mom and Molly," he spills out. "Look, I don't want to stay too long at Babylon tonight."

"Don't want to stay too long? You got something else to do that I should know about?"

"Yeah, coming back here and fucking your brains out," he smirks. Shit, sounds like a plan to me. We go to Woody's first and shoot a few games of pool. We'd just finished up the last game, when Clyde and Jason walk over. Damn, I didn't even see them come in. I no longer see Clyde as a threat, but damn if I'll spend time being around him – I don't like him and that's not going to change. I let Justin do his little song and dance with Clyde for all of three minutes, before I tell him it's time to go to Babylon. As soon as we get there, we hit the floor, time flying as we shake to the techno beat. I finally take a break from flopping around to get us both a drink. While I'm at the bar, I see two guys sneaking peaks at me and pointing. Now, this annoys the hell out of me, so I walk over to them, holding out my hands.

"Something I can help you with?" I ask.

"Did we say anything to you?" one of them asks. Oh fuck this. Let them play their game; I don't have time. I turn to walk away when I hear one ask, "off to run back to your little boy?"

"Excuse me?" I say, walking back to them.

"It's good to see the guy who fucks everyone else over, get fucked over himself for a change." I look at the smug look on their faces and realize they aren't worth my time.

"Fuck you," I sneer, before going to get the drinks and returning to Justin's side.

"Everything all right?" Justin huffs out, winded from gyrating, taking notice of my changed demeanor.

"I'm going to the can." I cut through the crowd and see a couple of potential tricks trying to catch my eye. I'm exiting the bathroom when a hand snakes around, grabbing my dick. I turn and see a young brunette smiling lustfully at me. I recall the guys at the bar's dig on me and for some reason, I feel the need to prove myself. To let everyone know that, I've...Still... Got...It. I grab the trick's hand, practically pulling him to the back room, where he undoes my pants with an expert's finesse and starts going down on me. I lean my head back, reveling in the

sensation of a new mouth on my cock, when suddenly Justin's bright smile flashes in front of my face. Fuck me, not now. All I needed was 3-4 minutes, well, all my dick needed was 3-4 minutes, but my mind has other plans. I can't do this. For the first time in my life, I'm happy. So fuck trying to prove something; I'm not going to fuck this up, not this time. I push the brunette away, buttoning my fly.

"But I was just getting to the good part," he protests.

"You're finished," I tell him. He gets up, gives me a 'fuck you' look and stalks away. I lean my head back against the wall. I should feel disappointed, but I don't, in fact I feel pretty damn good. Maybe I'm finally able to give Justin the one thing I know he wants. I walk out of the back room with a satisfied grin on my face only to see Justin standing there, waiting for me.

"You seem pretty damn pleased with yourself," he says. He seems calm. Too fucking calm.

"This is not what you think, Justin." I instinctively reach for him, but he backs away from me.

"I know, Brian, it never is." He then turns and walks away, not even giving me a second glance.

## Chapter 10

Brian

I follow behind Justin, grabbing his arm.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going?" I demand. He sighs and turns around to look at me. I notice the roll of the eyes and the defeated look on his face. I can't believe how easy it is for him to just give up, just walk away. Not after all we've been through in the last couple of months.

"You will listen to me," I ground out.

"What??" he asks in total disbelief.

"Don't jump to conclusions, Sunshine. Shit. Let me explain." I tell him the whole story from the guys at the bar, to what went down in the backroom.

"You pushed him away? Really??" He looks so....well, so shocked. Which of course makes me feel like a complete shit. He expects me to fuck up, to be disappointed by me. Hell, I thought we'd worked past all of that.

"I thought we were past the point of you expecting me to just fuck up," he looks hurt, as I say that. Hmmmm, wonder what's going through that blond head of his.

"We are past that point Brian, but what else am I suppose to think when I see you in the backroom? The place isn't exactly 7-11 – guys are back there pimping their asses out!" I guess he's got a point. Anyway, after some posturing on both our parts, we decide to head back to the loft. On the way there, Deb hits my cell and asks us to come over. It's pretty late, so I figure it must be important. I switch lanes, hitting the exit ramp and turn around, headed towards Deb.

As I pull the jeep up, I recognize several other cars as those of the gang. She, apparently, has called everyone over and this makes me wonder what in the hell is going on. Deb waits until we are all seated in the living room and then stands before us, clearing her throat. She seems so damn happy; she's fucking practically bouncing.

"I have an announcement to make," she says. I see Lindsay and Melanie exchange knowing smiles. Ahhhh, the lezzies know what's up.

"Carl has asked me to marry him and I've accepted!" she shrieks out. There's a moment of stunned silence and then the whole damn room erupts with screams and suddenly Debbie is overtaken with hugs.

"Are you sure about this?" Mikey asks. I can't tell if he's happy or not. I think what I see most is concern for his mom.

"I'm sure baby," she says giving him a reassuring hug. He nods his head and hugs her back fiercely. Of course Emmett has all kinds of ideas for the ceremony. I listen to him go on and on about different flowers, color schemes and menus, until I can't take it anymore.

Justin

I can't fucking believe it! Debbie is getting married. To Horvath! Well, if anyone deserves to be happy, it's her. I watch from across the room as she excitedly tells my mom how he proposed. Apparently they were in a restaurant and after the appetizer; he actually got down on one knee and asked for her hand in marriage. I chuckle to myself, mentally picturing Horvath on one knee. Makes me wonder where he is tonight, why he's not here. I guess he's informing his family of the news.

Everyone's life seems to be coming together. There was a time when everything was so fucked up; I never thought we'd see good times again. Not like this anyway. Together as a family, like it should be.

When we leave Deb's, I'm in a very good mood. Hell, this even distracted Mel enough to leave me alone and not dispense her brand of advice.

"Where do you think they will live?" I ask Brian.

"Who knows," he shrugs his shoulders. He seems lost in thought. I guess he's trying to digest what happened tonight, so I leave him alone.

Later that night, I'm flipping TV stations, when he comes to sit beside me, taking the remote out of my hand.

"I think it's time we talked," he's acting funny. I can't quite put my finger on it, but he seems....different.

"What's going on?" I ask, massaging the nape of his neck.

"I know that I've hurt you more than once," he says.

"That's an understatement," I jokingly interrupt.

He's not laughing as he continues. "I know that I've pushed you away a lot of times."

"That's over now Brain," I gently remind him.

"Just because it's over doesn't make it ok. I put you through a lot of shit."

"We've put each other through a lot of shit," I correct. "I can't let you take all the blame. We should have talked more, communicated our needs to one another. We didn't and that's both of our fault, not just yours," I tell him. I don't want him feeling guilt over something that we both played a part in.

"I like the way things are going between us. Like where we are. I thought about asking you to move back in, but I don't think either of us are ready for that again," he says taking my hand in his.

"I agree, I don't think we're ready to live together again. We need our own space, time to decompress from each other and take time for ourselves. It will only make for a stronger relationship in the end," I say.

"Seems like we're on the same page," he smirks at me.

"Seems like we are." I lean over and give him a sweet kiss. He then picks me up, carries me into the bedroom and throws me onto the bed. My man! Then he straddles me and just....sits.

"What are you doing?" I whisper. He stares down at me and runs his fingers through my hair.

"I love you Justin," the words come out in a whisper, caressing me softly.

"I love you too," I sigh. He then leans down and places small kisses on my lips and jaw line, slowly undressing me, and then, himself.

We make love that night, with the same tenderness that we did when I first moved in with him.

Brian

Justin and I make love all night, falling asleep in each other's arms. I think of all the things that have brought us to this point, all the memories. I watch him sleep as I reminisce about our first night together. He was so scared and I was so damn cocky. Shit. That was such a long time ago; we've come so far since then. I used to think that it was only a matter of time before he left me. I used to believe that I was just a stepping-stone in his entrance to gay adulthood. Then I started to get comfortable and he started pulling away.

When he went to Vermont, without me, it was a wake-up call. I hated that I'd let myself start to settle; that I'd started to believe that we really did have a chance at making it work. When he left for Vermont, everything went downhill. It wasn't long after that the fiddler came on the scene, changing everything.

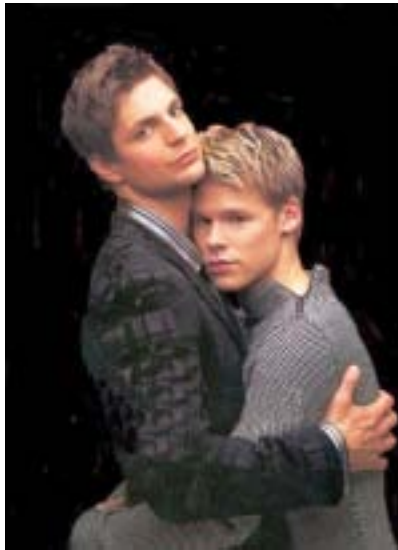
I guess everyone is tested, has problems, and it's how you handle those problems that make you who you are. From Justin I've learned, that it's okay to have failure; it's a part of life. What makes you the stronger person is not letting failure stop you. Justin has never let it stop him and that's one of the things I love most about him.

We stay in bed all day, lounging. We talk, make love, go to sleep, wake up, and do it all over again.

I'm content. Justin and I are finally happy and there's no way that I'll ever let anything ever come between us again. From this moment on it's he and I. Ready to take on any challenge that comes our way.

The End

# Backwards Glance Series



Set ten years in the future  
The old "pull" is still there; B/J just can't resist one another  
PAIRING: B/J, B/Other, J/Other  
Warning: Deathfic

## Chapter 1

It's been ten years, and the old gang has pretty much broken apart. Everyone has their own lives and responsibilities. Mikey and Ben are still together, but much removed from the nightlife. Brian and Mikey were still best friends, but other than that, the gang had all moved on.

Linds and Mel stayed together for about five more years, until Mel met and fell in love with someone else. Mel still stayed very much a part of Gus's life; she never abandoned him, never made him feel unloved. He stayed with her on weekends and split his holidays between his two mommies. The breakup was very hard for him. He was used to being shuffled between his moms' and his daddy, but not between all three.

Ted and Emmett stayed together for about 3 years before going their separate ways. Unfortunately, the breakup was bitter, and it ruined their friendship. They no longer felt comfortable around each other, so both just pulled back from the group.

Justin stayed with Ethan until he won the Heifetz competition and went on tour. Justin never really hung around the gang much after his and Brian's breakup. He still kept in touch sometimes, but it was just not like it used to be.

After graduating from PIFA, he traveled around the world to show his art, stopping in every now and then to see his mom, Molly, and Deb. He never stayed long, only a day or two. Sometimes he would go to see Gus, but those times had become few and far between.

He stayed home for a week when Vic died, trying to offer Deb all the support he could. He knew how hard it was for her and how much she loved Vic. He himself felt like he'd lost a father or at the very least, an uncle.

That was the last time the gang was all together, at Vic's funeral. That had been eight years ago, and a lot had changed in that time. Justin had met a man in New York named Kenny, with whom he'd spent the last five years and loved desperately. Now, after all their travels, they had decided to make a life together in the Pitts. Justin had

accepted a teaching position at PIFA and Kenny, who was also an artist, had secured a teaching position at Carnegie-Mellon.

Brian continued to enjoy the nightlife a while after Justin left, mostly just to save face, but slowly found himself pulling away more and more. It was two years after Justin's departure, that he had met and fallen in love with Scott, the head of a finance company he met while handling his advertising account. They took things slowly at first, and finally decided after six years to find a house and move in together. They'd been living together two years and things could not have been better between them.

Deb, upon hearing about Justin's plans to stay in the Pitts, decided to have a welcome home dinner for him and invite all the old gang. It could only go downhill after that.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justin

I feel a little funny, knowing that all the gang will be here at Deb's. It's been so long, and I feel a little apprehensive. I know that Kenny is looking forward to meeting all the guys; he's listened to me tell stories about them for years and kind of feels as if he knows them already.

We walk in and find that we are the last to arrive. I look around at them. Linds and Mel, both with different people — talk about strange! Then you have Ted and Em. I wonder if things are still tense between those two. It's been so long and things have changed so much; I think that the past should be just that, the past.

Brian is here with his boyfriend of eight years — who would have guessed that? I hear from Deb that they're really happy. I never would have figured on that happening.

"Hey, look!" Deb exclaims, "Sunshine is here!" pulling me into one of her monster hugs.

"You look good," Linds tells me, planting a kiss on my check.

I introduce them to Kenny, calling them all out by name until I get to Brian, whom Kenny, of course, knows all about.

"Ah, your first love," Kenny smiles, shaking Brian's hand. I look at Brian to get his reaction, which is just a nod and a smirk. Things have definitely changed around here.

We sit down to eat, everyone talking about what's been going on in their lives. Finally it gets to be too much, and I step outside for a smoke. I walk over to sit on the bench and find Brian is already there.

"Hey," he says, as I sit down.

"Hey," I answer.

"So, tell me, Sunshine, what's it like to travel the world?" Brian asks.

"It's cool, I guess, but the time had come for me to settle down. I'm tired of traveling; I'm ready to stay in one place now."

"So you choose gloomy, ass fucking Pittsburgh," he shakes his head and chuckles.

"It's my home," he looks at me, and offers me a small smile.

"Well, I'd better get back inside and make sure Kenny's not being smothered with questions in there."



"He looks like he can take care of himself," Brian tells me, looking me in the eye. The way he looks at me...shit, I almost melt. Suddenly the air between us changes; the mood is different, more intense.

"I've missed you, Justin, for what it's worth."

"I've missed you, too," I tell him, feeling my heartbeat speed up.

"Maybe the four of us can get together sometime," he offers.

"I'd like that. I'm sure Kenny would, too," I say.

"Well, let's go; we wouldn't want anyone getting the wrong idea now, would we?" We get up and our hands brush lightly and I feel that old familiar spark. I look at him, and he looks away, letting me know that he felt it, too.

"Guess some things will always stay the same," he smirks.

"I'm happy Brian," I tell him, not sure why I felt the need to say that, I just did.

"Relax, Sunshine, you'll be happy to know that I've turned into the boyfriend you always wanted me to be. I don't fuck around. Not for anyone. I know what I've got at home and I won't jeopardize it, not even for you." I know after all these years it shouldn't hurt to hear him say that, but damn, it does. I know that Scott is reaping the rewards from my hard work. I'm the one who opened him up, me. I'm the one who put up with all of his shit, the one who had to go through the painstaking process of breaking down all the walls, only to have someone else benefit. So yeah, it hurts just a little.

We walk inside and see that everyone has adjointed to the living room.

"Hey, I was wondering where you snuck off to," Scott says, coming up to Brian and putting his hands around his waist. "Thought you two had decided to leave me and Kenny behind and run off together or something," he jokes.

"Never," Brian says, placing a kiss on Scott's lips. I give a polite smile and walk over to find Kenny, who is wrapped up in a conversation with Linds.

We enjoy the rest of the night, and Brian and I exchange numbers and make plans to meet up again soon.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

Damn, it felt good to see Justin again. He seems...happy; I'm glad his life has come together.

Scott knows that I was Justin's first love. What he does not know is the depth of my feelings for Justin. He doesn't know what Justin meant to me and I guess that's my fault for refusing to talk about it. When I met Scott, I was still feeling a little bitterness toward Justin, so I referred to him as the kid who stalked me until he finally got a life. He has no idea what Justin and I shared. He likes to think that it was he who broke down my walls, that he was my first love, and fuck me, if I don't let him think that. It makes him happy and I want him happy. So I guess it's okay.

"He really looked good, didn't he?" Scott comments as we're lying in bed, after returning from Deb's.

"Yeah, he did," I say, not really wanting to discuss Justin while lying in bed with Scott.

"So, when do you want to get together with them?"

"We can do it tomorrow, if you don't mind," I tell him.

"Great, tomorrow it is. Do you think....."

I silence him with a kiss. I don't want to talk about Justin anymore; the last thing that I need is for him to start running around in my head again.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justin

Brian phones the next morning and we make plans to meet at his house later that night for dinner.

We walk in, seeing that the table and everything is already set.

"It looks good in here," Kenny says, taking my hand and squeezing it.

"What, you cook?" I ask, walking in and taking off my coat.

"Roast duck with orange sauce. It's Brian's favorite," Scott says.

"No, it's ...." I stop myself before I say anymore. Who I am to correct him? Who am I to say that's not Brian's favorite. Hell, I have no idea what he likes anymore.

We eat, and I have to admit the food is pretty damn good. After dinner we go to the living room to sit and talk.

"So, you guys only have two months before you start your big teaching careers; are you nervous?" Scott asks Kenny and I.

"Not really nervous, just a little anxiety, I guess," Kenny answers.

"What about you, Justin, you feeling any butterflies in your stomach?"

"Not really. I love a good challenge."

"You always did," Brian smiles at me.

"Some things don't change," I smile back. We lock eyes and share a look of affection until we are interrupted.

"I have ice cream for dessert, if anyone is interested," Scott says.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

"Ice cream," Kenny says, looking at Justin and smiling. "Mmm.....ice cream kisses," he says, leaning over, kissing Justin.

"Ice cream, what?" Scott laughs.

"It's an inside joke between us," Kenny says, blushing furiously. Fuck, if I don't know the reason for that blush. I remember Justin and I having our own ice cream kisses, especially when we got in a playful mood. I know It shouldn't hurt that he's shared this with someone else, it's silly really, yet I can't help the jealousy that's creeping up in my heart. I thought that was something special between us, not to be shared with anyone else.

We eat our ice cream and make small talk until it's finally time for them to go.

"We should get together again soon." Kenny says. So we make plans to do something in a couple of days.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I'm just getting out of my work clothes, the next day, when I hear a knock at the door.

I go answer it, and am surprised to see Justin standing there.

"What are you doing here?" I ask.

"I wanted to talk to you," he says, coming in.

"Where's Scott?" he asks, while trying to casually look around.

"At work; he won't be here until later. What's going on?"

"I just...you know.... Hell, what're the odds of meeting someone else who loves ice cream kisses just as much as you do?"

"Huh?"

"I saw your face last night when Kenny said something about ice cream kisses. Believe it or not it was he who started it up, not me. That was something special between us; I would never share it with anyone else."

"Justin it's okay. I mean, shit, it's not a big deal," I say, raking my hands through my hair and hoping that he believes my bullshit. He nods his head.

"Well, I'm going to go," he indicates while walking to the door. I follow behind to close and when, suddenly he turns around, and we are inches apart. The attraction is too strong — neither of us fight it, hell, we don't even try. Our lips meet and we both get lost in the kiss. We're on the floor, half-naked before we come to our senses. We pull away at the same time.

"I can't do this," Justin says, still breathing hard.

"I know, me either," I say, getting up and fixing my clothes.

"I guess I'll talk to you later," he says, getting up as well.

"Yeah."

He lays a hand on my face and looks into my eyes, and I lean down to place another kiss on his lips. I can't help it.

"Later," I tell him.

"Later," he smiles back.

## Chapter 2

Justin

Three days. Three.fucking.days, since Brian and I nearly lost control, and I'm trying hard to keep him out of my head. What we almost did, out of my head. I know it's a road I'm not prepared to go down. Again. I'm happy. Kenny makes me happy. I would never, ever want to hurt him.

Brian also seems to be pretty happy with Scott. That's something I never thought I'd see — Brian Kinney, happy and in love. I guess we all have to grow up sometimes.

I finally decide on cooking blackened fish with rice and shrimp; I know that used to be Brian's favorite. He and Scott are coming over here this time and I pray we are able to keep our emotions in check.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

Justin made one of my favorite dishes for dinner tonight. I wonder what that means? I question if he even remembers, or if it's some crazy-ass coincidence. I gave myself a strong talking to, before coming over here, listing all the reasons why it's not a good idea to let my feelings get out of control for him, again.

"So, Justin, how does it feel to be home after so much time away?"  
Scott asks.

"It feels a little different. Some things have changed, but overall it's okay," he shrugs nonchalantly.

"We've been on the road for so long, it feels good to finally settle down," Kenny counters, moving over to massage Justin's shoulders.

There it is again, the little green-eyed devil creeping up. I marvel, for the thousandth time, what made us think we could pull this shit off. Justin with his lover, and me with mine; what a fucking joke.

"You're tight, baby, you need to loosen up," Kenny purrs to Justin, seductively.

"I thought you liked me tight," Justin jokes, smiling up at Kenny.  
Yeah, that's right, Justin, play it up for all it's worth, forgetting that I'm even in the damn room.

"Should we leave you two alone?" Scott coughs out.

"No, we have all night for that — you two can stay a little while longer," Kenny winks at us.

"Where's your bathroom?" I demand, a little too harshly, standing up.

"This way. I'll show you," Justin says, standing up as well.

We walk down a long hallway and make a right turn. "Here," Justin points, turning the light on for me. He is so close that I can feel his breath on me.

"Thank you," I murmur to him, wanting nothing more than to take him in my arms, crushing him to me. I walk past him and our bodies brush against each other. I feel my cock immediately leap to attention from the contact. He reaches up and caresses my face as I lean down to place a tender kiss on his lips.

"Justin," I breathe out.

"I know, I know. We've got to stop," he moans. I pull him closer to me and stick my tongue down his throat. He welcomes me in and lets his tongue slip inside my mouth also. We share a deep kiss and then he pulls away.

"Bri, I don't think it's a good idea if we get together like this anymore," Justin says, still massaging my face, looking deeply in my eyes.

"I know," I sigh dramatically. "There's too much at risk," I say, my hand wrapped firmly around his waist. He throws his arms around me and lays his head in the crook of my neck. I hold him closer and we stay like that for a minute, until he finally pulls back and returns to the living room.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justin

I walk back into the living room, where Scott and Kenny are having their own conversation.

"From what Kenny tells me, you two have had some pretty wild times," Scott says to me, as I take my seat.

"Yeah, we've been through some things," I mutter.

"I know how it is — don't even get me started on the King and I!"

"You two look so happy together, I can't imagine what type of problems you could have had," Kenny replies. I sneak a glance toward the hall, wondering just what the hell is taking Brian so long in the bathroom.

"It was hard at first, but with a little persistence I was able to break down all those walls he hid himself behind," Scott gloats. I'm shocked at first, my mind trying to wrap itself around what he just said.

"Excuse me, you did what!?" I gasp.

"Broke down those barriers that Brian was hiding himself behind," he responds to my outburst. OK, that's what I thought he said. What the fuck makes him think he did anything?? Where does he get off taking credit for my hard work? I look toward that damn hallway again and finally Brian appears. I give him a look that says 'You fucked up big, this TIME!' and he looks at me, a confused image streaking across his features. Now, I'm just ready for them to go! I don't want them here...Brian here...anymore, and I don't want any more little fucking dinners with them, either! Fuck both their asses!

"I'm getting sleepy," I declare, pretending to stifle a fake yawn, hoping they catch the hint.

"Well, we should probably be getting on," Scott says, while standing to leave. I watch, as Kenny walks them to the door, not moving from my seat. Brian gives me a questioning look before they head out the door.

Kenny turns around leering at me, asking, "Why do I get the feeling that you are not the least bit tired?"

"I thought that they would never leave," I purr, taking my shirt off, giving him my most seductive look, letting him know he'd better follow me into the bedroom.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

All the way home I have to listen to how much fun Scott had. How we should try to get together with them every week, and on and on. And on.

"I was bored," I finally say, pulling into our driveway.

"What? You didn't have a good time?" Scott is totally put off by my revelation.

"No. I don't think that we should do this again," I say, opening the door to the house and walking in.

He nods sagely. "He's not the same annoying little kid you told me about."

"I just didn't fucking have fun and would rather not be bothered with it again!"

"Okay! Okay. It's your call, geez, let's drop it. I don't want to spend the rest of the night fighting with you over your ex-stalker." I look at Scott. I don't want him calling Justin that, but it is what I let him think, so who am I to get mad now?

"What is it that's really bothering you?" Scott asks, sidling up to me.

"Nothing," I answer, shrugging him off and hoping he will just drop it. I should have known better, as he continues to speak.

"Do you feel that uncomfortable around him? Is it because of the little crush that he had on you before?"

Fuck, I thought. The truth probably would 'set me free.' "It was more than just a crush," I hesitantly admit.

"I know he thought he was in love with you, but he has someone else now.

I don't think you need to worry that he will start that mess up again."

'MESS???' I sigh deeply inwardly and tell Scott, "I don't want to think or talk about Justin anymore; so let's.fucking.drop.it!"

"But, it's bothering you. Come on, Brian, I know you have a huge ego, but it's been ten years, for Chrissakes! You were his first; he thought he was in love! He was a kid, he didn't even know what love was. He realizes you never loved him; he knows that you never returned his feelings. Let it go, already."

I walk into the bedroom and plop down on the bed. I feel a little guilty, needing to set Scott straight on a few things. The more I think about it, the more I have to wonder what good would it do? Let him think what he wants; why should I bring any tension into my relationship, for Justin's sake? However, I can't help but wonder, though, if what Scott says is true. Did Justin think I never loved him? Was it really just a crush? I know Scott doesn't have all the facts, but I can't help thinking that he may be onto something. But, if that's true, then why can't we keep our hands off each other?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justin

I'm nursing a drink, leaning against the bar in Woody's, when I see Brian stroll in. He gazes in my direction, noticing me, then saunters over.

"Hey. Where's the hubby?" he asks, looking around.

"At home. Where's yours?"

"Same place."

"Oh. Listen, I don't know what to say about the other night. Don't know where these feelings are coming from. Seems like every time we come into contact, we lose control."

"It's just been a long time, that's all. It's no big deal." Yeah, right. Same old Kinney bullshit. I glance over at him, standing so close to me, and I want to reach out to him. I can't count the number of times that we've been here as a couple, enjoying the scene, together. It just seems funny to be standing here with him and not be a part of each other's lives anymore.

"I told Scott that I don't think we should hang out with you guys anymore," Brian announces, waiting for my reaction.

"That's probably a good idea."  
What did he say?" I ask.

"It doesn't matter. Look, Justin, I've changed. I'm not the same guy I used to be. I value what I have with Scott, but I...."

"I know," I interrupt; "You don't have to say it. I feel the same way."

"Have you spent much time with Gus since your return?" Good way to change the subject, Kinney.

"A little. You know when I passed through on my travels I always stopped in to see him. We talked on the phone and he even came to see me a few times when I was close enough to visit."

"He's a handful. I don't know how he got so out of control," Brian states.

"I know. He seems to have a chip on his shoulder." Hmm, like father, like son. "How much time do you spend with him?"

"It's not like he wants to spend time with me," Brian answers, defenseless. "He'd rather be off with his friends. He doesn't have time for his old man." I figure there's a little bit more to it than that, but I just let it drop.

"How are Mikey and Ben doing?" I haven't spent much time with the old Gang since I came home and am kinda curious to what's up.

"Their fine, Justin. Look was it... Was I...?"

"What, Brian?"

"Was it just a crush?" he rushed out.

"Was what just a crush?"

"You.... and me....?"

"Does it matter?" I ask, and instantly I see the change come across his face.

"Nope," he says, "doesn't matter at all". Then he's gone.

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Scott

Brian comes home and I can instantly tell he's in a bad mood.

"What's going on?" I ask, following him as he walks into the bedroom and starts undressing.

"I'm tired," he responds. I back off, knowing he'll talk to me when he gets ready.

I admit to myself that things didn't get tense until Justin came home. I know that Brian had a hard time with him before. The teen followed him around everywhere, insinuated himself in his life, even moved into his best friend's mother's house! I can only imagine the hell Brian had to go through because of him. He must be stressed now thinking about those old times.

I watch Brian collapse onto the bed and immediately pass out, completely naked. I shed my clothes as well, get in the bed, and pull him close to me.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I stop by the Big Q on my way home from work. I see Justin standing in one of the aisles.

"How's it going?" I ask, walking up to him.

"Oh. Hi Scott. I'm fine. Just picking up a couple of things."

"Me too, we'll shop together," I announce, like we do this kinda shit all the time.

We walk along the aisles, laughing and joking as we go. I'm finding that I really enjoy his company. We continue our conversation as we both step outside, where we talk for a few minutes more before going our separate ways.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justin

Michael and Ben have invited Kenny and I over to their house. We're running 15 minutes late, due to some last minute interruptions.

When we arrive, we see that Brian and Scott are there as well.

We actually end up having a great time together, all six of us. I reflect back to Scott and I shopping together at the Big Q and realize I actually like the guy. We get along pretty good. Who'd guessed it? Me and the first love of my life's boyfriend would be friends? I guess stranger things have happened.

I return to the present, noticing Brian move to the kitchen. "Maybe we were a little hasty," I utter, walking up to Brian, as he retrieves a beer out the 'frig.

"Hasty about what?" he smirks.

"Well, we've been here all here tonight, and, thus far, everything is fine. Maybe we can be around each other without...you know..."

He nods his head and then crooks it towards the living room where Scott is, "he told me that he ran into you the other night."

"Yeah, at the big Q. He's an alright guy. But I guess you already knew that?" He arches an eyebrow at me, LaKinney style.

"Oh, so you approve?" he smirks.

"Well, you do have good taste," I smile back.

"Are we talking about you or Scott, now?" he retorts.

"What do you think?" I chuckle.

"What I think, is that you still like to be a smart ass," he says, pinching my cheek with one hand.

"It's what I do best," I say, removing his hand from my face, but still holding on to it.

"When can we get together, just the two of us, to really catch up?" I ask, trying not to sound desperate. He looks at me for a moment, like he's trying to decide if I'm being serious or have some ulterior motive.

"I just want to talk," I rush out.

"Let's get together, tomorrow," he finally pronounces.

"To...mor...row???" I stammer out.

"Why, can't wait?" he scoffs.

"Fuck you, Brian," I tease. "Tomorrow it is then, just call me," I say, before turning and walking back to join the others.

Well, tomorrow comes and Brian calls, but only to cancel. He says he got caught up at work or something. I'm really disappointed about him canceling, but am more concerned that it bothers me. God, I don't like feeling that way.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

Fuck! I hated canceling my plans with Justin, but shit got so fucked up and it couldn't be avoided.

When I get home, I find that Scott is already in the bed, asleep. I undress and start to climb in bed, to join him, but I'm restless. I can't stop thinking about Justin. I peek a glance over at Scott, sleeping soundly, and make a beeline to the living room, phone in hand.

I'm about to hang up, when he answers on the fourth ring, "Hello."

"Justin, hey what are you doing?" I breathe out, fixating at a spot on the wall.

"Nothing, what about you? Just getting home?"

"Yeah."

"Where's, Scott?"

"Asleep," I snort in response.

"Well, Kenny's not here."

"That's okay, I didn't want to talk to him anyway," I say, and Justin giggles at that.

"About tonight, Justin..." I start to apologize.

"It's okay, Brian," he soothes, "I know how important your work is."

"Yeah, well, I'd better go," I say reluctantly.

"Brian?"

"Yeah?"

"Any other reason you called?"

"To hear your voice, Sunshine." Little shit, thinks he knows me. "No other reason. Look I've gotta go."

"Well, later then," Justin whispers.

"Yeah, later."

I return to the bedroom, climb into bed and wrap my arms tightly around Scott, willing myself not to think about a certain blonde across town.

Chapter 3

Justin

"Hello?"

"Justin?"

"Yes, Brian, it's me," I answer.

"Did you call me earlier?" he asks.

"Yeah, but I didn't really want anything."

"So, it's getting closer and closer to your little teaching gig," he pronounces.

I sigh deeply. "It's more than a gig, Brian, it's my job, my career," I say, more than a little annoyed.

"Calm down, Sunshine, I'm just joking," he laughs.

"It's not funny," I pout, still wanting to feel a little pissed.

"God. Stop being a fucking drama princess!"

"Whatever. Where's Scott?"

"Would you rather talk to him?" Brian teases.

"Look who's a smart ass now!"

"It's just a question."

"Yeah, right, like anything with you is just a question," I snort.

"What the hell does that mean?" he grounds out, sounding a little agitated.

"You are the most calculating person that I know. You plan ahead for everything; always have everything figured out way ahead of time. It's your MO!"

"Not everything," he says, a touch of regret in his voice, and I realize he's talking about us.

"Let's leave the past in the past," I say, hoping he will just drop it.

"You know that the past is in the past," he philosophizes. "Where else would it be?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" I bite my tongue to stop from screaming at him.

"Nothing. What are you doing later?" he quickly changes tactics.

"Why, what's up?" I ask suspiciously.

"I'm going to see Gus and wonder if you would like to come with me, that's all."

"Yeah, I'd love to see Gus. Stop by and pick me up when you get ready to go."

"All right, later."

"Later."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian swings by to pick me up and we make our way over to see Gus. He's in the living room with some of his friends when we get there.

"Hey, Justin!" he says, giving me a hug. Then he turns his attention to Brian.

"What the hell do you want?" he asks him.

"What I want, is for my 12 year old son to speak to me with respect!" he roars.

"Whatever, like you really deserve any," Gus snorts. I look at Brian with an open mouth and see that he's ready to blow a fucking gasket! I have no idea what's wrong with Gus; he's never acted this way before; at least I don't think he has. I don't know what's happened between he and Brian to cause so much animosity, but I intend to find out.

"Go home," Brian orders Gus's friends.

Gus immediately goes into action. "This isn't your house! Whodoya think you are? You can't come in here and put my friends out. You get out," Gus screams at the top of his lungs, causing Lindsay and her new love, Karen, to come running down the stairs.

"What on earth is happening?" Linds shrieks, looking from me to Brian, then letting her tense gaze settle on Gus.

"He's trying to put my friends out," Gus cries, pointing a shaky finger at his father.

"You can't waltz in here and dictate," Karen crows, staring evil eyes at Brian.

"You can't tell me what to do with my son," Brian snaps.

"Brian, I think you and Justin should leave. We don't need or want you here causing us anymore problems." Lindsay's words nearly make me fall on my ass. Lindsay. Not on Brian's side?? Now, this is a first!

"Why is it that, whatever she says," Brian gives the evil eyes back to Karen, "you listen to? Lindsay, fuck this shit!" Brian exclaims, not caring that Gus's friends are slackjawed in awe at his ranting. I can almost see a vein pop out his neck, he's so furious.

"Oh, right. What do you want? Want me to drive her away, too? Put you first and say to hell with everyone else?" Lindsay screams right back at him.

"It's not MY fault that Mel left; she fell in love with someone else. How long are you going to blame me for your failed marriage? How long before you acknowledge and accept your own culpability and move on!?"

"Gus, go to your room. Boys, please go home," Karen speaks, hastily moving into action.

"You're not my Mom! You can't tell me what to do," Gus says petulantly. I don't want to be here anymore, around any of you! I'm going to live with mamma. She said I could come anytime I wanted to, you know," Gus lashes out.

"Don't start this again, Gus. You are not going anywhere!" Lindsay bellows, finally losing all semblance of control.

"You'd rather I stay here with you two cold bitches!!? I don't think so," Gus retorts, running out the door with his friends hot on his trail. I move to follow, but Lindsay, placing a cold hand on my shoulder, stops me.

"Leave him alone, Justin. He's just going to run to Mel. Like he always does," weariness evident in her voice.

"This is total, fucking, BULLSHIT!" Brian says through gritted teeth, looking Lindsay straight in the eye.

"You just had to come over, didn't you? Well, it's time to go. Get out," Lindsay says quietly, standing her ground. I watch Brian turn and walk slowly to the door.

"This is far from over," he snidely informs Lindsay, before walking completely out the house.

I'm utterly speechless, but manage a weak "Bye" to Lindsay and Karen, before running to catch up with him.

"What the hell is going on?" I gasp, getting into his car.

"Lindsay blames me for Mel leaving," he says calmly, all the while gripping the steering wheel so hard, I can see his hands start to shake. I know how much all of this has to be hurting him.

"Because she put you before Mel all the time?" I ask in disbelief.

"Yeah, and Gus blames me and Lindsay. He hates us both."

"I'm sure he doesn't hate you; it's just a hard thing for a child to deal with. Trust me, I know," I say, thinking back to when my own parents got divorced. I knew, firsthand, how hard it is to deal with. It's almost unbearable. I know how lost Gus must have felt when it happened, and I guess that's how he's still feeling.

"I'm sure he just feels the need to blame someone, that's all," I say, hoping it offers him some comfort, any comfort.

He contemplates my words, then guns the engine. "Let's take a little ride, what do you say?" he asks me.

"Let's go," I grin, and we take an on-ramp to the highway. We drive for the better part of an hour before we pull up to a little brick house.

"Whose house is this?" I ask, getting out and looking around.

"It's mine," he says, pushing me to the door. "Now let me give you the grand tour." I follow him inside, where we proceed to stand in the kitchen. Then we enter a hallway. As we walk I notice there are three bedrooms. Off to the right is the living room and then there's a door leading downstairs to a basement. I walk into one of the rooms and stop short, breathing heavy. It's filled with art. Specifically, my art. I can't begin to explain the warm feeling that comes over my heart at seeing this.

"Brian," I whisper in awe, looking at him, and he just rolls his shoulders into a shrug.

"How often do you and Scott come here?" I ask, though I really don't want to know the answer.

He stares at me blankly, before responding. "Scott doesn't come here. This is my house and he knows nothing about it, and I would like it to stay that way, you understand?"

"Yeah, I understand" I say. I understand fully that he can share it with me and not Scott. I can't help letting a little smile escape my lips.

I inch closer to him. "You come here to forget?"

He has an intense look on his face and finally breathes out deeply. "I come here to remember," he says softly, looking around at my work. Now I get it. Now I know why Scott has never been here and why I am here. It's for us. This house, it's about us. It's where he comes to think about us. I would have never, ever thought this in a million years. I'm so touched that I feel heat start to rise in me, taking me over and all I want is to be in his arms. His strong arms, holding me, caressing me. But I also know that he's vulnerable now. I know that this time, the trip here is not about me, but about Gus and Lindsay, and how things used to be back then. I feel good that he wants to share this moment with me, though.

We walk back to the living room and Brian flips his cell open, powering down. So I take mine out and do the same. Then he moves to the Bose stereo system, turning to a soft ballad station, and comes over to where I'm now sitting on the couch. He lays down lengthwise, glancing at me for consent to place his head in my lap. I silently nod my approval, stroking his hair, letting him know that I'm there for him. Fading into the moment, I almost miss that he starts blinking his eyes rapidly, then begins emptying them of tears. I say nothing, just continue running my fingers through his hair, along his scalp, trying to sooth him.

Soon, the familiar touch, light background music and shared memories lull us both into a deep sleep and we don't awaken until around ten that night.

"Shit! I think we're gonna have some explaining to do," I say groggily to Brian, rubbing my eyes.

He's already rising from the couch, making his way to the kitchen. "I'm not ready to go back yet."

"Uh, what are you saying?" I ask cautiously.

"I'm saying that we are staying the night. Got a problem with that?" He looks at me like he has no idea why I want to leave him and go home. How I can be this close to him and not be tempted to touch him. Alright, more than touch him, devour him.

"Look, I'm going to have to explain enough as it is, so please just take me home." He stares at me for a moment and I can see the hurt in his eyes; he wants to stay here, in his own little world, with me. What happened with Lindsay and Gus really affected him and he's just not ready to deal. Not yet ready to leave this cocoon.

"We can stay," I find myself saying in amazement. As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I see relief flood his features.

"We can stay," I reiterate, "but I do need food," I continue on, laughing. Brian laughs along with me, peering into the 'frig. He gathers the goods and begins making us sandwiches. We eat them in relative silence, the only sound being our respective smacking noises. We finish up and Brian moves to leave the kitchen, taking my hand. We walk down the hallway and into one of the bedrooms.

"You can bunk in here," he indicates with a flourish of his arm.

I nod my okay, after a quick glance around. "Where are you sleeping?" I ask, the words escaping my lips, before I have a chance to stop them.

"In the room beside it," he smirks. I begin taking off my clothes, totally oblivious to Brian standing there, watching my every move.

"I'm trying to do the right thing here, Justin," he sighs, looking like he's ready to pounce on and eat me up at any moment.

"Good night then," I yawn, getting in bed, slipping under the covers.

"Good night," he answers, and turns to walk away. I know I should call Kenny and tell him where I am, but I'm not ready to deal with him yet. So I just lay there thinking about Brian, until I can't take it anymore. I get up, putting on

a robe that's been conveniently laid on the chair and leave my 'room'. I then tiptoe into Brian's room, noting he's not asleep either, just sitting on the bed, pretending to watch television.

"I'm not really sleepy," I announce unnecessarily, "being that we just woke up, you know?" I then creep over to the bed and recline next to him.

"When did shit get so fucked up?" he asks me, keeping his eyes trained to the tube.

"I don't know," I answer in a low tone. "I had no idea of the things going on between you and Gus. I'm sorry, Brian."

"It's my shit, Justin, you have nothing to be sorry for."

We talk like that, for the rest of the night. It's 4:00 a.m. when we finally fall asleep, wrapped in each others arms, lying on Brian's bed.

It's 12 noon when I finally get home. I enter the house and am greeted with the sight of Kenny, pacing the floor, eyes blood-shot red.

"Justin!" he shrieks. Are you all right?" he says, running to me, gathering me up in a tremendous bear hug and placing kisses all over my face. Then, just as quickly, he releases me, swiftly picking up the phone, punching in numbers and informing someone that I just came home. He talks for a minute more, ends the call and then faces me.

"Now that I see you are all right, do you mind telling me where the FUCK YOU'VE BEEN and WHY THE FUCK I didn't receive so much as a fuckin' phone call!?" he screeches.

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Brian

I walk in the house to see Scott watching TV.

"Hey baby, you OK?" he asks me as I take a seat beside him.

"Yeah," I answer.

'You went to see Gus, didn't you?' He's familiar with this scene, we've played it before.

"Yep," I answer, getting up and making my way to the bedroom. Scott knows all about what's going on with Gus and Lindsay and he knows that sometimes after going one or two rounds with them, I need some time alone. It's not often that I stay out all night like that, but he trusts me and doesn't give me shit about it.

"Hey, Brian, come here," Scott says softly. I walk back to the living room and he turns to face me, his hard image belying his previously soft tone. "So, Kenny says that Justin was missing all night, as well. He called, right before you got home, to let me know that Justin had finally made it in. Mind telling me, just what in the hell is going ON!?"

Oh, shit!

Chapter 4

Justin

"I'm sorry, I should have called. I didn't mean to worry you," I say, hoping that Kenny's going to try to be reasonable, when I tell him where I was.

"I'm waiting, Justin, where were you?"

"I uh... I was with Brian. He needed me. I'm sorry," I rush out, again apologizing. I watch him digest what I just said, all the emotions that cross his face, then I observe as he tries to keep his temper in check.

"What, exactly did he need you for, Justin?"

"He's having some problems right now and just needed a friend." I walk into the bedroom, flopping down on the bed, Kenny hot on my trail.

"He needed a friend? All night? Justin, come on, what kind of fucking fool do you take me for?"

"I don't take you for any kind of fool" I say, totally exasperated. "Nothing happened. Nada. We're both in committed relationships. You should know that better than anyone!"

Now it's Kenny's turn to be totally exasperated. "I don't like this, Justin, I don't like this ONE.FUCKING.BIT! I know how deep your feelings ran for him, how much you loved him."

"Look, Kenny. I don't need this shit, OK? I did nothing wrong."

"All night, and nothing happened? he barks out. Kenny looks me straight in my eye and says in a slow, deadly tone of voice, "I ask you again; what kind of fool do you take me for?" Listen up folks, I know I was wrong, and I know that I should have called, but I'll be damned if I'm ready to take shit for something that I didn't do.

"For the last friggin' time, nothing happened! Brian has a lot of shit going on right now; he needed me, he needed a friend. That's all it was. I didn't fuck him, but now I wish I had. If I'm going to be accused of \*nothing happened,\* then I might as well have done it." I look at him pointedly and see a defeated look enter his eyes, effectively ending this particular conversation.

"Just don't let it happen again, OK?" he warns me, before walking out of the bedroom and the house in a huff.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

"Justin went with me to see Gus," I recover enough to state.

"OK. That doesn't, however, explain why he was with you all night," Scott replies, looking at me for an explanation.

I sigh deeply, trying not to lose control. "We talked. I needed to talk to someone, and, he was there."

"Brian, shit! I'm trying to be understanding here, but I don't get it. Why the hell would you want to talk about your problems with him? You can share with him and not me, is that it?"

"Like I said, he was there. He was convenient. Now stop fucking making a big deal out of something that doesn't mean shit!" I can't reveal the real truth to him, I muse...that there are some things I only want to tell to Justin. Some things I can only share with Justin. He understands me totally, without me having to make unnecessary announcements and proclamations. That's just, how it is.

Scott interrupts my thoughts, continuing his rant. "You do recall what happened between you two before?" he snidely reminds me. "Do you think it's a good idea to lead him on? Get his hopes up? Maybe he'll start stalking you again, would you like that? Maybe he can start stalking both of us," Scott yells. And I've had fucking enough!

"Stop calling him a stalker! You don't know shit. About ANYTHING!" I rail at him.

"JESUS, Brian, what the hell is he doing to you?" he asks in an uncertain voice. Damn, I'm to blame for this shit. I've led Scott on. He believes things that aren't true, and for that I'm wrong. If the situation were reversed, I can't say I'd be that understanding, either.

"I'm sorry, that's it. This subject is now officially closed. I'm not saying another word!" I stalk into the bedroom, throwing off my clothes and climbing gratefully between the sheets. He stands over the bed, peering at me with a sour look on his face. I quickly reach up and grab him, pulling him down onto the bed with me.

"Take off your clothes, baby," I whisper huskily in his ear, while at the same time, nibbling on it.

"Didn't you get enough of that last night?" he snaps, but I can see his resolve weakening. I press him to me fully, starting to undress him, and finally he gets caught up in the moment. I entwine my legs with his, caressing his back, hoping that thoughts of Justin will fly out the damn window. Well, for him anyway. I'm not crazy enough to think I'd be so lucky.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justin

I wait a little while after Kenny leaves, thinking he might come back. When he doesn't, I pick up the phone, dialing Brian. It rings for an eternity and I'm just about to hang up when..... "What???" Brian finally answers, panting, obviously out of breath.

"What, to you too. What in the hell were you doing?" I chuckle to myself, I already have a good idea what it was.

"Is everything all right?" he huffs me.

"Yeah. Kenny was really pissed at first, but he's alright, now."

"Justin," he sighs. "I don't want to cause you any problems."

"You're not," I smile.

"Brian, who's that? Hang up and come back to bed," I hear Scott practically purring in the background.

"It's Justin," Brian informs him.

"For Christ's sake, Brian, didn't you just leave him? What in the hell does he want now?" Scott yells, all previous seductive purring, gone.

"I'll talk to you later," I utter and put the phone down to see Kenny standing in the doorway.

"Was that Brian?" he asks me.

"So what if it was?" I answer, defensively.

"I just asked Justin. Babe, I don't want to fight with you anymore," he adds, walking over to me and pulling me into his arms for a deep kiss. I immediately feel my cock rising as we make our way to the bedroom.

"Can Brian make you feel like this, baby?" Kenny whispers in my ear. We move into the bedroom and he throws me down, unceremoniously, onto the bed. We're both naked by now, as he eases atop of me, starting to kiss my neck and down my body.



"Can Brian make you feel like this?" he moans out, retrieving a condom from the nearby nightstand and handing it to me to put on.

"I love you, Justin. Brian could never love you the way I do. Remember that." Talking about Brian is making me hornier than hell. I ease the condom onto my hardness, quickly prepare Kenny and then slide into him completely, with thoughts of Brian running all through my head.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

I call Justin the next day and we agree to meet at the diner.

"So your husband let you get away for a little while? I thought he'd have you on lock down," I tease Justin as he slithers into the booth.

"Very funny, asshole," Justin smirks at me.

"Look, I thought we could go..."

"...see Gus?" "Don't", Justin warns me.

"No. Shit, not two days in a row. Plus, I talked to Lindsay and he's still decompressing from yesterday. I want to go down to the house again; maybe this time you can bring some of your more recent art to add to your room there." Justin eyes twinkle and he smiles at me.

"My room?"

Why do small things always make him so happy? "It's got your art in it, so it's your room."

"When do you want to go?" he squirms in his seat, getting excited.

"What's wrong with right now?"

"I've got to get the pieces together, Brian. Decide what I want to take. It's not a simple process."

"Well, let me know when you're ready," I tell him, masking my disappointment. I really wanted to go there with him today. Can't figure out why I want us to go there so bad, but I do.

"Let's go check out the art at the GLC," Justin says, standing up.

"Are you crazy? That's the last fucking place I want to be."

"I went with you," he reminds me.

"You wanted to see Gus," I tell him. Then he looks at me, his eyes softening and he cocks his head to one side, letting out a very pitiful, "Please."

I'm hooked. I can't say no to him and he knows it, because he turns and walks to the door, not even bothering to see if I am following behind him.

We get to the GLC, and Justin tries to explain the different types of pictures to me. We linger for about an hour, then leave in search of food, as we ordered nothing from the diner in our haste to scoot over to the GLC.

We get take-out Chinese and go back to my house to eat it.

"Scott's not here, is he?" Justin asks, practically tiptoeing and peering around, like the Bogeyman is going to jump his bones at any moment.

"Are you scared of him or something?" I ask, getting a little frustrated.

"I heard him on the phone yesterday," he lets me know. Okay, fair enough, I think.

"He was just pissed because I was with you all night. He's alright," I counter.

I toss some pillows from the sofa onto the floor and we sit down, getting busy with our food. We laugh and joke the entire time we are eating.

"Hey, open your fortune cookie," Justin says, tossing the thing at me. I crack it open and pull the little paper out.

"What does it say?" he demands, trying to take it out of my hand. I fight him off long enough to read it, before he snatches it out of my hand.

"Your destiny is right in front of you," he reads out. He lowers the paper then looks at me.

"Why don't you open yours up?" I suggest, hoping he'll stop looking at me like he's ready to jump in my lap. He cracks it open and I see a small smile escape his lips.

"What's it say?" I ask, making a grab for his paper, same way he did mine. He leans back and I launch myself, landing on top of him, trying to get the paper out of his hand. There's a pause in our moment of time, then he looks up at me and our lips meet in a soft kiss. It starts off as a short kiss, but gradually turns into something longer. We are almost past the point of no return, when the damn phone rings. I decide to let the machine pick up, but stop short when I hear Scott's voice.

"Hey babe, just calling to say I'm running a little late, and I'll be home as soon as I can get away."

I eat myself off of Justin and we both sit up. I feel the mood tense and try to lighten it.

"Can I please, see the damn paper now?" I ask.

He hands me the little piece of paper, his eyes rolling upward. "You can see it, but what it says has already come true, just that fast."

"Beware, danger is just ahead," I read, then look to Justin, who has a big ass smirk on his face.

"Smartass," I say, leaning over to give him a kiss. He grabs the back of my head, urging me closer, while running his fingers through my hair. Finally we pull back and I grab his hand and hold on to it.

"We can't keep doing this," I sigh. He scoots over, climbing into my lap, then clasps both of his hands with mine.

"You are a bad influence on me Mr. Kinney," he teases, leaning his forehead against mine.

"Don't call me that," I groan out.

He leans back, grounding his ass into my groin. "Why not? You are a lot older than me, and you should be setting some kind of example, you know," he smirks.

"OK." I tell him, tickling his sides, causing him to fall over with laughter.

"Stop, Brian! Please! I'm sorry," he barks out.

"No more old-age jokes," I command.

"No more. I promise, I promise," he says, and I let him up only to be pounced on again.

We stay like that, roughhousing on the floor until the door opens up and to my utter amazement, both Scott and Kenny walk in.

"What the fuck is going on? Why are the two of you here, together?" I demand, jumping up and straightening out my clothes, while Justin does likewise.

Scott answers dryly, "I ran into Kenny outside the door; he's looking..."

Kenny quickly interrupts, screaming, "What are we doing here together!? What in the hell are you two doing!?" looking wild-eyed at Justin.

"We were eating," I simply state.

"On the floor, on top of each other like that?" Scott shakes his head, utterly dumbfounded.

"We were...er...we were tickling each other," Justin stammers.

"Is there something that you want to tell me? Justin? Brian?" Kenny spits out, looking questioningly from me to Justin.

"I think you two should go, NOW!" Scott roars to Justin and Kenny.

Justin turns to look at me one last time, before fleeing out the door behind Kenny.

I look menacingly at Scott, prepared to do battle. "Don't start. You don't have a problem with Mikey and you are not going to have one with Justin!"

"Whatever you say goes, is that it? You call all the motherfucking shots in this relationship!"

"No, but I will not be made to feel like I did something wrong for hanging out with a friend."

"As long as he recognizes his place. Brian, I'm warning you – keep that boy in his place!" He then stomps into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him.

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Justin

The ride home is awkward, to say the least. We let ourselves in, get ready for bed, and still I can't get two words out of Kenny. I know he's furious, but dammit, I'm not going to apologize for being friends with or hanging out with Brian. So, I decide to silently fume and I am half asleep when he decides to talk.

"You know that Brian loves Scott, right?"

"I know that," I yawn out.

"And you know that I love you, right?"

"Yes," I say, not liking where this is going.

"Justin, I don't want you seeing him again. You understand me? It's either me or him!"

Chapter 5

Justin

"I don't want you seeing him again. You understand me? It's either me or him!" My jaw drops to the floor at Kenny's command.

"Don't do this, Kenny," I say in a deadly, low voice.

"Don't do what??? Fight for you? Fight for what we have together?"

"This!!" I won't be controlled like some child! I won't be told whom I can and can't see."

Oh...Ok, that's fine, whatever," he says, slumping in defeat. "Do whatever the fuck you want to do. Do whomever the fuck you want to do, and so will I!" I look at him standing there, begging and pleading with me, and my heart, breaks. I don't know what to do. God, I love Kenny so much and I don't want there to be problems between us, but....

"Kenny, Brian is going through some rough shit right now. What kind of friend would I be if I turned my back on him? You know what he's meant to me, how much he helped when I needed it." We look at each other and I continue. "You can't really expect me to turn away from him now that the situation is reversed."

"Damn, Justin. I...I...I give up, you win," Kenny sighs. "But I want you to consider this...every time that you are with Brian, think about us, think about what we have here, together. Think about everything that we've been through and, then, think about whether it's worth it to throw it away on someone who's in love with another person. That same someone who has committed himself to somebody else, in a way that he never could to you! You just think about that the next time you get the urge to roll around on the floor with Brian-fucking-Kinney!"

"Kenny," I reach out to him, but he jerks away from me and stomps out the bedroom, through the living room and out the house, slamming the door behind him.

I sink down heavily onto the bed and consider what Kenny said. Brian is committed to Scott in a way that I never thought I would witness. Maybe Scott's good for him in a way that I can't be; in a way that I never could be, and that hurts. To think someone else is better for Brian than I am, hurts like hell.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Scott

Brian refuses to discuss Justin with me, and we stay silent the rest of the night. I awake the next morning, leaving a note on the counter. We're meeting at Mikey and Ben's tonight for dinner and I want to remind him.

I have a fucked up day; all I can seem to think about is Brian and Justin on the floor; together. I can't seem to scrub that image out of my mind. By the time I reach Ben's, I'm wound up so fucking tight, I'd probably kick a puppy for the chance to relieve some stress.

Brian's already there. I walk in, sit down, watch Brian talk to Michael. I realize then that if I push him, I'll probably drive him away. So I'll accept this, for now. I just don't want Justin to get the wrong idea and that worries me to no end. From what Brian tells me, it was very hard dealing with him the last time. He wouldn't take no for an answer; wouldn't believe that he was just one of many fucks. He tried to make it more than what it was and I don't want that to happen again. Not just for my sake but, also for Justin's. Despite everything that has happened, which I'm still trying to figure out what *everything* is, I really do like him, and don't think I'd enjoy seeing him get hurt. But after so much time, he has to see the reality of the situation. I mean, they just fucked once or twice; it's not like they had some on-going romance or anything. Now that he has Kenny, he has to see the difference, see what real romance and a relationship is. My thoughts are interrupted with a knocking at the door.

"Hey, Scott, get the door," Michael yells out to me from across the room. I open the door, and damn if it's not Justin and Kenny on the other side. What the fuck universe, am I in? Everywhere I turn, there they are. "Hey," I grunt, as they walk in the door. "Hey," Kenny nods. Justin just looks at me and offers me a weak little smile. I guess he's embarrassed about what happened. Good.

Mikey, Brian, and Ben join us in the living room. Ben passes a couple of beers around and I immediately suck one down. I look at Mikey and he's grinning from ear-to-ear. I wonder what the hell is wrong with him.

"What are you so glad about?" Ben asks him. He just looks around at all of us, all wide-eyed and let's out a little giggle. Maybe he's hopped up on some E, who the fuck knows. There's another knock on the door and I wonder who the hell else is coming to this *party*. Michael jumps up and opens the door, allowing Emmett and Ted to saunter in.

"Well....this is interesting? You two together?" Brian quips.

"No, we just arrived at the same time," Ted clarifies.

I glance over at Michael and see that silly ass grin still plastered on his face.

"What the hell are you so pleased about?" Em scoffs.

"I just think that it's strange, all of us here together, after so many years," Michael intones, a little too gleefully if you ask me.

"I know what you mean," Ted speaks, shooting a quick look at Emmett.

"We've been though...some stuff," Emmett sighs, shaking his head in agreement.

"Sure have," Mikey smirks. "Hey, what about the night you two met?" Michael exclaims, eyes darting back and forth between Brian and Justin. Nice seque.

Mikey then gets a far-away look on his eyes, continuing. "I'll never forget the look on Brian's face when he first laid eyes on Justin. It was priceless."

"I remember thinking of Justin as a little brat, who would not go away," Michael states. Yeah, I've heard this story before. I fix my eyes on Brian and notice how uncomfortable he seems. I guess talking about these things stirs up bad memories.

"I couldn't have been more wrong," Michael announces, staring at Justin.

"You two went through so much together." Emmett dreamily reflects. "Remember New York, baby?"

"New York? What happened in New York?" I interrupt, oblivious that the question was not asked of me.

Ted snorts, "You mean when Justin stole Brian's credit card and ran away to New York, 'Remember New York'?"

"Not my finest moment," Justin exhales quietly. Well, this is all news to me. I knew Brian went through a hard time with the boy, but damn, this is ridiculous.

"We all went to New York, to find him. Brian tracked his credit card and finally caught up with Justin, but it was hours before we saw them," Michael leers. I quickly cut my eyes over to Brian and Justin, noticing the look that passes between them. It's a look of remembrance, a look of affection, a look of....

"Oh, and let's not forget the prom!" Ted stupidly cries out. Suddenly, all of the air is sucked out of the room and everyone tenses up, going silent.

"The Prom? Please enlighten, Ted," I insist, since I seem to be the only clueless one here.

"Justin's prom," Ted answers shamefully, aware he's just stuck his foot in his fat mouth.

"Sugar, you still don't remember anything?" Emmett inquires, sad eyes trained on Justin. Everyone's attention turns to Justin.

"I um.... I remember bits and parts," Justin stammers, obviously flustered. He glimpses at Brian, then turns to tell him, "I remember you picking me up in your arms and spinning me around. Then I remember you kissing me. That's it. All I remember, besides the parking lot." He looks so forlorn, I have to suppress a catch in my throat. "Does this sound familiar to you?" Justin asks, looking expectantly at Brian.

"Yeah. That's what happened," Brian answers in a dry, flat voice, eyes all the while trained on Justin. Now me, I'm still trying to understand what the fuck is going on and just what is being said. Brian went to New York, to retrieve Justin? (okay, check). Brian went to Justin's prom with him? (okay, check). Justin can't remember what happened at his own prom? (okay, check). These are things I would never, ever have guessed could've happened in a million, no make that, an infinite number of years. Like, you know, out of the realm of all possibilities. I just can't, for the life of me, wrap my brain around it. I look intently at Brian, but he seems transfixed and can't take his eyes off of Justin.

I can't take much more of this shit. "Why is it that you can't remember?" I blurt out, more than a little curious as to his answer. I feel the tension rise again and take note of the serious, sad looks on everyone's face. What the fuck is going on? I wonder.

Justin sighs deeply, eyes never leaving Brian. "I got attacked when Brian and I left the prom. A classmate hit me in the head with a baseball bat. Brian saved my life." I was in a coma for 2 weeks. I can hardly remember any of what must be, the most wonderful night in my life," he tonelessly ticks off, like he's reciting a 'to do' list.

"I didn't save you. He still fucking hit you!" Brian barks out, emotions that I've never seen him display, darkening his features. "I didn't save you from him," he repeats in a whisper. Okay, this revelation has fucking floored me; I'm fucking speechless, gaping at the both of them. I realize, disheartedly, that there is something more going on here. I intend to find out just what the fuck it is.

Justin finally tears his eyes away from Brian to look me in the eye. "Brian helped me a lot after that. It's because of him, literally, that I'm standing here today," Justin asserts, leaving no room for argument.

Finally, Mikey remembers to breathe, putting his two cents into 'down memory lane.' "I remember when you first moved in with Brian, I thought it was because he felt guilty over what had happened, but again, I was wrong."

"Remember the rules? That's something I never thought I'd see Brian do," Emmett quips.

"Who could forget 'em? I knew Brian was in love when he told me that Justin had left, and he went to him and agreed to his terms," Michael laughs. I sit back listening to them, wondering if I'm trapped in some alternate universe or a gay-themed, sci-fi, soap opera. What the fuck is going on, I wonder for the one millionth time.

"Ah yes, the rules! Still can't believe Justin pulled that off," Emmett snorts with obvious glee.

"Yep," Michael agrees. "Brian running behind Jus—"

"—I didn't go running behind him," Brian grounds out.

"Oh yes you did. You hunted me down at Babylon and b-e-g-g-e-d me to stay," Justin snickers.

"I told you, I wanted you to stay. There's a difference, twat," Brian says, with an amused look on his face. What the??? Okay, this sonofabitch has some serious explaining to do. They had 'rules'? Brian agreed to 'rules' with Justin??? I had no idea their relationship ran so deep.

"What kind of rules are you talking about?" I venture. I want the whole fuckin' sordid story now, not Brian's half-assed attempts at one, later.

"The kind that should be easy to follow," Brian recalls.

"Of course, I broke every single one of them," Justin says, giving Brian a hard look. He continues on in a rush, mood changing from playful to something else.

"I kissed that frat boy, stayed out past three, and let's not forget the worst; I cheated on you, became emotionally attached to someone else!" Justin yells in apparent frustration, standing up and bursting out the door in a whirlwind with Scott right on his heels. I toss a look at Brian and can see that he's itching to chase after Justin.

I rise, looking pointedly at Brian, "I think it's time we left also. We've got some things to discuss."

The entire ride home, the events of the night keep swirling around in my head. I can't believe Brian and Justin were that close. Fuck, they were in love. Brian following some rules that Justin set, what the fuck was that? Justin was the one to walk away, not Brian? Brian loved Justin, he had to. I can't believe I've been this goddamned stupid. Brian loved Justin, hell, for all I know, he still does! Suddenly, I reflect on the night they spent together. Innocent evening spent together, my ass! Then me walking in my own fucking house and finding them rolling around on the floor! Shit! I've been fucking played.

I pull up to the house first and wait on the doorstep for Brian to get out of his car. We push into the house and I immediately launch into him.

"Why the fuck did you lie about what you and Justin were to each other?!"

Brian had started undressing and paused, sighing heavily, "I was still hurting over Justin leaving me, when I met you." A far-away look covers his features. He quickly snaps out of it to resume undressing.

"Did you love him?" I softly ask, and he looks away. "DID.YOU.LOVE.HIM?" I insist, practically shrieking at him.

He faces me then, anger slashing his features. "YES, OK! YES, I LOVED HIM! I LOVED HIM MORE THAN I'VE EVER LOVED ANYONE ELSE! IS THIS WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR?!?" Brian roars at me. No! That's definitely not what I want to hear.

"Uhn" I snort out derisively, rolling my eyes. Eight years. Eight-fucking-years, built on a fucking lie." I can't describe what I'm feeling; all I know is I've never, ever felt hurt like this.

"Scott, listen...I was wrong to let you believe what I did and, uhm...I'm sorry. I don't know what else to say," Brian allows, getting in the bed. I pull the sheets up and slide into bed with him, but make sure to stay on the edge, so no physical contact is possible.

I can't let this go and push further. "Do you still love him?"

"What?" he retorts.

"Justin ...Do you still love him?" I continue. His answer is to crawl to the other side of the bed, moving further, further away from me, from us.

Chapter 6

Brian

I stay on the other side of the bed...thinking about the events of the night...hoping it would all disappear like a bad dream...not wanting to face Scott. Maybe I'm a coward, who knows. I know that I've hurt him and have no idea how to deal with it. I never intended to make him feel like this, but I can always count on disappointing someone. I steal a look at him while I'm reflecting on this. I want to reach out to him...I want to hold him, and tell him that I'm sorry until he forgives me. I don't want this to be the end of us, I'm not ready to give up. Still, I can't help but fear that this may be it. This may be the one thing that he can't forgive. What if he doesn't want to? Where will I be then? What happens if he wakes up and tells me that it's over? How will I deal with that? I can't, is how; I don't want to. Finally, I fitfully drift off to sleep.

When I awake the next morning, I hear Scott moving about. He comes around the bed and I grab his hand. He quickly snatches it back.

"Hey, sit down," I tell him, but all I get is silence. No shitty remark, no yelling, just deafening silence.

"Where're you going?" I ask, when I take notice that he's fully dressed and has his car keys in his hand. Silence is once again, my only answer.

"I said, where the fuck are you going?" I get up, standing in front of him. I can't let him leave, not like this. Because if I do, it's really going to be... over. If I let him walk out that door, then that may be the end of us, and I can't let that happen; won't let that happen. This is not what I wanted. I never wanted this.

"Get the fuck out of the way," he finally speaks, trying to scoot around me. I grab him again, but he pushes me back and walks away. I watch as he gets his coat and leaves the bedroom, then I hear the front door slamming, announcing that he's gone.

SHIT! FUCK! I pound my fists into the wall until I can't lift my arms anymore. I stand stock still, staring at the wall and realize that I've punched a nice sized hole in it – at this point, I really don't give a fuck. Sigh....story of my life.

This is all your fault, Kinney. I know that. Know that I was wrong and that there is probably nothing I can do about it, nothing to somehow make it right. I grab the phone and punch in the numbers to his cell. Of course, he doesn't answer. I start to pace; back and forth, forth and back, trying to think of what to do to get my life back on track. I have to do something to make Scott listen to my side of things, make him understand what's going on. I recognize that even if we do work through this shit, that he may not trust me again, but who can blame him. I'd feel the same way.

Three hours and many unanswered phone calls later, he's still not back. I start wondering if he's even coming back, has he left for good? Is he out looking for somewhere else to live? Is he with someone else, trying to get some twisted-ass revenge on me by fucking around? Guess I'll eventually find out.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justin

Kenny and I leave Ben's place headed for Woody's.

"What the fuck was that all about?" Kenny rails, once we're settled in a booth. You'd think he'd be tired of asking this same question. I know I am. As usual, I don't have an answer, but try to formulate one because I know he's near his breaking point.

"I guess it's just old feelings of guilt." I hope that explains it to him, hope that he doesn't feel the need to search for more answers.

"I think its a little more than that," Kenny says knowingly, and I acknowledge that he's probably right. "How much shit do you expect me to put up with, Justin? Maybe we shouldn't have come to the Pitts!" He's right, I know, but

don't tell him that. Maybe we should never have come here. Maybe we should have settled somewhere else. "Maybe we should leave," he says, head downcast. I hook a finger under his chin, forcing his face up and take a good long look at him. His expression is stone cold and I understand this might be our last chance. Still, how can we walk away from Pittsburgh? We have responsibilities here, a home, and no matter how much we may want to, we can't run away from them.

"Let's wait the semester out," I tell him. He sits back and I guess he thinks about it, but he never takes his eyes off of me, his facial expression never changing.

He then totally catches me off guard by changing tactics. "Where the fuck do you get off yelling like that and causing a scene?" he blurts out.

"Kenny," I sigh, "I don't want to talk about this. I know I acted like a fool. I don't need you telling me that I did."

"Yeah, you acted like a fool, but you also acted like someone in love...and I don't mean with me, either. So, my question to you is, what would you do if you were me? What should I do knowing this? Just forget about it? Pretend that you're not in love with someone else? Try to fight Brian for your attention? See I'm asking you, because I don't know WHAT THE FUCK TO DO!" He stands and storms out of Woody's. I follow quickly behind him and jump in the car, just before he speeds away from the damn curb, tires squealing.

"What the fuck is wrong with you? You could have killed me!" I scream. Okay, I know that I'm being a little overdramatic right now, but fuck, with everything that's gone on, I'm entitled.

"You look fine to me," he sneers. He pushes his foot down even more on the gas and we speed perilously through traffic. Kenny is driving recklessly and I've never been so scared in my life. We run red lights, careen past other cars and have a few near-misses. I hold on to the shoulder harness, shutting my eyes tightly, as we whip around curbs so fast it takes my breath away.

Finally, he screeches to a halt in front of the house, both of us lunging forward with the movement. I take deep breaths, willing my heart to stop hammering and finally ease out of the car, knees shaking terribly.

"Are...you...crazy,? I barely get out, still trying to catch my breath. What the fuck were you thinking?" I demand, getting my bearings and storming into the house. He walks in behind me and slams the door.

"I needed to release some stress, that's all. I'm sorry," he says, walking over to the refrigerator, grabbing a beer. Then he walks back over to me, sits down on the sofa and begins casually flipping through the TV, never mind that just moments ago, he almost killed both our asses. What the fuck goddamn planet is he on?

"That's it? That's all you have to say for yourself?"

"Yep. What else should I say? Anyway, sit down so we can talk," he pats the seat beside him and I do as he asks.

"I let anger control my actions tonight, Justin. I left Woody's to keep from knocking the shit outta something. I wanted to hit you, I really wanted to hit you, that's how angry I was, still am. But, that's not something I could ever forgive myself for doing. As mad as I am, you don't deserve that. No one deserves that. So, I just expressed it the best way that I knew how, flooring that son-of-a-bitch, getting that adrenaline rush and trying to dissipate my red-hot anger. I'm sorry if I scared you, but you backed me into a corner and I reacted instead of 'acted.' Justin, understand that this does not excuse your actions tonight, nor does it make everything okay. We have a boatload of shit to deal with and...we will deal with it," he states emphatically and I nod my head in agreement. What else can I do?

"I don't know what to say to you," I honestly tell him.

"It's not okay with me for you to be in love with someone else, Justin. You need to understand that first. I don't like it one bit. It's also really not okay if you're friends with him, either, but I know there's nothing I can do about that. I suggest you keep your fucking feelings in check, cause I won't put up with too much more of this bullshit," he states very simply.

I close my eyes and try to block everything out. This.Can't.Be.Happening. We are so strained right now, the most simple thing could cause the end of our relationship. How did we get to this point? I wish that we'd never come here. I hate this damn turmoil; it's fucking killing me.

"You don't have anything to say?" he asks, interrupting my musings, and I shake my head no, then get up, go to the guest bedroom, locking the door behind me. Maybe I'll sleep in here for tonight. Shit, the way things are going, I may sleep in here for a couple more nights. I slump down onto the bed and roll up into a fetal position.

At hearing Kenny's incessant knocking on the door, I grab a pillow, jamming it over my head and let the tears of pain flow. I'm not ready to talk to him now, facing his ultimatums. The only thing I want is for him to just go away.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~
Brian

It's ten the next fucking morning when Scott finally gets home. He walks in, immediately collapsing on the couch. I was all set to tear him a new hole, but his demeanor brings me up short and the only thing I can do now is go to him and try to comfort him. He holds his hands over his face and his whole body shakes. I sit beside him, placing a hand on his back and he grabs me in return, holding on as if his life depended on it. We stay that way, me holding him, letting his tears flow, until he pulls back.

"Brian, I...I don't know where to go from here," he stammers.

"Where were you last night?" I inquire.

"I drove around for a couple of hours, trying to clear my head, you know. Then I just gave up and checked into a hotel," he sighs. "I don't know if I can forgive you for this, Brian, but I also can't let go. I need some time to think, think about us," he adds. I wonder if that means he wants to leave me, move out, live somewhere else; or, if he expects me to move out, leave our home.

"What are you saying?" I ask, even though I'm sure I'm not going to like the answer.

"I think one of us needs to move out. Until we can figure out what we're going to do." Fuck! That's all I can think. Fuck. He's giving up on us.

"So it's that easy, huh? It's that easy to just walk away from me? I think that we need to talk more about this. Moving out will only make things worse. It will only drive us farther apart," I plead with him. He stays silent a long time before he finally speaks.

"Then just give me my space, Brian. Just give me my space and some time."

"Okay," I say. I feel so helpless, like it's all out of my hands. So I agree to his terms, it's the least I can do.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~
Justin

I'm getting ready to walk out the door, when the phone rings. I quickly glance at the caller ID box and discover that it's Brian on the other end.

"What's up?" I sigh, taking a seat. Something tells me we're in for a very long talk.

"How are things?" he asks. How the fuck does he think?

"I think I should be the one asking you that question," I tell him. It's been three nights since the little scene at Ben's and this is our first time talking.

"Things are not so good," he admits.

"Brian, can I ask you something?" This is something that has bothering me since that night at Ben and Michael's, and I've got to get it off my chest.

"What is it?" he asks.

"Why is it that Scott seemed so surprised about everything? I mean, Kenny knows all about you. Why is it that Scott didn't even seem to know that we'd been together? How come you never told him about us?"

He pauses a few minutes before answering me. "I just didn't, Justin. It never came up and it wasn't important," he says.

Whoa. What the fuck does that mean? I wasn't anything? I wasn't important enough to mention? "Guess I never meant as much to you as I thought I did." I let a small chortle escape my lips.

"Don't start this shit, Justin. My reasons are my own and none of your damn business." I can tell that he's getting pissed, but really, who gives a fuck?

"There is always some hidden meaning in everything you do, right Brian? Well guess what? I don't have time for your guessing games! A simple question deserves a simple answer." Okay, I know I have a lot of nerve saying that, but... "Why the fuck did you keep everything that we had a secret? Why, Brian?"

I wait for a few minutes, then barely hear him whisper: "Same ole shit, don't have time for this...." Click. He hung up? He hung the fucking phone up on me?? Fuck him.

Chapter 7

Justin

I'm pulling into my driveway, when my cell rings. I park the car, answering.

"Hello?"

"Justin, where are you? I need you to go somewhere with me." It's Brian and there's an urgent tone to his voice.

"Excuse me? You want me to go somewhere with you? Am I mistaken or did you not hang up the phone on me yesterday?"

"Where are you, so I can come and get you?" So he's not going to rise to the bait. That's fine, I didn't really expect him too anyway.

"I'm at home; you can come and get me," I say. I decide not to even enter the house; Kenny's not in there anyway. Good. I sit on the front porch and wait for Brian.

"Where we headed?" I ask, peeking my head in the window. He sighs impatiently, so I jump into the car. He waits until we're in traffic before telling me that we're on our way to see Gus and Lindsay.

Gee, this is rich. Now see, I want to help Brian deal with Gus and everything, but I've got so many fuckin' problems of my own, that I'm not much good to anyone else right now, but hell, might as well give it a shot.

"Do you think he'll even talk to you?" I hear him sigh, and I guess I have my answer. I hurt for him because I know how much he loves his son and what this is doing to him. I'd love to be able to talk to Gus one-on-one and see exactly where his head is. I know out of all of us, except Mel, that I'm the only one he'd even be willing to talk to.

Lindsay's been good about letting me see him; there's never been a problem there. So, maybe I should spend some time alone with him, try to help him, do something. I hate to see people I love in so much pain.

When we get there, Brian knocks on the door and walks right in without waiting for an answer, me right behind him and...Oh fuck. Shit! We should've waited! Should have fucking waited!

Lindsay and Karen are butt naked on the middle of the floor, going at it. Brian and I casually stroll by them into the kitchen and wait for them to get dressed, before joining us.

"You can't just fucking walk in here! I thought we told you that before. If no one answers the door, just leave, because either we're not here or we don't want to be bothered," Karen yells out. She seems more embarrassed than anything else. Lindsay just looks mad as hell. I can't say that I blame her, but considering all the times she and Mel busted into the loft unannounced, I don't know, maybe she could tone the scowl down a bit.

"Where's Gus?" Brian gets right to the point, looking between Lindsay and Karen.

"He's not here," Karen announces. She sits down, pulling Lindsay with her. Brian rakes his fingers through his scalp and starts pacing across the floor.

"So you mean that he could have come in and caught you two, just like we did?" Lindsay immediately jumps up and goes to stand in front of Brian.

"He's with Mel for a couple of days, Brian, and I don't need you coming in here judging me." Lindsay has really worked herself up into a frenzy, her chest rising and falling, breathing really hard.

"I'm not judging you, Lindsay, calm down. I just want to know where my son is." Brian looks irritated as hell. I go up behind him and rub his back, hoping to ground him. He places his arm around my waist and I know that he needs the comfort. Lindsay looks at us funnily, and I think it's the first time she's really thought about the fact that Brian and I are here together and, we're having physical contact.

"What the hell is going on here? Please tell me you two are not trying to start something up again. Brian, you know that's the last fucking thing that we need," she tells him, and Karen comes up, hugging her from behind for support. I wonder what she means by that statement, but now is not really a good time to push for an answer. I guess I'll find out later.

"That's not what's going on here, Lindsay, lighten up. Listen, I'm going over to Mel's to see Gus. I'll just call you later or something," and with that said, we leave.

We zoom over to Mel's, Brian making a point of knocking on the door. Mel lets us in and crooks a thumb to the living room, where Gus is sitting on the sofa, busy playing some video game. He rolls his eyes when he sees us coming his way, I think more for Brian's benefit, than mine. We take a seat on either side of him.

"Hey, Justin. How's it going?" Gus smiles up at me.

"I'm fine, Gus. What about you?" He shrugs his shoulders. I look over at Brian, who is just staring at Gus. I know that he's waiting for Gus to talk to him or at least acknowledge that he's there, but Gus simply goes back to playing his video game.

I can feel Brian's hurt and pain and it's fucking killing me. He clears his throat and Gus rolls his eyes again.

"Gus, look at me. I want to talk to you," Brian softly tells him. Gus gives off a big dramatic sigh, stops the game, and turns to pointedly look at him.

"I think we need to spend some together, a weekend maybe, to talk about some things and come to some sort of an understanding," Brian says. At this point Mel comes into the room and sits down. Gus looks from her to Brian, then focuses his attention on Brian.

"I don't want to spend the weekend with you! I don't want to be anywhere near you! Why is that so hard for you to understand?" he demands of Brian. Mel immediately jumps up from her chair and zips across the room, looking like she's mad enough to kill. She grabs at Gus and snatches him off the chair.

"You will not talk to your father like that! Especially where I can hear it. Do you understand me young man?" she growls into his face. Gus just nods his head in dazed agreement. "You will not show disrespect to him or any other adult for that matter. I am not Lindsay and I'm not going to let you get away with that shit here! It's not all right, plus you're the child and we're your parents!" she lets him go and he sits back down, moping. I smirk to myself, thinking that Melanie has a way with him that no one else does.

"Can I go play basketball?" Gus sulks and Mel tells him to go ahead. He grabs his ball and heads out the back door, trying to get out as fast as he can. Mel then looks at Brian and me and sighs deeply, scrubbing her hands over her face.

"I can't tell either one of you how to live your life, but if you are trying to get back together, then your fucking timing stinks. It'll make this situation with Gus ten times worse, and I think you both should be able to see that," Mel says. Brian nods his head.

"Don't you think I know that Mel? Justin and I are friends, not that it's any of your business," Brian stands up and stalks to the door.

"It is my business, Brian. If it involves my son, then it's my business," Mel wearily gets up and walks to the door with us.

"I said that we were just friends Mel. So leave it alone, okay?" he asks.

"Alright," she says reluctantly, shutting the door behind us.

We silently sit in the car for about ten minutes, and I assume Brian is trying to figure out his next move. I know where he wants to go, and I also know that he's probably trying to figure out a way to ask me to go with him. After everything that's happened between Kenny and I, and he and Scott, he's not sure if I'll say yes, and my guess is that he couldn't stand the rejection if I said no. So he does what he's done so many times before; keeps his feelings inside.

"We can go there if you want to Brian. If you need to be there, then let's go. You don't have to ask, I'll always be here for you." He looks me in the eyes, then leans over and places a small kiss on my lips. Nice...the Brian Kinney 'thank you.'

We drive in companionable quiet and I guess we're both lost in our own thoughts. Brian decides to stop at the grocery store to pick up a few items, while I wait in the car. I use this time alone to call Kenny and let him know what's going on. I need to try to think of a way to tell him without making him fly off the handle, which is a joke really. I mean we are barely speaking and the reason we aren't is at this very moment in a mom-and-pop, purchasing shit. Call me crazy, but I just can't abandon Brian.

I take a couple of deep breaths and then just give in, dialing the number. I push in the last one, then hurriedly cut the phone off, realizing I don't know exactly what to say to him. 'Stop being scared and just call him,' I tell myself. So I pick up the phone and dial again. This time I let it ring.

"Hey, Justin, what's going on?" Kenny asks.

"I'm with Brian and don't know what time I'll be home," I rush out and wait for the hurricane that is sure to come. There's a long pause before he finally speaks.

"What I don't understand is why he needs you so much or why you feel the need to spend so much time with him? I'm sure Scott has to wonder the same thing, but then again, maybe it's just me," he says and then he's silent. I guess he's waiting for my response, but I don't really have one, so I stay silent too.

"I'll see you when you get home," he finally sighs. I start to say something else to him, but I hear the distinctive click of a dead phone.

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Brian

I stride into the grocery store and start throwing stuff in the basket. I'm not paying attention to what I'm doing because my mind's in about three different places and it's hard trying to process everything that I'm feeling.

I don't usually have to call Scott when I'm going to be 'gone for a little while.' Even though he doesn't know about my little house, he does know what's going on when I don't come home. He just doesn't know where I stay, and usually it wouldn't matter, but right now, the way things are, I can't take that chance.

I'm not going to tell him about my house; I still feel that is none of his business, but because of everything that's been going on, I feel the need to call him and let him know that I won't be home tonight.

I reach the checkout line and start unloading my purchases. While I'm waiting for the girl behind the counter to ring me up, I flip open my mobile and call him. There's no answer, so I just leave a message. He's still not ready to talk to me yet, I guess.

When I get back to the car, Justin is sitting there, staring at his phone. Guess he had his own little conversation. I load the groceries and we take off, silence following us all the way to the house. Once there, I unlock the door and then walk back to the car to unload the groceries and take everything inside. After it's all put away, I kinda stand around, soaking everything in...just being here makes me start to feel better – my sanctuary.

I'd never admit it to Justin, but I'm thankful that he agreed to come with me. I know he's risking a lot by being here and that makes me even more grateful. I watch him shrug out of his coat and walk purposefully towards my bedroom. Damn. I...just...can't...help...myself. I quickly ease up behind him and place my hands around his waist, halting his progress. He then leans back against me, falls almost, and I place a small kiss on the back of his neck. That's how it starts...with just an innocent, sweet kiss. Before I know it, Justin has swiveled around and we're all over each other. The pent-up passion, anger, disappointments, everything...it's too much, both of us realizing that it's too late to turn back. Every little touch, every little kiss means so much. We couldn't stop if we wanted to...won't stop.

Chapter 8

Brian

I wake up before Justin and flash back to last night. Words can't describe how it felt to be with him again, in him, again. Still, I can't help thinking about the consequences of our actions.

Justin starts stirring in the bed and I recall the particular movements as a sign to him waking up. When he finally does, he heads to the bathroom, without once looking at me, does his business and then comes back into the bedroom.

"Can we talk?" he gets out amidst a huge yawn, and I nod my head yes, adding, "need some coffee first, though." He gets up, heading towards the kitchen and I rise and pad to the bathroom, do my thing and then join him. He's

started the Krups, adding the Kenyan roast that I keep stocked. He sets two steaming cups of brew on the table and we sit opposite of each other.

I stir generous amounts of sugar into my coffee, trying to quell my apprehension in relation to what he wants to talk about. He seems really nervous, kind of unsure of himself. Finally he lets out a big breath and speaks.

"Why is it that Lindsay and Melanie think it's a bad idea if we get back together?" I was pretty sure that he knew the answer to that question. I guess I just took it for granted that he knew.

"Justin, Gus looks up to you. He loves you and I would hate to see something happen to change his image of you. The rate he's going and where he's at right now, he needs someone like you that he can go to." I see the confused look come across his face. He still doesn't get it. "Look, if you and I try to rekindle our relationship, Gus will look at it as if you came between Scott and me. I've been with Scott since Gus was four and Gus loves him. It would be like losing another parent to him, and I don't think he could handle that."

He takes a long time thinking about what I said, taking it all in. I see him running it over it in his mind and after a couple of minutes he sighs and says, "I don't think we should come here again, and we shouldn't see each other anymore." I nod my head, dejectedly, and watch him walk away.

It's really unfair and fucked up when you think about it. To get a small taste of something, only to have it snatched away, never to be able to touch it again.

We know how we feel, but there is nothing that we can do about it. How can we pursue a relationship with each other, when it would hurt so many people that we love? Would it even be worth it? Gus has been through so much and I can't stand the thought of him losing, Scott and possibly even Justin in one big swoop.

That's what would happen. I know that he would lose all respect for Justin. As for Scott, I know he loves Gus, but you can never tell what someone will do. I would like to think he would stay a part of Gus' life, but I'm not sure that he would. They spend time together now, but of course I'm not a part of that. I don't even think they talk about me. Which is fine, I guess if it means that I can still have some insight into Gus' life.

We tidy up then get in the car and head home. I notice that we've settled into an awkward silence – I guess we're both thinking the same thing – this is the last time we'll be together. I won't lie and say it doesn't hurt. The truth is, it hurts like hell, but that's the way life can be. Justin and I had our time together, and now it's time that we let go and think about the people and situations that are directly affected by our actions.

We've driven for only fifteen minutes when Justin reaches over and entwines his hand with mine. That's how we stay all the way home. Hand in hand, not speaking, both of us lost in our own thoughts, our own pain.

When we get to his house he gives me a quick kiss on the lips before he gets out. I watch as he closes the car door and takes special care not to turn around and watch me as I pull away from him for the last time.

Justin

I don't watch Brian as he leaves; I can't. I keep my back turned, walking straight ahead into the house. Good, Kenny's not home, I think to myself, recalling the last 24 hours and deciding to pick up the phone and make a call.

"Yes?"

"Mel, it's me, Justin. I'd like to see Gus and was wondering if you'd mind dropping him off and I'll bring him home when it's time to go?" She agrees, telling me it will be late afternoon before they come.

I decide to take a shower and then fix myself something to eat. I'm stuffing the last bit of sandwich in my mouth when Kenny comes home.

"Have fun?" he spits out, face hard and eyes coldly staring me down. I get up slowly and move to stand in front of him. He remains as still as a statue when I reach for him, not pulling away, but not responding either.

"I'm not going to see him any more," I announce, and watch as he goes from indifference to outrage.

"So, he finally got what he wanted, is that it?" I look away, fighting to keep a blush at bay, and he looks at me with disgust, shakes his head and stomps out the back door. I follow behind him.

He's sitting in one of the lawn chairs and I take one beside him. He makes a show of ignoring me, so I decide to make the first move.

"I understand if you feel the need to walk away from me. I have no right to ask you for anything..." he's still acting as if I don't exist, so I get up stiffly, walk back through the house and decide to wait for Gus on the front porch.

I ease onto the swinging chair, my left leg tucked under me, while my right foot keeps up a steady toe to heel motion to gently rock the chair. I've been out here for a while, my thoughts swirling around in my head, body rocking back and forth, when.... Kenny comes out, sitting on the top step.

"I have no idea what I want to do, Justin. The only thing I know for sure is that right now, I don't want to be around you, can't be around you...I want you to leave me alone. Maybe one of us should move into the guest bedroom," he says.

I let out a calming breath I didn't realize I'd been holding and nod my agreement. "I'll move into the guest bedroom," I quietly volunteer.

"Good, then," he says, and gets up, walking back into the house.

I sit there like that, in the same position, movements stilled, until Gus and Melanie pull up. Gus jumps out, running towards me and Mel honks the horn, pulling away.

"Justin!" he hollers, wrapping himself around me. "I'm glad you called Mama and asked to see me! So, what gives?" Gus' breathing is starting to return to normal as he plops down next to me.

"I think we need to talk," I tell him, trying to keep my tone light.

"About what?" he hesitantly asks.

"Your Dad," I answer, and he rolls his eyes at that.

"He loves you," I say, and he looks at me with an almost comical expression of shock.

"Yeah, right. Anyways, why do you care so much? After the way he treated you, how can you even stand to be around him?" I wonder to whom he's been talking; I know it can't be Brian.

"What makes you think that your father treated me badly?"

He shrugs his shoulders, studying his fingers poking imaginary holes into his jeans. "I dunno....stuff I used to hear my moms talk about," he concedes.

Ahhh, the Mel-Lindz spin...interesting. "What exactly did you hear?"

"That he was mean to you and, and... he drove you away," he jerks his head up to look at me, waiting for me to agree with his statement.

"Gus," I sigh. "That's not what happened. Brian didn't drive me away. We just both made mistakes; we're both to blame. That's what caused us to split up, mistakes made by us both."

He doesn't buy it, shaking his head no. "That's not what..."

...."Gus, I think your moms may have misunderstood what was going on between Brian and I. People do that sometimes. They only said what they thought to be true or what they assumed was the truth. Now, who should know what happened better than Brian and me?" He considers this, and I see that maybe he is starting to believe me.

I don't know what the hell Lindsay and Melanie were thinking, talking like that in front of him. Then again, kids hear and understand a lot more than what we give them credit for. They may appear to have their attention elsewhere, when really they are dead on your conversation, without you even knowing about it. Maybe that's what happened here; I'm willing to give the 'ladies' the benefit of the doubt.

I sense Gus starting to get upset and watch as he folds his arms across his chest, almost in a defiant gesture. "Well, maybe he didn't make you go away, but he sure as hell made mama leave," he spews.

"Gus, why in the world would you say that?"

"Because they were always fighting over him. Mama said he always came first and that my mom loved him more than she did her. So she left and found someone who would put her first. They drove her away and I hate them both!" I watch as tears stream down his cheeks, dripping onto his lap. He tries ignoring them, but they won't stop falling and finally he swipes his sleeve across his face, wiping them away.

I start rubbing small circles on his back, seems to ground the Kinney men, and decide to be forthright with him. "Do you really believe that your daddy wanted her to go away, wanted to see you sad? Did he tell her to leave? Was he happy once she was gone?"

He shakes his head. "I guess not," he heaves a sigh.

"Gus, when my parents got divorced, I blamed myself. I couldn't see past my nose to realize that other factors were at stake for the deterioration of their relationship. See we need to find a reason, and sometimes we end up placing blame where it does not belong. As for your mom, was she happy when Mel left? Did she ask her to stay? Do you think that she wanted her to go?"

"She cried everyday for a long time," he says quietly.

"She was hurting, just like you were. It wasn't her fault any more than it was your father's. Sometimes people fall apart and no one is to blame. I'm sure they still love each other; they just were no longer happy together."

"Maybe you're right, but I still want her to come back home! I hate Karen! She's not my mother and is always telling me what to do! And my mom says I have to do like she says. Fuck her!" he screeches.

"Watch your language, Gus, and try to understand and respect that if your mom trusts her, then you have to do what she says. I'm sure she'd never knowingly put you in a dangerous situation or do anything to hurt you."

"Well, she's not cool like you....and Scott. She thinks she's my mom and I hate that."

"What about Mel's girlfriend, Grace? You get along with her pretty well, don't you?"

"Yeah, but Mama keeps her in check," he smirks.

I don't want to know what he means by that, so I leave it alone. "So how about it? Want to give your old man another chance?"

"I guess I could talk to him," Gus halfheartedly says.

"That's a start," I smile at him.

I know this conversation alone is not going to make everything okay with Gus. I'm no expert, but it seems like he may need counseling to deal with the fact that Melanie is gone, and she's not coming back and also to deal with Lindsay and Karen. It's hard though. It was difficult for me when it happened, but I was older, a little more seasoned. If he starts opening up to Brian and Lindsay though, perhaps it will take away some of his stress and maybe even the anger. Guess our talk has helped a little bit. I can only hope that it has.

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Brian

I enter the house, greeted by the sight of Scott standing in the doorway, his coat on, keys in hand.

"Where you going?" I ask.

He eases out of his coat and hangs it in the closet before answering. "Nowhere. Just got in."

"Where the fuck have you been all night?" I demand. Now, I have no right to be mad, but damn, I can't help it.

"Where the fuck have I been?????" he questions. "Whatever. You come and go as you please and obviously you were out all night too. Plus, all I did was stay in a hotel; I didn't feel like being bothered with you."

"I left a message," I admit.

"I didn't check 'em," he says. "Sooooo, just getting home, are we. With Justin, huh?"

I nod my head. "Yeah. We agreed not to see each other anymore," I tell him, even though I'm not sure how much of a difference it'll make.

"Brian, don't stop seeing him on my account," he snorts. "At this point, there really is no need."

Now what the fuck does that mean?

Chapter 9

Brian

"Brian, don't stop seeing him on my account," Scott snorts. "At this point, there really is no need." His words spin around in my head, bringing me up short.

"Why do you say that?" I demand.

"Because it's how I feel, Brian. I can't sit back and watch this...this thing you do with Justin. Please don't ask me to."

"Are you deaf?!? I said I'm not going to see him anymore," I'm drowning really fast here, but I know that Scott is not ready to walk out on us. I can sense it.

He moves to stand in front of me. I see the same defeated look in his eyes that I used to see in Justin's so many years ago. Why do we always hurt the ones we love the most?

"Can you promise me, Brian? Can you promise me that you won't see him again?" he asks expectantly.

"Yeah, I can," I say gruffly, with a heavy heart and he falls into my arms, hugging me fiercely.

I force myself to stop thinking about Justin, to no avail. Every time I close my eyes, I see him; every time I wrap my arms around Scott, it's Justin I feel. Fuck this. I can't make it through one lousy day without thinking about our night together; how it said so much about us, the way we still feel about each other, and the way we will always feel about each other.

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Justin

I was certain that Gus would call Brian after our talk three days ago. Fuck me, if he didn't. I don't know what it will take to get them close again or at least, talking again. They definitely need to all sit down together and, for sure, Gus seriously needs some counseling. I'll help Gus in any way that I can; that is, if they want my help...well, who the hell am I fooling – if Brian wants my help.

I haven't spoken to Brian since I got out of the jeep that day and all I can think about is the fact that I want to see him, want to see him bad. I know this is for the best though. Still, it felt so damn good to be with him again...to feel him again.

I'd moved into the guest bedroom as Kenny suggested. My second night there, I awoke in Kenny's arms; he'd come in there, to be with me.

"What are you doing in here?" I asked, rubbing the sleep out of eyes.

"I couldn't sleep without you," he murmured, and I leaned over, brushing my lips against his.

"So, I can come back into our bedroom, then?" I ventured.

"Yeah." I want you back in our bed," he'd whispered. I shifted in the bed and looked at him – realizing just how difficult this whole situation must have been for him – because what he really was saying was that he'd forgiven me for all that had happened with Brian.

Kenny gazed intently back at me, then ran a thumb across my bottom lip, caressing, then continued. "I haven't forgotten what happened, Justin, but I'm willing to try and work past it."

"Okay." One simple word was enough. I rolled off the bed, pulling Kenny with me, leading him to our bedroom.

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Brian

Scott has tried, but he won't let it go; just won't do it. I realize that I shouldn't expect him to just get over this in a few short weeks, but I thought we were working past it, trying to right our relationship. I'm truly beginning to understand just how much I've hurt him...how I betrayed the love and trust he felt, hopefully still feels, toward me.

When I reach for him, he tenses up. When we make love, I feel him hold back. When I think about Justin, which I admit, is a lot lately, he knows it and has even commented on it a few times. "Thinking about him?" he'll ask me. Sometimes when I get quiet he'll tell me 'I bet I can guess where your mind is,' I don't answer – why bother? He's right. I sense, without him having to utter a sound, the bitterness he holds towards me. I inwardly sigh with the familiarity of this whole mania. I've been here before, felt this way before...things aren't the same and, maybe, never will, or should be, again.

Still, nothing could have prepared me for what was to follow. One night, about two months after the night Justin and I had shared, Scott came home late, asking me to come into the living room....presumably to talk.

With no preamble he announced, "I'm leaving Brian. I've found another place to live and all I've got to do is pack my clothes; the rest is taken care of." I suddenly feel a sinking sensation, like I'm in quicksand, slowly going down,

raising my hand to the sky in a final gesture of once having existed here on Earth. My mind is racing, but I'm aware enough to know that after eight years together, it can't end like this...I won't let it.

"Scott, I never said I wanted us to be over," I croak out.

"You didn't have to, Brian. I...I...can't forgive you. Every fucking time I close my eyes, I see you and Justin. I imagine the two of you being together, making love and...and...it's fucking killing me! I can't let it go; I've tried. I can't trust you Brian and I don't see it changing anytime soon. Based on that, I see no rationale for me to be here any longer, do you?"

"Love?" I reason back. It's the last thing I have to hold on to. The last thing I've got to bargain with.

"Love?!?" he smirks. "It's not enough. I'm sorry, but it's just not enough, plus, it's too late." With that said, he rises from his perch on the sofa and walks into the bedroom, most likely to pack his belongings.

I sit still, drained...completely, utterly...drained. I try physically forcing down the emotions swirling around in my bloodstream, making my gut clench till it hurts....anger, fear, loneliness, the absolute fucking despair at once again, being alone...and lose. I allow the tears to silently roll down my face – just this once – in honor of the black abyss, which is my life.

I creep to the kitchen, splash cool water on my face and will myself to go into the bedroom, where he's busy tossing things into suitcases.

"You sure this is what you want?" I solemnly ask.

"Brian, don't make this any harder than it already is," he begs. So I don't. Walk away. Figure it's the least I can do. I enter my study, closing the door behind me, then slump into my favorite leather chair. I stay that way for three hours; giving him plenty of time to gather his things and leaving me with 8 years of memories, wondering how in the hell I could allow it to all come undone.

I go to bed that night, sleep elusive. My mind is jumbled with thoughts of Scott, Justin, Gus; hell, even Lindz. I keep hitting mind rewind over all the scenarios of the past couple of months, causing me to feel a panicky kind of dismay. Guess I'm going crazy after all. Feels like there is nothing I can do to stop it...almost don't feel like stopping it.

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Justin

Since moving back into our bedroom, Kenny and I have had both good and bad moments. The main problem is, of course, Brian. Can anyone blame me for not exactly being able to get over him? I mean, the way he touched me, held me, when we made love, is stuck in a continuous loop in my mind like it happened yesterday instead of two, long months ago.

"You leave sometimes...where do you go?" Kenny interrupts my thoughts. We've both just gotten home from school and are sitting on the front porch, soaking in some fresh air.

"Huh?" I ask, cocking my head at an odd angle.

Kenny repeats his question... "where do you go?"

I shrug noncommittedly and smoothly answer him with a half-truth. "Oh, I was thinking about my students and I guess my mind just sorta wandered. I can't believe how talented some of these students are," I add, falsely excited. "They have so much potential; you wouldn't believe it!"

"Yes, I would! I have a few gifted students, too. A couple should even be over there at PIFA with you," Kenny shares, his excitement...real.

I acknowledge that with a nod, countering. "It's not easy getting in though."

"I know. But, shit, somehow I feel like they're being cheated."

I've seen some work from a few of his students and....he's right. The ones he showed me, ones he's really proud of, are just as good as some of my students. "At least they have the best teacher," I smile at him.

"Thanks baby," he says, reaching for my hand and placing a small kiss on my palm. I relax against Kenny, feeling all tingly inside. The moment's interrupted with the fierce rumbling growl of my belly. Kenny chuckles at the sound, a blush coloring my cheeks.

"Let's go out for dinner tonight," Kenny suggests. "I have a taste for seafood...and...good company," he adds, pulling us both to our feet and twirling me around in a pseudo-waltz.

We end up going to a little seafood place that we've eaten at a few times before. The food is delicious, reasonably priced and intimate.

"I absolutely love their food," I drool, dipping a piece of my lobster into melted butter then placing it at my mouth and sucking it down.

"Me too," Kenny purrs, cracking open a crab leg.

We're having such a great time and I realize I don't want the evening to end with just dinner. "Let's go to Woody's afterwards, for a drink."

Kenny contemplates this for a little bit, then coolly licks butter off his fingers..."Sure, why not. I'm feeling good, you're looking good; shit, we could even go dancing afterwards!" he adds, smacking his lips; apparently completely satisfied with himself. I can't help the grin that follows, nearly blinding the entire, fucking restaurant.

We finish off the food, square the bill and head to Woody's. Once there, we grab a table, ordering a round of the brew on tap. We're having a good time joking and teasing each other when I happen to glance up and see Scott, yes that Scott, and some guy walk through the door.

I watch in fascination as they go from holding hands to outright kissing. Un-fucking-believable! My eyes follow as Scott and his friend take a seat at the table directly behind us. Kenny has also noticed their entrance and gives me a questioning look.

"Who's that with Scott?" he sneers and I just shrug my shoulders in answer.

"Never seen him before, but they do look awful comfortable together. Wonder where Brian is?"

"Who knows?!? He sure as hell needs to be here though," Kenny chokes out apparently thinking it funny. "Listen," he adds, rising from his seat, "I'm going to order another round, okay?"

I barely hear the last part of his statement, as I've completely focused my attention on the conversation behind me...

..."Scott, can we get together tomorrow, or not?" the man practically begs.

"Look, I told you; tomorrow is the day I spend with my son. I promised him and won't let him down; besides that, I'm looking forward to seeing him."

"You're son? You mean, Brian's son, don't you? I thought you two broke up? Didn't you move out?"

Shit, I had no fucking idea. My mind immediately goes to Brian...wonder how he's doing...he must be in so much pain, with no one to turn to. Wait a minute...check that...he has Michael. Well, I hope he has Michael; hope he's been there for...

..."It doesn't matter if I'm with Brian or not." Scott's voices slices through my thoughts. "Gus is my son too. I won't push him aside for anyone. You understand that? He comes first, always has, always will. I've been a father to him since he was four years old. He's as much my son as he is Brian's, Lindsay's, Melanie's and whomever else is a significant other of those 'three!' I've told you this before; if you can't accept him, then there's no need for this to go any further."

"Don't get bent out of shape, geez! I'm sorry. I had no idea how much you loved the boy. Of course I'll accept the fact that you want to, need to, spend time with him. Now, back to my original question – when can we get together?"

"I don't know. Let's take it slow." I can hear Scott taking deep breaths, coming down off his rant.

"You still love him, don't you?" the guy continues. "I understand. I can wait."

I guess I shouldn't be surprised at the level of devotion Scott feels towards Gus – especially in light of what Brian had told me a couple of months ago – but, I can't help the feeling. I also can't help feeling, irrationally I might add, a little resentment that Scott and Brian can be apart, but Scott still have contact with Gus. I just hope that some good can come out of this.

"You wouldn't be eaves dropping, would you?" Kenny asks me, banging the beers down on the table, making me almost jump out of my skin.

"I couldn't help but, hear," I laugh nervously, in my own defense. Kenny gives me that 'yeah right' look, before throwing his left leg over the seat of the chair, using the chair back to slide down.

We end up staying for another hour or so before leaving, making sure to say our byes to Scott on the way out.

He seems surprised – if eyebrows arching into one's hairline is any indication – to see us. I thought maybe he'd noticed us behind him, but his back was to us the whole time. Oh well. He recovers soon enough, introducing his friend, whose name is Greg, then we walk out the door.

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Brian

Gus is madder at me than he was before, if that's even possible. He took the break-up hard and even though he doesn't know the details, it's all...my...fault. I guess he's right though; I'm the one to blame.

I can't help this maudlin feeling that follows me around. I guess losing just about everyone that I love and care for...Scott, Lindsay, Gus and....Justin, will do that to a person. The only other one left is Michael. Hell, he's so happy right now, that even with our 25 years of history and co-dependent behavior, I just can't bring myself to burden him with my troubles...with my life.

For the first time ever, I feel...hopeless. Nothing matters. Shattered relationships; professional and personal unfulfillment; it's all getting me down....way down. Scott is gone and won't accept any calls from me. I've tried talking to him plenty of times, maybe to get him to reconsider 'us.' I think I still love him, still want him back; or, maybe it's just the loneliness fueling those desires. Lindsay and Gus both act like complete strangers and I'm tired of dealing with their bullshit. Justin...sweet Justin is OFF limits. That leaves me. Me, mister I Don't Give a Shit, giving a shit and having regrets.

I feel like poison, I continue musing. That I infect everyone I love, like a bad, incurable disease. If they knew, if only one of them had a fucking clue, that all I really want is their happiness, maybe they'd feel differently about me, towards me, but...they don't.

So, I continue going to bed alone every night and awaking in the same state. I leave an empty, shell of a home every day only to return to the same cold house at night. Fuck this thinking, it's making my head hurt. I grab a pen, snatch some engraved stationery off my desk and write down exactly what I'm feeling....

If I close my eyes maybe I can make the pain go away. If I close my eyes for long enough maybe I can open them to a brighter day. Why must we hurt? Why must pain stay? Grief and sorrow fill our days. How often are we happy? How many days go by without a tear?

Where do we go when we feel low? To whom or what do we turn? Drugs? Alcohol? Neither of those will do. Death? Maybe that's the answer to all life's problems. Maybe that will do.

If I could close my eyes and never open them again, then I'd be free. Never open back up to the pain, sorrow, grief, and horror. Never again mad, sad or blue. Never again will I feel betrayed, resented, ignored, or just like a plain fool.

If I could sleep forever I will be free of all life problems. I can't stand this daily living; it's too hard, and I beg to be free. To have no more of life's problems weigh down on me.

What's the answer? When will I be free? How many tears must I cry for you to really see? If I just start to bleed maybe that will do.

See my pain, see my scars, see my bruises. They never heal, they are as open as they were the first day they came, and try as I might they just seem to want to stay.

I can't understand why the pain won't just fucking go away. Nobody sees me. No one knows my pain. Not sure if they would care, so I guess it's just the same. This is the end of me.

Brian A. Kinney

I sign my name and walk into the bedroom, retrieving my gun.

Chapter 10

Brian

I had retrieved my gun, passing it back and forth between my hands – feeling the heaviness, before something stops me. I'm not sure what exactly, but something tells me to give it another try; to just put forth more effort. So I place the gun back securely then stride over to the nightstand to pick up the phone.

"Lindsay, it's me, Brian. I need for you, Gus, and Karen to come over here...tonight," I tell her. She doesn't even try to disguise a big sigh, exhaling noisily into the earpiece.

"Why, Brian? What do you want? We have plans. Do you expect us to drop everything just because you say so?" Fuck, she's still so goddamn bitter. Why do I even try?

"It's for Gus," I say, knowing that will catch her attention.

"What's for Gus, Brian? What are you up to now?"

"Are you happy with the way things are with him now? I think we both can agree that our son needs help, and he needs it now! Listen up, I'm going to call Melanie and Grace, and....uh, I think that Scott should be here, too. Fuck it! We all need to be here. For God's sake, it's Gus we're talking about Lindsay, and we both know that you can't afford to say no."

There's a long pause, then what sounds suspiciously like a sniffing noise, before she answers, defeat flattening the tone of her voice. "What time?" Damn it to hell...why did that have to be so hard?

"Now!" I shout, slamming down the phone. I call Melanie, bracing myself for another mini-implosion, but it never happens. She agrees to come over right away, and promises to bring Grace with her. Scott doesn't answer my calls, of course, so I leave him a terse message, explaining the situation.

Glancing at the cordless, now safely cradled in its base, I consider calling Justin and asking him to join our motley group. I really want him to be here, especially knowing how he feels about Gus...how he keeps me centered...but by calling him, I'm breaking boundaries, not to mention being completely selfish. Fuck me, I'm kidding absolutely no one, or, above all, myself...

I snatch the phone up, quickly punching in numbers. "Justin, hey, it's..."

"...Brian?!?"

"Yeah. Listen, this situation with Gus has gotten completely out of hand and I've called a 'meeting' of sorts to address the matter. His mommies – all four of 'em – me, possibly Scott and, I'm hoping....

"...I'll be right over," he interjects. I knew it. I knew I could count on him, I think, while hanging up the phone, preparing myself for everyone's arrival.

Melanie and Grace arrive first, followed shortly by Scott – who evidently did check his messages – and then Lindsay and Karen, with a dejected-looking Gus in tow. It's another ten minutes or so, before Justin gets there, and when he does, he's not alone...Kenny walks in with him, one arm wrapped possessively around Justin's waist.

Once everyone has made their respective hello noises and found a seat, I get started.

"Okay, everyone here knows the gist of this 'get-together'...we need to do something about Gus," I add, bluntly. "If he continues to act the way he is now, I'd hate to think about where he'll end up." I take a moment to gaze around the room, my eyes fixing on Gus. I notice him open his mouth, as if he is going to say something, but one quick look at Mel and he smashes his lips together, sinking deeper into the chair he's occupying.

"Gus, honey, why don't you go out back and shoot some ball or something, until we're ready to speak with you," Mel tells him and he gets up, goes to the bedroom that he has in my house, gets his ball and heads out the door. Once we hear the back door slam shut, Justin starts speaking.

"Gus blames Brian and Lindsay for Melanie leaving; that's one thing. Another is that he grew up in a household where his father was put down – probably on an everyday basis – by the two people who loved Gus and cared for him the most," he says, looking pointedly at both Melanie and Lindsay, then me, as he talks. "That had to have affected his view of his father and his relationship with him."

"Why would you say that, Justin?" Lindsay demands. "Are you trying to say that I deliberately turned my son against his own father!?"

"What he's saying..." Grace interrupts Lindsay, "...is that you and Melanie should have both been more careful in what you said around him, especially where it concerned his father."

"What!?! Who are you to talk? Plus, why are you even here; this doesn't concern you," Lindsay spits out at Grace.

"I'm here for the same reason that Karen and Scott are...we care about Gus" Grace retorts.

"Oh, really!?!?! Or...or, is it because you're a home wrecking bitch!?" Lindsay shrieks.

"That's enough, now stop it. This shit is ridiculous," Scott pronounces, taking center stage. "We're all here because of that baby boy outside; we love him and want what's best for him."

"Look, we may have said some things, but never in the presence of Gus; never while he was in hearing range," Melanie defends.

"Mel, do you really believe he never heard you utter a bad word about his father? I know he has, because he told me himself," Justin reveals. "He needs to understand that you didn't leave because of Lindsay and Brian, or both."

"Then clarify this shit, Justin! I've had this talk with Gus on more than one occasion, told him plenty of times there is no one to blame, that sometimes, shit just happens. Do you honestly believe I would not have told him that before now?" Melanie posits. Justin nods his head as to agree. I suppress the anger rising within to address Lindsay.

"You blame me, though, Lindsay, and as long as you do, Gus will too." There. I said it. Put it out there...for her to rebut, retort, or re-something.

"I think we're fooling ourselves if we don't face the fact that my constantly putting you first is one of the causes of my marriage falling apart," Lindsay states. Uhhh...okay. I wasn't expecting that. While I'm thinking of a re-something to her, Justin, my Justin, comes through.

"That's the choice you made, Lindsay. You need to face your own culpability first before pointing the finger at someone else," Justin snorts derisively. "You didn't need to put Brian, or his needs or wants, before your marriage. You wanted to put Brian before your marriage! End. Of. Story."

"I think the best thing is family counseling, with a professional," Karen reasons. "I don't believe this is something we can solve ourselves, and if we try, we may do more harm than good." We all take a moment to contemplate this idea and agree that it's probably the best approach.

"So, I'll do the research for a good psychiatrist and make the appointment, but we need to try and agree on a good time," Melanie says.

We go round and round for about fifteen minutes, before we all finally decide on a day and time that is right for everyone, effectively ending the discussion, and, the evening.

Lindsay yells out the backdoor for Gus, who rolls his eyes at me – guess that's his goodbye – on the way out the door as he, Lindsay and Karen leave; Melanie and Grace right behind them. I'm holding the door, waiting for the guys to leave, when Kenny sidles up to Scott...

"So, Scott, got plans with Greg tonight?" he smirks, watching for my response. I can't help the shocked look that washes over my face. Greg? Who the fuck? Has he moved on already? Can't believe that, but the words that leave Scott's mouth, confirm its truth.

"As a matter of fact I do," Scott deadpans. "Not that who I date is any of your fucking business, though!"

Shit! That was fucking fast! I see how much I'm fucking missed! I sneak a glance at Justin, who's watching me with concern etched on his brow, but says nothing. Fuck 'em all! Scott and his man, Justin and his.

"I think it's time for you all to go," I say, still holding the door open. Scott walks out – not even looking at me – followed by Kenny, with a smug, satisfied look that I wanna fucking slap off his face. I know he said what he did to hurt me, but I can't stop myself from wondering how in the hell he knew about it. The last one out the door is Justin, who places a hand on my face, caressing it, before giving me a quick kiss on the lips and walking out. I know that's his way of offering me comfort.

Though I'm convinced that we accomplished something tonight, I can't help feeling ten times worse than I felt before they came.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Two days since the 'pow-wow' at my house, and I've pretty much gone back to my isolated, empty existence. No one has called, no one comes over, and, apparently, no one really gives a fuck. All I have is myself, and that's not much right now. I'm not much right now.

I'm on my way to Lindsay's house, to visit Gus. I did a little shopping for him, getting some things I think he might need for school, and, of course, a mountain of designer clothes.

I pull into the driveway and wait about ten minutes before getting out, needing to prepare myself for going in there. Not knowing how I'll be received by Gus, plus adding in the 'Lindz' factor, has put me on edge. So, I take this time, thinking of something to say to Gus to at least make him smile at me like he used to. I miss that, miss the short period of time in his life when I was his everything...could do anything...fix anything. That time is long gone, and I can't stop worrying that I may never get it back.

I take a deep breath, hop out of the car, grab the shopping bags and make the walk to Lindz' front door. I raise my knuckles to knock on the door, when it flies open, startling me.

"Wondered how long you were going to stay in the car this time. Lindsay and I had a bet going...she won," Karen grins at me. God I hate that bitch.

"Where's my son?" I demand, walking in and looking around.

"What's with all the bags? Trying to buy his love?" Karen smirks, as she walks into the living room where Lindsay is sitting with her sketchpad in hand, drawing a picture.

"Where's Gus?" I ask again, and she points up the stairs. Guess that means he's in his room. So I trudge up the stairs and barge into his room, where he's sitting on his bed, licking an ice cream cone. I hold the shopping bags up to get his attention and force a lightheartedness to my voice that I don't feel.

"I got you some things; school stuff, clothes and, oh yeah, a couple of pair of shoes." He blinks a couple of times while looking at me and continues to lick the ice cream cone, barely acknowledging the fact I'm in the room.

"Here Gus," I shove the bags at him, "don't you want these?" He just continues to sit there and lick on that damn cone. He blinks his eyes again, turning to stare at the wall, ignoring me. I move around in front of him, arms pinned to my side holding those fucking shopping bags and he just looks right through me, like I'm not even there.

"I'll just lay them on your bed," I say, placing the bags there. "You can look through them when you get the chance," I offer. His response is to roll his eyes.

Now, I've been hurt before, that much I'm willing to admit. I've felt pain before, and I'll admit that, too, but never like this. Nothing in this world could ever have prepared me for what I'm feeling right now. I can't take anymore, can't hold it inside anymore. I start blinking rapidly and take a few breaths, fighting with my feelings to stay where there are, begging them not to show themselves. But it's too much, the rejection is too real. I squeeze my eyes tight, but they come anyway. The tears come, they flow down my face and I try to breathe, but it's so damn hard. I squeeze my eyes again, but still they come.

I never wanted my son to see me like this. Never wanted him to think of me as a broken down man. Any respect he had left for me, I'm sure is gone out the window. I can't help but wonder, why even try anymore? Nothing I do will make a difference, it doesn't matter. I could do a million things and it would change nothing. It's hopeless... I'm hopeless.

I glance down at Gus and he's perfectly still, holding what's left of the cone tightly, causing it to flake and fall onto his lap. I'm brought up short though, by the silent tears coursing down his cheeks, dropping, intermingling with the ice cream.

"Gus," I whisper reaching out to him. He turns his head and slinks back from my touch.

"Please...just...go," he chokes out, as the tears continue down his face.

"I love you. No matter what, always remember that I love you. That will never change. You'll always be my little man," I bend down, planting a kiss on the forehead of my only son, only child, before I walk away, one last time.

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I walk into Woody's, game face on, planning to drink myself into oblivion, or, someplace close to it. That's when I see them. Scott, and...I'm assuming...his new friend. They're shooting pool and sticking their tongues down each other's throats; mind you, not at the same time, though. Not needing to watch my 'ex' acknowledge that he's moved on, I march right back out and think about going to Mikey's.

...Mikey. He called yesterday to let me know that Ben was in the hospital, again. I went there to comfort him, but he pushed me away, stating the need to deal with his pain alone. With all that we've been through, I found it strange that he wanted to be alone. Then I realized that Mikey was protecting me. Not wanting to burden me with his problems, while I was dealing with my own problems. This knowledge didn't make me feel better; just made me remember the times when we were always there for each other...when I knew that he would always be there for me. Guess that time is no more.

I know I'm not supposed to, shouldn't even want to, but I can't help it. I pick up my cell and dial Justin's number. It's picked up on the second ring and I instantly hear a lot of laughing and muffled noise playing in the background. I hang up before someone has the opportunity to say 'hello,' and turn the ringer off. Fuck caller ID and fuck \*69; I don't want them calling back, or at least, having to hear them call back. Justin seems content right now and I know that one phone call from me could ruin all of that. As much as I need him, want him, I can't do that, won't do that.

I lean my head back against the headrest and let my mind go. I've never felt farther from life and closer to death than I do right now. I know depression; I've been depressed, but this feels... different. Like a painful, never-ending cycle of nothingness. Hopelessness. Makes me wonder why I should even bother...tomorrow will be like today, and today was like yesterday. My life will never be any different than it is right now; every...single...day, I die just a little bit and every...single...day, I'm pushed closer to the edge.

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Justin

When we left Brian's, I couldn't shake the nagging feeling that something was wrong. I mean, I knew that Brian was worried about Gus. I also knew that the revelation of Scott and Greg had shaken him up, caught him off-guard. But there was something else though, something deeper and darker; something seemed just a little off about him and I just couldn't seem to put my finger on it. I was quiet all the way home, my mind turning in circles.

"Justin, look, I'm sorry, okay? I know that was pretty fucked up what I did, telling Brian about Scott. I admit it; now can you please stop giving me the silent treatment?" Kenny had said to me as we walked into the house. He assumed I was quiet because I was mad at him. I was, am, mad at him, but that wasn't the reason for my silence; my mind was on Brian.

"Why'd you do it, Kenny, was it just to hurt him?" I'd asked, even though I already knew the answer.

"He hurt me," Kenny had explained, like that made it okay. I just shook my head and left him standing there.

It's two days later that I recall that conversation – Kenny and I are lounging on the couch, watching some stand-up comic act – when the phone rings. I reach behind me to answer it, but I'm laughing hard and have to compose myself before saying hello. Once I do so, the line is dead. No one is there, so I twist around to hang up the phone, simultaneously checking the caller ID and Brian's number blinks back at me.

"Who was it?" Kenny questions.

"Brian...but he hung up." I nudge Kenny to move so I can get up. "Something must be wrong, he wouldn't call otherwise," I say, mostly to myself. Kenny looks at me, his face hardening and lets out a big breath.

"Call him then, Justin. I know you want to," he throws his hands up in defeat. "Call him and make sure everything is all right...with Gus."

I call back and get his voicemail. I try his home phone and, same thing.

"Something is wrong; he's not answering the phone," I'm saying this while putting on my coat and grabbing my car keys.

"Of course, you're running to the rescue," Kenny pouts, coming to stand in front of me.

"I have to," I say, pleading for him to understand.

"Sure you have to. You always do," he mumbles, flipping the power button on the remote to turn the TV off, and walking away from me. I stand there, watching him for a minute, before heading out the door. There's nothing I can say to him to make him understand, and right now I don't have time to even try. Brian needs me, I know he does, and I have to get to him.

I practically run to my car, dialing his number and inserting my key in the lock at the same time. Shit! Still no answer. I gun the engine and point the car towards his house, hoping all the while that everything is okay. I get there in record time, noting that his car is gone. Fuck. I run up the walkway anyway and alternate between pounding on his door and peeking through the transom windows. Of course there's no answer...he's not home.

I swoop back down the walkway and have one leg in my car, when I see Scott pull up. I jerk my leg out and rush over to him. "Have you seen Brian?" I breathlessly ask, no time for pleasantries.

"Yeah, I saw him. Earlier. At Woody's. I was with Greg and I know he saw us. He left abruptly and I wanted to make sure everything was alright. I tried calling several times, but he's not answering his phone, so I came over here," he says.

"He saw you and Greg, together?" I repeat needlessly, and he nods his head. I get a sinking feeling in my stomach; now I know something is wrong. I've got to find Brian.

"Well, he's not here; I don't know where he is," I throw over my shoulder, running back to my car. I consider where else he could be and immediately think of Gus. I zoom off, dialing Lindsay's number...busy. Shit! Doesn't anyone have call waiting?!

Lindsay opens the door – with a puzzled look – at the sound of screeching tires in her driveway. When she spots me, her face immediately gives way to a tentative smile, which all changes when I sprint up to her, invading her personal space, demanding answers.

"Have you seen Brian?" I gasp, hoping they have some insight into where he is. Lindsay just blinks and opens the door wider, indicating that I come in the house. I enter, immediately feeling the tense atmosphere.

Lindsay shuts the door, wringing her hands together. "Justin, I've been trying to get in touch with Brian also, but he won't answer his phone and...."

"...What happened?" I cut her off, bracing myself for the worst. I then notice Gus, who has apparently been in the living room this entire time, has a flood of tears pouring down his face. This does not bode well, at all.

"Tmmm...I'm not sure. He was over here earlier, with some items for Gus, and then he tore out of here, like a bat outta hell. And the look on his face...my God, Justin. I don't know, it was.... It was a look I've never seen on him before. I tried to stop him to talk to me, but he just brushed me off, mumbled something about love and rejection,

then he was...gone. I immediately went to talk to Gus, but he wouldn't answer me. I tried for over an hour to get something out of him before I finally just gave up and tried calling Brian," she snivels.

Suddenly Gus runs across the room, throwing his arms around me.

"I didn't mean to make him cry, Justin, I swear I didn't. I'm sorry," he cries out, collapsing into my arms and holding on for dear life. His body trembles and he sobs in a way that I've never heard. I hold him in my arms, rubbing circles on his back and let my own tears fall. I hear Lindsay let out a sob and she comes to gather Gus up into her arms.

"It's okay," she sniffs out. "I've got him; you go find Brian,"

"I'll be back Gus. I'm going to go find your dad and when we get back, we'll sort this all out," I say reassuringly. I leave, the image of Mother and son trying to comfort each other, burned into my skull.

There's no further need to call him, I have a feeling I know where he is. There's only one thing left to do now...I push the gas pedal to the floor, praying I'm not wrong.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

I make it to my house in record time; once inside I set the gun on the table and go about getting pen and paper to write my goodbyes. That done, I walk out to my mailbox, placing them inside, to be picked up by the mailman the next day.

I then shuffle into the room where Justin's art is, and sit for a while; thinking back on better days. I get up, heart heavy, gun in hand, and go into my room. I put on some soft music for background noise and prepare myself for what must be done.

"Are you really that selfish?" a voice asks me, and I look up to see Justin standing in the doorway.

"Why are you here?" I ask, wanting nothing more than for him to go away and leave me to my destiny.

"I asked you a question first. Are you really so selfish that you would pull that trigger and leave your son without a father?" he questions softly. What!?! Where the fuck has he been the last couple of months?

"You call what we have now a healthy relationship?" I snort.

"I call what I see. I just left a little boy crying his heart out, because he thinks he hurt his daddy. Gus loves you. I know it's going to take time for you two to get where you want to be, but he does love you," Justin states.

"He's still crying?" I ask, amazed.

"Yeah, and he says he's sorry he made you cry, so I told him I was going to get his father and bring him back. You're not going to make me into a liar, are you?" Justin inquires, coming a little closer to me. I close my eyes and let a tear roll down my face. I'm so mixed up...don't know what's right or wrong, anymore.

"I've always loved you baby, always. Even when I pushed you away, even when I did fucked-up shit, I still loved you. I'm so sorry for making you feel the way I did, so many times. I hurt you so many times," I say, and then I start to shake uncontrollably. The pain takes over my body and I see Justin move a little closer.

"It's okay, Brian. I know you love me and all of that is in the past. Please, just put the gun down and let's go see Gus," he begs.

"Justin, please...help me, I don't...don't want to die," I plead, and he inches closer, now standing directly in front of me.

"Give me the gun," he holds out his hand, palm up, and I put it to my head, then I bring it back down.

"I want to live," I say. I want to live, I think to myself.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Justin

"I want to live," Brian says, and that's when I know. Know that everything is going to be alright. I take another step toward him and I reach out, my hand open, palm up. He hesitates – putting the gun to his head, then bringing it down again – tries to hand me the gun, but fuck...time then ceases to move and I'm not exactly sure what happens. He fumbles the gun in his hands and...and, somehow – BANG! – it goes off! Shooting him through the chest. I watch, helpless, as his once beautiful, strong and agile body crumples to the floor.

"BRRRIIIIIIIAAAAANNNNN!" I scream, watching with detached amazement, as blood starts to seep onto the floor, puddling up, growing larger. I fall to the floor beside him, gathering him in my arms, rocking him back and forth, willing him to live... He stares at me, eyes glassy, lids drooping, to raise a weak hand up, touching my face.

"Always...cough ...love you...cough...always love Gus," he says as his life slips away.

"We love you too, always," I cry, tears streaming down my face. But he's gone still.

"Brian...Please...Just open your eyes," I'm pleading, tears blinding my sight, but I don't let go of him; hug him tighter. "Please don't leave me here. Please, baby, just wake up. I love you, please don't leave me! PLEASE WAKE UP!" I yell, holding his lifeless body to me. Through my tears, I glimpse the smoking gun lying on the floor. I reluctantly shift Brian in my arms to slowly pick it up and place to my head...

"I love you, baby," I whisper to Brian, right before I pull the trigger.

Justin slumps over Brian.

So ends the life of Justin Taylor and Brian Kinney. Together at last, for all eternity.

The End

Mirror Images Series



Everyone has a twin, including Brian...right?

Chapter 1

Justin

I don't know what the hell is happening to me, but I keep seeing Brian in the strangest places. Places I know he shouldn't be. Like right now. I'm bopping down the street following behind him, but that make no sense because he went to Washington on business, two days ago. I took him to the airport myself. Now...I'm not saying I don't trust him, we've been back together for four months and it's taken a lot on both our parts to make it work, but, fuck me, if that ain't Brian.

The funny thing though is that we are now a lot closer than ever before, including the whole Ethan thing. I don't know if he still tricks or not, I won't fool myself into thinking that he's stopped. I can say that I've not seen him do anything in all of the time that we've been back together and I know that I've been faithful. Still, something is going on, because that is definitely Brian that I'm following. He enters a little café, greeting both a woman and man. I stand back, out of sight, and watch. God, now I really do feel like a damn stalker. He takes the woman in his arms and tongues her down. Whoa...what the fuck is going on here! I'm ready to confront him when I see him grab the man and kiss him with so much passion and love that I think I'm going to fucking fall down onto the pavement. Who the fuck are these people? They all sit down together and I flee from there. I've seen enough. Something is going on and I'm not even sure I want to know what it is.

The way he kissed them. It was like he loved them, loved them both. But that makes no sense – Brian doesn't do pussy. I return home, sulking. Now I'm glad that I never moved back into the loft with him, cause I'd probably be homeless again.

Brian won't be returning for another two days; I was to meet him at the airport. Well, I guess I'll have the final say; no way will I be there, waiting for him. I refuse to be a part of this little game that he's playing.

I'm not sure if I should just confront him out right or allow him to dig himself into a hole. But I know what I saw. I've been seeing him ever since he supposedly got on the plane. Thought I was the one going crazy, guess not. Wonder how long this shit has been going on? Him claiming he has to go away on business, just so he can go where around.

I decide to end my pity party and head to Babylon. I go in with the intent of partying until I drop...trying to ease my pain. I'm not going there to see whom I can pick up – that's not the frame of mind I'm in. I don't want some trick. I want Brian. But right now I need to dance, to relieve some of this damn stress.

I hit the dance floor as soon as I walk in. Some guy comes in front of me and starts dancing while another one slithers up behind me. I'm sandwiched between the two, dancing till my heart's content...when someone cuts in. Damn! It's Emmett. Why the hell is he cutting in?

"While the cats away the mouse will play, huh?" he asks as he shimmies his hips to the music.

"Whatever," I answer not ready to tell him what's going on with Brian. It's none of his business.

"Where's Ted?" I ask, changing the subject. I came here to take my mind off of Brian, not to be reminded of him. Actually, to be honest, Babylon is not the best place to come, to get, Brian-off-the-brain.

"Over there," he says pointing to the bar where I see Ted, Michael and Ben all looking my way. I wonder if they stare at Brian like that when he comes here alone.

"Let's go have a drink," Emmett says grabbing my hand and pulling me off the dance floor. This is not what I came here for, to be bothered with the boyz. I look around Babylon trying to find quick escape routes, but before I know it, I'm standing in front of all of them.

"So...when is Brian due back?" Ted asks with a little smirk on his face. I guess they all think I'm here to pick someone up. Well fuck them all! They don't know shit! Not that it's any on there business any damn way. Still it makes me mad that they think they know me so well.

I glance at Michael and know he's not going to say anything. He's done pretty well, this time around, staying out of Brian's relationship with me. As hard as that may be, he's minded his own business.

"Let's get some drinks," Ben cajoles. I look at Mikey and Ben, and then Emmett and Ted. All happy little couples. They make me wanna puke. I can't watch this shit; not after what I saw today. Not after the awful turn that Brian and I have taken in our relationship.

"I'm outta here," I announce and start to walk away, feeling incredibly suffocated and needing air.

Emmett leans back, elbows on the bar, stating, "Not the same without his majesty here, is it?" Now, I love Emmett, but I'm so not in the mood for his shit. They all look at me, smirking sourly.

"Why don't you all just fuck off?" I leave four shocked expressions behind me. Fuck them!

Brian

I've been waiting in this damn airport for 30 minutes and still no Justin. Where the fuck is his ass? I've called him, but he's not answering the phone so I assume he's on the way. The time keeps ticking, but still no sight of his bubble butt. I just finally give up and catch a cab home. He better have a damn good excuse ready.

I walk into the loft calling his name and get no answer. I quickly change my clothes and set out to Justin's place. Now I've started to trust him again or at least I'm trying too, but shit like this makes me think he's somewhere fucking around. Why else wouldn't he answer my calls or meet me at the airport?

I knock at his door, get no answer and proceed to bang on it for about five minutes before giving up and thinking 'fuck it.' It doesn't take anybody that long to open the damn door.

I decide to head to the diner and catch up with the gang. I walk in immediately sensing his presence. Yeah, there's the little shit, sitting with the guys. What the fuck does he think he's doing?

I sidle over to their booth and pierce him with my gaze. "Did you forget something?" I ask. He lets out a big sign. Excuse me?!?! What the fuck? Am I inconveniencing him?

"Brian! When did you get back?" Mikey asks, smiling up at me. At least some-damn-body is happy to see me.

“Just now. Caught a cab from the airport,” I pronounce, looking at Justin for some kind of reaction. He looks up at me and rolls his eyes. What the fuck did I do now and what’s his problem?

“Why the fuck didn’t you pick me up?” I ask, feeling my frustration start to rise. He seems so fucking unconcerned. What the fuck has happened to him?

“Pick you up from where, exactly?” he asks, looking at me with two very cold eyes. I can feel the heat of his anger radiating from him.

“Pick me up from where?” “Airport,” I answer. I don’t get it...he seemed pretty happy when I left. Why this attitude?

“Okay. So what in the hell is going on?” I smirk, eyeing the occupants of the booth. Fuck me, they look as confused as I am.

“I saw you the other day,” he announces, like it’s supposed to explain everything.

“Saw me? Where?” looking at Justin closely to see if I can tell what kind of drugs he’s on. That’s the only explanation.

“Like you don’t know,” he snorts. This is too fucking weird.

“What the fuck has he taken?” I ask no one in particular. Ted just shrugs his shoulders, while Emmett rolls his eyes and Michael looks straight ahead. Finally, Ben speaks.

“We don’t know. We’re just seeing him for the first time today, after he told us all to fuck off the other night,” Ben adds, grinning. Justin looks around the table, contritely.

“Sorry about that,” he says, face softening. Then he turns back to me, a look of disgust in his eyes. I’ve had enough. I stare at Justin waiting for him to explain to me what the hell is going on.

“How’s your other boyfriend? Oh...how’s your girlfriend, too? Can’t leave her out, now can we?” he practically spits out.

“My what?”

“Your secret is out. I saw the three of you the other day,” he says in a matter-of-fact tone of voice. Has Justin gone insane? All I can do is stare in horror at him. What the fuck would make him think I’ve got a girlfriend? Talk about being confused.

“Justin, what are you talking about? I just got back in town!”

“Yeah right,” he grunts, moving out of the booth and leaving the diner.

“You...have a girlfriend?” Ted guffaws, tears starting to stream down his face. I roll my eyes and walk away. I need to find Justin. I think he may be having a nervous breakdown or losing his mind. By the time I get outside, he’s gone. Fuck!

I race to the loft thinking he may be there, but that’s just wishful thinking. Damn! What the hell do I do now?

Justin

I can’t believe that fucking Brian! Yesterday he walks into the diner and has the nerve to question why I didn’t pick him up at the airport, even knowing that I saw him at the café and would be pissed! He still tries to deny it. I don’t

get it! I wonder if he'll have the nerve to go meet with them again. I decide to make a little trip back to the café just to see.

Once there, I take a seat in the back, feeling like a complete idiot to be spying on the man I love. I see two familiar faces enter the café and about ten minutes later, Brian strides in, greeting them the same way he did before...with deep kisses! Fuck this shit! I rise, stalking over to the table. I want answers and want them now!

Brian looks up at me, a small smile escaping his lips. I get a weird feeling that he's imagining me naked. What the hell is wrong with him?

"What's up, sexy?" he purrs, giving me a wink. Huh?!?! He's fucking flirting with me! In front of these people? I can't fucking believe it!

I steal a glance at his two companions and can't resist asking who they are. "Who are these people?"

He seems a little taken aback, but answers me nonetheless. "This is Sharon," he replies, pointing to the woman and she smiles at me. Bitch! He nods in the direction of the guy and introduces him. "That's Frank." Frank smiles too. Fucking bastard.

"So. You were here with them the other day then?" I ask. He shrugs his shoulders before responding.

"Yeah, I saw you over there, peeking around the corner. Why didn't you come over and introduce yourself?" he smirks. Okay, this is strange, I realize. Brian is dead serious. He must be having some kind of mental breakdown. The best thing I can do for now is play along with him.

"I'm Justin," I tell Sharon and Frank, offering my hand to be shaken.

"Why don't you join us, Justin? My treat," Brian asks. I sit down and Frank let's out a long sigh. I guess he doesn't like me taking a seat. Well, fuck him!

"We still on for tonight?" Sharon asks, rubbing Brian's hand, while smiling at him seductively. He leans over the table and gives her a kiss, full on the lips!

"Not tonight, lovely" he purrs. What the fuck?! I can't take anymore. I don't know who the fuck these people are, but I'm not going to stand for much more of this.

"So you like pussy now?" I hiss. Brian looks confused, then answers.

"I love cock, but I like her pussy," he smiles at her. I see her give Frank a smug look, but Frank's not looking at her. His eyes are glued on Brian and he appears to be madder than hell. Well, take a number and get in line.

"How long have you know them?" I demand of Brian, seething.

"Since college...But enough about them, let's talk about you. Tell everyone something about yourself." Taking deep breaths, I think about how scared I am for Brian. He's obviously gone off the deep end, so I decide the best thing I can do is go along with him. I tell them all about my studies at PIFA; Sharon and Frank seem uninterested, but Brian soaks it all up, even asking me questions that he never bothered with before. Guess he's showing off for these people. I finally wind down my diatribe noting the relieved looks on the bitch and bastards faces. They announce to Brian they must go. Sharon leaves first followed by Frank. Both make sure to give Brian long deep kisses oblivious to the glares of some of the other patrons.

"Don't you have to get back to work?" I ask looking at my watch. I don't want to let him out of my sight, but I need time to call someone for help. I can't deal with this shit by myself.

"That's one of the benefits of being a partner. I can take my lunch anytime and as long as I want to," he smirks. "So, Justin. What made you come up and talk to us? Did you find us interesting? Did you find me interesting?" He asks

the last question, trying to give me a sexy look. God, he really has gone crazy. I alternate between wanting to slap the shit out of him or take him to the doctor, but I decide to just play it cool.

“Yeah, it’s you,” I say breathily and he smiles.

“Then let’s go,” he stands up, holding his hand out for me. I grab it and we walk out of the café.

“Where we headed?”

“Wherever you want,” he replies, swinging our arms back and forth.

“Really? What about work? Don’t you have to get back?” I rush out.

“That’s the good thing about being a partner. I can take the rest of the day off, if I want. The world of advertising can do without me for a few hours,” he laughs.

“Okay, then let’s go to the museum,” I suggest and he smiles again.

“Are we walking?” I want to know.

“Sure, why not? Is it a problem?”

“No. No problem, at all” I say and really, it isn’t a problem.

We hit the museum and Brian surprises me by not only showing interest, but also knowing just as much if not more than I do. I guess we all have our secrets. We then decide to go to the movies. I start wondering if maybe he’s playing some kind of game with me. I mean he’s acting different. But he seems like a very intelligent and sane man. I’m so confused I don’t know what to do.

“I guess we should end the night by going out to dinner,” he says pulling me into his embrace. I put my arms around him and he leans down and gives me a kiss. Fuck! Even his kiss is a little different. What the fuck is going on? I don’t get it.

“Where do you want to eat?” It’s pretty much been my day so I guess he can pick a place to eat.

He decides on a little Italian place and I look down at my jeans and tee shirt.

“It’s okay. I’ve brought Frank here a few times and he never seems to care what he’s got on,” he laughs. Okay there it is again, reminding me of that. We’ve done well all evening not talking about anyone but ourselves. Except for the mention of Gus one time and he didn’t seem to know whom I was talking about. Swore outright that he didn’t have a son. I could have done without the remainder of the other two, though.

We take our seats and after perusing the menu, I decide on the baked ziti. Brian surprises me by getting the same.

“I still think Deb’s taste better,” I say as I dig in. He looks confused, then he asks.

“Who’s Deb?” Okay here we go again. We’re having so much fun that I keep forgetting what’s going on with him.

“It’ll be alright,” I coo, patting his hand.

“Okay Justin,” he says giving me a weary look.

We spend the rest of the night talking about anything but the gang. When we finish I try to go home with him, but he laughs and ask me for my phone number. I play along and give it to him then he puts me in a cab, sending me home. Once the cab jets from the curb, I tell the cabbie of the change of plans and give him the address to the loft.

Half an hour later, still standing outside Brian's place waiting for him, I consider the fact that maybe he got there before me. I punch in the code to the building and walk up the stairs. I have my key so I go right in. I look around, but it's obvious he hasn't made it home yet. A strange feeling overcomes me and I decide to leave.

I enter the diner expecting to see him, but he's not there and neither are any of the guys. I glance around, looking for Debbie, but I guess it's her night off. Walking into Woody's, I scan the crowd, but again, no sign of Brian. I order a drink and weigh my options. Seems the only one available to me is to return to the loft and wait for him. I down two more beers and take off for Brian's.

This time when I go in I see that he's not only made it home, but he's changed out of his suit. He looks shocked when he sees me come in.

Brian

I enter the loft, leaving a trail of clothes as I strip. I pick up the phone to call Justin when...he walks through the door.

...“Where the fuck have you been? I've been worried sick about you!” I say, slamming the phone down and trying not to upset him too much. I'm not sure how much he can handle. He looks at me and his mouth drops to the floor.

“What?! I've been with you all fucking day,” he claims. Oh God, Justin! I swallow hard and carefully make my way over to him.

“Justin,” I sooth. “I've been at work all day. We've been swamped. Hell I even had to miss my lunch break,” I say, still a little pissed about that.

“I've been with you all day Brian! I had lunch with you...and...and, Frank and Sharon!” he stammers. I fight back the emotions that I'm feeling because now I have no doubt in my mind that Justin has gone off the deep end. I have absolutely no idea what the hell he's talking about.

“Frank and Sharon? Who the fuck are they?” I ask even though I'm sure that they are people that he's conjured up in his head.

“Frank is your other boyfriend and Sharon is your girlfriend. Remember? You like her pussy!” He's screaming now and I think the best thing for me to do is get to the phone and call for help.

“Brian please tell me you understand what I'm saying to you. We went to the movies and museum. We even walked!” He takes a breath then goes on. “We ate at a little Italian restaurant and I made a lame comment on how Deb's ziti tasted better than the restaurant's did and then you put me in a cab home.” He starts tearing up so I go to him and wrap my arms around him.

“It's okay Brian, we're going to get your some help,” he sniffs. Right like I'm the one who needs it.

“Let me call your mom and Debbie,” I say, pulling back and walking towards the phone.

“You remember who Debbie is?” he exclaims. This is worst than I thought. What would make him think I didn't know whom Debbie was. I don't know, but I do like he asks. I don't explain, I just tell Debbie that it's urgent and to gather everyone and come to the loft. Then I call Jennifer and tell her to get over here fast.

I feel a little relieved after placing the call and Justin looks relieved as well.

Soon the loft is full with everyone starting to speak at the same time, asking questions. I put my hand up to silence the, and start to speak, but Justin beats me to it.

“Brian needs our help, I think he's having a breakdown,” Justin says without preamble. I walk over to him, hugging him from behind.

“Actually, guys. Justin is suffering from some type of mental breakdown. He swears we spent all day together and that I’ve got a boyfriend name Frank and a girlfriend name Sharon.” Jaws drop and everyone stares at Justin.

“It’s true,” he announces. “I saw them with my own eyes. I don’t know what’s going on with Brian.” He says that while glancing at me. “We all ate lunch together and then it was just the two of us. You never went back to work, saying it was one of the benefits of being a partner and that the world of advertising could do without you for one day.” He looks around the room begging for someone to believe him.

“Justin honey, I went by Brian’s office this afternoon and he was there, knee-deep in work,” Lindsay says, her voice tinged with concern.

“I spoke with Brian a couple of times today and he was at work each time,” Michael says looking at his mom for some sort of support.

“LIARS!” Justin screams out. “You are all lying!” I know I’m not crazy! I have the movie ticket stub in my pocket! He pulls it out and lays it on the table like that alone proves everything that he’s said.

At this point, Jennifer stands up trying not to look terrified. “Sweetie, let’s get you home and in the morning we can go to the doctor.”

“I don’t need a doctor! I need some air,” Justin grits out, stepping outside the door.

“Do you think it’s wise to let him out there alone?” Ted inquires. I don’t want him to think we don’t trust him, but still he’s not in a right frame of mind. I open the door to peek out, but he’s gone. I take the stairs two at a time, racing out the building door, but Justin’s nowhere to be found. Fuck! I fly back up the stairs stopping only to get my car keys.

“He’s gone! Everybody move! Whomever finds him first, call!” I bark, flying outside the loft, my search for Justin on.

Chapter 2

Justin

Once outside, I take off running. Something is not adding up right and I don’t know what to do. So I continue running, stopping only when my cell phone rings.

“Hello?” I pant into the phone, praying that it’s somebody who can tell me what the hell is going on.

“Justin? I’ve been thinking about you since I put you in the cab. I can’t get you out of my mind. I can’t remember the last time that I’ve felt this way. I had a good time today and the night is still young. Can we meet somewhere?”

“Brian??” I ask

“Sure. I told you if you want my name to be Brian then, so be it. Now where can we meet?” Maybe I’m crazy, but I’m ready to get to the bottom of this.

“The diner,” I say curtly.

“What diner? You mean the café we ate at?” Oh God, this is so fucking crazy.

“No. I mean the Liberty Diner. On Liberty Avenue.

“Oh. Never been in there, just passed by a few times. I know where it is. I’ll meet you there,” he replies. I now have proof. I dial Lindsay’s cell phone and she answers on the first ring.

“Lindsay get everyone together and tell them to come to the diner,” I proclaim. That’s where I’ll be, as I start to the diner by foot.

By the time I arrive, everyone is already there, asking hordes of questions.

“So why did you want to meet here, Sunshine?” Deb asks me. I glance at Brian.

“Well!” I say. He looks confused.

“Well what, Justin?”

“Didn’t you just call telling me you wanted to meet. You said you couldn’t stop thinking about me after putting me in the cab?” I ask

“What cab, Justin? I haven’t talked to you since you ran out the loft!”

“You just called and we talked!” I say through gritted teeth.

“I’ve been with him the whole time, Justin and I didn’t hear him talking to you on the phone,” Ted says. Just then I look up and I see Brian coming toward me with a big grin on his face. But that’s not possible…he’s also standing beside me. What the fuck? I look around and everyone’s looking between Brian and…well, Brian. They come face-to-face, both of them looking alarmed.

“Who the fuck are you?” the Brian who came with the rest of the gang demands to know.

“I’m Kevin. But Justin here likes to call me Brian,” he answers pulling me into his embrace. Brian yanks me back toward him.

“I’m Brian,” he pronounces. I can see the realization dawn on Kevin the same time that it dawns on me.

“Is there someone here named Debbie?” Kevin wants to know. Debbie raises her hand, still too shocked to speak.

“Where are Frank and Sharon?” I ask, just to make sure.

“At my place, resting. They have an early flight in the morning and we wouldn’t want them to miss it,” he purrs. They don’t live here you know…just visiting.”

“Who the fuck is playing this cruel joke on us? There is no way I can deal with two Brian Kinney’s,” Melanie shrieks out.

“My name is not Brian, it’s Kevin Miller. I just moved here from Denver. I’m a partner in the advertising firm, Baker and Wright. I’ve heard a lot about you, Brian Kinney. You were the top advertising man here, huh?” Kevin inquires.

“What do you mean, were? I’ve heard about you also; some hotshot from Denver, that probably doesn’t know shit. Others may be impressed with you, but I’m not,” Brian says, getting closer to Kevin. Kevin chuckles and steps back, a funny look on his face.

“You know that I’m adopted,” Kevin stuns us by saying. “I know my parents first name but that’s it,” Kevin says looking at Brian. Everyone else looks like they are trying to figure out where this conversation came from.

“Jack?” Lindsay tenuously asks.

“And Joanie!” Kevin exclaims with a toothy grin.

“Aren’t those your parents’ names, Brian?” Emmett ask, but Brian says nothing.

“Those are the names of his parents,” Melanie answers for him.

“So....you’re my long-lost twin, then?” Kevin smirks. Shit! What the fuck does all of this mean?

“I’m not your long-lost anything; I don’t have a fucking brother,” Brian grits out, trying to walking out of the dinner, Kevin stepping in front of him.

“Don’t I have a right to know my parents?” he demands.

“What parents? You’re fucking lucky! You got off easy! You want to meet your mother, then fine, you can meet her! But you are a little too late to meet dear old dad because he’s dead!” Brian roars at Kevin. I see shock register on Kevin’s face, but he quickly hides it. I guess he and Brian share one trait in common.

“Take me to her,” he demands of Brian. Brian turns and storms out of the diner, Kevin following close behind. We are left, pondering what the hell just happened.

“Holy shit! I feel like I should be doing something; just don’t know what it is,” Deb exclaims, clasping and unclasping her hands.

“It’s amazing,” Lindsay says in awe. “They look just alike...and sound alike also. Know wonder you couldn’t tell them apart Justin.”

“Great! Just what we need – another Brian Kinney to take over Liberty Avenue – leaving even less for guys like me,” Ted complains, which of course gets him a funny look from Emmett.

“Not that I’m looking, or anything,” Ted clarifies.

“I really don’t know what to say. I guess his mom has a lot of questions to answer,” Michael needlessly says, looking worried. I guess he’s wondering how Brian is taking all of this. I wonder the same thing. This is not going to be easy, at all.

Brian

I ease into my car and Kevin jumps in on the passenger side, right before I hit the gas paddle. All the way to my mom’s house he’s trying to talk to me, but I’m not paying him any mind. I can’t believe this fucking shit! I can’t get to Joanie’s house fast enough. She better be ready with some answers because there is no getting around this one. I guess Sunshine wasn’t crazy after all.

Damn. This also means that Justin and Kevin spent the whole day together doing the things that Justin said. I glance at Kevin already regretting the question I was going to ask.

“So you were with Justin all day, huh? Why?” Kevin looks at me then gives off a little smirk. God, it’s like looking into a goddamn mirror.

“I like him, I enjoy his company, he’s so full of life, and so easy to please. Think I may be seeing more of him,” Kevin grins.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea,” I let him know. He shrugs his shoulders and I assume that he got the message.

We pull up in front of Joanie’s and I notice my sister’s car. Great....I guess we can have one big family reunion.

“Wait out here,” I tell Kevin, walking into the house. My mom and sister are sitting in the living room, chatting.

“Where’re the kids?” I ask Claire and she looks up at me.

“With their father. What are you doing here?” I ignore her, going to sit beside my mom. She gives me a weary look.

“When dad told you to get rid of me – because he didn’t want another kid – I have to wonder how he’d have felt knowing there were two more kids instead of just one?” There is a sharp intake of breath and I watch her eyes grow wide.

“Brian, why are you here? What are you up to now?” Claire spits out.

“I’m just wondering how dad would have felt if I was a twin, that’s all.” I get up, ready to walk to the door and am greeted with Kevin entering the house. I guess he got tired of waiting. Upon seeing Kevin, both my mom and my sister are frozen, rooted to their respective spots. The only thing moving are their eyes and they dart back and forth between Kevin and me. I finally decide to speak.

“Kevin...this is your mom, Joan Kinney; and this is your sister, Claire.”

“What the hell is going on?” Claire demands, coming to stand in front of me.

“I’m sorry,” my mom says in a voice so quiet, I can hardly hear her. “Please. Can you all sit down and let me explain.” We do as asked, all eyes turning to her.

“Brian...Claire...you know that you father never wanted another child,” mom addresses Claire and I, looking at Kevin...”that’s no secret. So when we give birth to twins there was no compromising, one had to be given up for adoption.”

“I can’t believe this. Mother, how could you!” Clair wails. Tears stream down her face and she’s sniffing hard. For the first time in my life I feel for my sister. For the first time I actually want to comfort her because I know what she’s feeling. I’m feeling it too.

“I didn’t have a choice. You don’t understand how things were,” she defends herself. “I know who Kevin is. I know everything about him. I know that he’s the head of a major advertising company in Denver. I know that his parents’ names are Mildred and Charles Miller,” she says.

“How do you know all of this?” Kevin asks shakily. “You are right...those are my parents and I was in advertising in Denver, but now I’ve been transferred here.”

“So you live here in Pittsburgh?” my mom questions.

“Yeah, but how did you know so much about me?” Kevin replies.

“I’ve always known where you were and what you were doing. I have a distant cousin who was here when I gave birth to you. She had a best friend who had been trying to adopt. That’s whom you went to. My cousin has always kept me informed about you.

“Aunt Betty,” Kevin whispers. I wonder what the hell he’s talking about now.

“Yes. My cousin’s name was Betty. She told me that you two were close,” my mom smiles.

“So, were do we go from here. I would like to get to know you and Brian and Clair...that is...if you want to know me,” Kevin looks uncertain, but my mom and sister are quick to ease his fears.

“I would love getting to know you. I want to spend time with you and try to be a part of your life. I know I can’t make-up for all the time that I missed, but we can start here, right now,” my mom pats his hand and he pulls her into a hug.

“I have two sons so you also have two nephews who I know would be more than happy to meet you,” Claire intones.

“Two!? I think I have three nephews, right? I mean Brian, you have a son named Gus, don’t you?” Shit! Justin. I wonder what else Justin unknowingly told him about my life and me.

“Leave my son out of this,” I say, knowing the moment I do, all hell is going to break loose.

“You have a...I, uh...you have a...son? And you never told me? Your own mother?” My mom’s on the verge of tears and sis is looking like she’s ready to pass out. I guess this is a lot to swallow, in one day.

“Gus, is not your concern,” I say in a deadly tone.

“What do you mean he’s not my concern, Brian? He’s my grandson for God’s sake!” I want to believe that if I let her become a part of Gus’ life that I won’t regret it.

“It’s okay, Brian. When you’re ready, I’ll be here.” She quickly changes tactics, playing the perfect mother...whatever.

“I’m leaving. Kevin, you can come with me or you can stay the night at mommy’s house, but either way I’m gone.” I jump up and walk to the door. Kevin stands up as well. He and Claire quickly exchange phone numbers and addresses, doing the same with my mom. I walk on out, leaving them alone to say their goodbyes.

I’m sitting in the car when he finally comes out of the house.

“I guess we all have a lot of catching up to do,” he jokes. I just roll my eyes.

“So. You like pussy, huh?” I can’t help asking. Justin has kept on and on about some lady name Sharon.

“I like Sharon, but we are more friends then anything else. I do want her to have my child and we’ve been practicing a lot...so who knows?”

I cringe at that, shaking my head. “What about Frank?”

“Frank has been with me since college...well they both have, really. They are the two constants in my life. I fuck them, but they are more like friends. They still live in Denver and were just here visiting. They leave in the morning.” We pull back up to the diner, but before he gets out the car I guess he feels the need to tell me one last thing.

“I love Frank and Sharon, but I’m not in love with them. Now this Justin...that’s something else entirely different. Call it a hunch, but I can already picture myself with him. We have chemistry. I think this could lead to something...”

“...I thought I told you before that Justin is off-limits,” I interrupt his fantasy. Somehow I feel more threatened by him than I have of anyone else. He looks at me for a moment trying to read my thoughts, before speaking.

“I want us to be friends at least, Brian. If you say that Justin is off-limits, then fine, he’s off-limits. I can settle for just being his friend. Now I won’t be so easy in other matters though. I’m serving notice....I intend to take over your clients and when Vanguard goes out of business, I may consider giving you a job at my firm,” he smirks at me. God, he is arrogant as hell! Who the fuck does he think he is anyway? Take over my clients? Vanguard out of business?

“Yeah, well we’ll see about that,” I say, glancing through the windows into the diner. Looks like everyone has gone home.

“We’ll have to get together soon, Brian. I want to talk with you. If I didn’t have those two waiting at home for me to be taken to the airport, I’d come to your place now.

“Yeah. Whatever. You were ready to leave them at your place to come out here and be with Justin,” I point out.

"Justin's special. You of all people should know that, but of course if you don't, I can always show you just how special he is," Kevin laughs, walking to his car. Fuck! What the hell am I going to do now?

Chapter 3

Brian

Arriving home I take note of Justin, lying on the couch, asleep. Quickly discarding clothes, I decide to wake him.

"What's up, sleepyhead?" I ask, gently shaking his shoulder. He sits up, scrubbing his eyes.

"Brian..." he starts, stretching his arms over his head, "when did you get home?"

"Just got here," I answer as I walk into the bedroom. He comes behind me, wrapping his arms tightly around my waist.

"Is everything alright?" I can hear the concern in his voice.

"Fine. Everything is fine," I assure him.

I ease into bed, pulling the sheets over me. I have a bitch of a headache and all I want is sleep, blissful sleep. I feel Justin's eyes bore through my prone figure, then hear the rustle of clothes being removed before he joins me in bed. I automatically spoon up against him, running my palm over his shoulder. He doesn't push. He knows me well enough not to. It's not what I need right now.

I wake up early the next morning wanting to get a head start on this damn baby food account I'm trying to snag. I've got to be on my game, considering what I've heard about Kevin Miller. Rumor has it that he hasn't lost an account yet and is as ruthless and cutthroat as they come. Now that I've met him, I'm pretty sure this is more fact than fiction. I can't afford to slip. I glance at Justin realizing it's not only business that I have to worry about with Kevin.

"Hey...whatcha doing up so early?" he asks, taking a seat in my lap. He places a soft kiss on my lips, then scoots his butt back to make room before kissing his way down my body. It's a minute before he notices my lack of response.

"Okay," he scrunches his nose in surprise or is it displeasure. "What's wrong?"

"How come you didn't know it was me Justin?" I casually ask out of the blue.

"Are you kidding? How the hell was I suppose to know? You look just alike. Shit...you even dress alike!" he exclaims.

"We don't act alike," I observe, dryly.

"I thought you'd gone off the deep-end, Brian, so I didn't expect you to act the same. Also, as I recall, you thought the same thing about me!" Well, I have to admit that's true, I thought he had gone crazy. I grab the back of his head, effectively killing all noise, and give him a deep hard kiss.

"Now go. I have to get this done before going in the office," I add, giving his ass a little pat as he heads back into the bedroom.

"Hey! Don't you have to get ready for school?" The sound of running water answers my question. I look at the work piled on my desk with growing disinterest and listen to the sound of cascading water coming from the shower. I leer evilly to myself. Fucking work can wait a little. I'd rather join Justin in the shower.

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Justin

I'm just leaving the building of my last class, when I notice Brian lurking around outside... apparently waiting for me. I sneak around and come up behind him, putting my hands over his eyes.

"This had better be Justin," he laughs and somehow I know...it's Kevin.

"Why are you here?" I blithely ask. He looks exactly like Brian and it's hard to imagine him as...well, as Kevin.

"I wanted to see you," he simply states, staring longingly into my eyes. "You know I had a good time with you last night and I want to see more of you." He appears to wage a battle in his head then starts walking away. I hesitate a fraction then follow, needing to set him straight on a few things.

"Kevin, listen, I..."

"...I know that you're taken," he interrupts, "and I understand that. I promised Brian that I wouldn't go after you and I won't...but I also told him I wanted to be your friend. That's not a problem, is it?"

"No," I sigh. "It's not a problem...as long as you understand. I mean...you are Brian's brother so..."

"So, let's have lunch together – my treat – and not at the same café as before. We don't need Frank and Sharon hanging over our heads," he chuckles, as we continue walking towards Liberty Avenue.

"They hang out at that café alot?" I hear myself asking

"They don't live here; they live in Denver. They were here visiting me and now are gone, so I have my lunch dates open," he smiles at me, then opens the door into a little Hamburg french fry joint.

After placing our orders we begin talking.

"So...you're bi? You like men and women," I tease.

"Not really, Justin. As I said before, I like Sharon...she's one of my closest friends. I know she's in love with me, but she knows the deal."

"Are you sure?" I question. "Because when we were here last, you said you liked her pussy," I remind him. He shakes his head in a manner suggesting *I just don't get it* Well, he's right. I don't get it.

"Sharon, and Frank for that matter, both compete for my attention. That was said more for Frank's sake than anything else. I love them both, but I'm not in love with either of them. They're my best friends and both are in love with me. Pretty weird, huh?" he cracks, eyes crinkling at the irony. Damn. Guess he and Brian do have a lot in common. What're the fucking odds of that?

"I would like a child and want Sharon to be the mother," he states openly. "As a matter of fact...we've been practicing. Gross, huh?" He signs before continuing. "Though, I've wondered just what will happen when she meets some man that she really wants to be with. How much that may change things." The waiter picks that moment to arrive with our food and I immediately dig in. I barely know this man, but already he's confiding in me. Makes me feel... good.

I pick up my burger taking a big bite.

"So, what you're really afraid of is her putting someone else before you?" I surmise and he nods his head.

"I know it's silly..."

"Not really," I answer, with a far-away look probably etched on my face. "I remember when my best friend, Daphne, told me about her new boyfriend. I felt...left out. Especially when she broke a study date with me to spend time with him."

"Yeah, I know what you're saying," he confides, absently stroking his glass of iced tea, "but I'm here and she's there, so maybe the time apart will make a difference."

"And...Frank?" I question. "What's up with that?" I can only wonder if it's a Mikey-Brian type of thing.

"Nothing...we're best friends who fuck," he snorts. "I know he loves me, but he also knows the deal. We've discussed it and I've told him that I'll never feel that way about him. I make no illusions about my feelings towards him. There's no need to question them, 'cause I don't leave room to guess." He says this while delicately eating his burger trying hard not to get any drippings on his suit.

"You guys are pretty fucked up. I can't even began to understand what you have going on," I say dipping a fry in the pile of ketchup I've squirted out.

"Know what?" he pauses, lips pursed... "I'm surprised that you and Brian don't spend your lunch breaks together."

"Our schedules sometimes clash," I say, feeling a little defensive.

"Well then, since your lunch breaks are free we can make it a regular thing for us," he suggests. I guess we could. I don't see the harm in meeting for lunch, plus...I enjoy his company.

"Kay. We can meet here everyday for lunch then," I inform him, taking another bite out of my burger...the food here is really good.

Kevin grins his agreement then sighs, looking at a point past my shoulder.

"Justin...I met Joan and Claire last night and was surprised to learn that they didn't know a thing about Brian's son." Ohh-kay. This is something I'm definitely not ready to talk to him about.

"I'm not going to discuss them with you." There's a slight edge to my voice letting him know how serious I am.

"You're loyal. I like that in a man," he chuckles, switching gears. "Are you through with your classes for the day?"

"Yeah, but I know you can't possibly be ready to take another day off?"

"No...no," he says while laughing. "I'm just wondering what you'll be doing with the rest of your day...that's all."

"Well, I'll probably go home, get some school work done, go to Brian's...Hey! You should go with us to Babylon tonight," I excitedly exclaim. "All the guys will be there."

"Babylon? What's that?"

"That...is a dance club," I reply with a knowing smirk.

"What time?" he smirks back at me. "And should I meet you there or at the diner?..."

"The diner. Nine o'clock. From there we can head on over to Woody's, then to Babylon."

"Whoa," Kevin blurts out, holding his hand up. "Now, what's Woody's?"

Jesus Christ! He has got to get out more!

"Look, just be at the diner at nine sharp," I tell him, standing up. I go to walk past him and he grabs my arm. We stare at each other for a moment as I feel an electric shock go through me. God, I could get lost in those eyes. Mental note to self...watch him.

"Thanks for lunch," I whisper before turning to walk away.

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Kevin

I go through about three different outfits before deciding on a pair of jeans and a black wife beater. I feel the need to dress-to-impress, Justin, wanting to see the look on his face when he first lays eyes on me. I can't get him out of my mind. I know that he belongs to my brother, but I can't help feeling like I do. Still, I promised Brian that I wouldn't make a move on him and I'm a man of my word.

I reflect on my earlier conversation with Justin regarding the lack of closeness between Brian and his mother and sister. I didn't mention it to him, but they invited me for dinner tomorrow and I'm going. I'm actually looking forward to it; spending time with the Kinney women and meeting Claire's kids. Apparently, Brian is supposed to be there as well, but Claire doesn't think he'll show.

Arriving at the diner, I glance thru the plate of glass and see Justin and Brian sitting at a table, surrounded by guys. Interesting...Brian is wearing a pair of black jeans and a white wife beater – great minds think alike, I guess. It's going to be a long night. Justin sees me first and waves.

"Hey, Kevin! Let me introduce you to everybody." He introduces me to Emmett, Ted, Michael and Ben. Of course I already know, Brian. He doesn't look too thrilled to see me, but that barely registers as I smirk at the rest of the guys who do seem fascinated with me.

I notice that one of the ladies from the night before walks over and Justin quickly introduces her as Debbie, Michael's mom. She's a very colorful person – to put it mildly – and I instantly take a liking to her. I nod hello at her and slide into the booth next to the one full with Justin's friends.

"So..." Ted smirks, glancing between Brian and I, "...you two planned to dress alike?"

"I think it's adorable," Emmett coos, punctuating the statement with a body shimmy. "So, Kevin...tell us all about yourself."

"Yes Kevin, please do," Ted interrupts. "Speak s-l-o-w-l-y and enunciate." Geez...are these guys for real? I suppress a snarky retort as I watch Justin roll his eyes towards the ceiling.

"Not much to tell, really. I'm a partner in an advertising firm. I go to work. I come home. Great life, huh?" I notice Ted seems really disappointed with this bit of information. Good.

Justin rises from the booth with a "time to head to Woody's," and we all follow him out the door. Once there, the guys head towards a table...their table, and I follow, mutely, behind.

A round of beers are ordered and I start relaxing, allowing myself to get comfortable.

"Brian," I say, as he prepares to break... "are you going to dinner tomorrow at your Mom's? He shrugs his shoulders and I take that as a yes.

"Can you believe Kevin didn't even know what Babylon was!" Justin laughs, apparently trying to change the subject.

"Just because I don't know the local dance club doesn't mean that I'm innocent," I say, making Justin blush.

"Oh...I'm pretty sure you're not innocent," he answers playfully, leaning against the table. Brian looks at me strangely and I wonder if I've overstepped my bounds.

"Let's get the fuck outta here...I'm bored," he grouses, abruptly straightening up. Everyone follows without question and I have no doubt as to whom the leader of this pack is.

"I can't wait to see people's reaction at two Brian Kinney's. This is way cool!" chirps Michael.

"I'm NOT Brian Kinney...my name is Kevin," I hotly correct, resentment rising at being called Brian. Like he's the real thing and I'm just a cheap imitation.

"Whatever..." Ted grumbles then jerks his thumb in Brian's direction. Listen up, you're brother here is the fucking King of Liberty Avenue and all things gay. Hell, there's probably not a trick in Pittsburgh that he hasn't fucked or been sucked by...you don't know the things a trick will go through just to have one night with the legendary Brian Kinney," Ted continues on. "I can certainly think of worse things than being mistaken for Brian Kinney." I chance a peek at Justin and shudder slightly at the look of hurt in his eyes.

"I'm sure you can get all the dick you want...especially looking just like him. You should have no problem," Emmett states proudly, like he's said something profound.

I'm tired of this banal discussion and am grateful when we reach the gay disco Mecca, Babylon. I'm taken aback for a minute – flashing lights, hot, sweaty gyrating bodies everywhere – it's a little bit too much. The guys head straight to the dance floor, but I decided to check out the scene and head to the bar for fortification.

I can't believe the numbers of stares I'm getting and, more importantly, how many are openly lewd. Every guy in the place has his eye on me.

"Hi, remember me from the other night?" some tall brunet asks, rubbing his crotch suggestively against me. I don't know this fucker from the man on the moon, but who gives a shit...he's hot and making my jeans tighten. I decide to play along.

"Is there any truth to the rumor," he asks, nibbling on my ear.

"What rumor?"

"That rumor," he giggles, hands sliding up my chest. "Brian Kinney doesn't do seconds."

"It depends," I growl lowly, removing his hands from chest and holding them tightly.

"Depends on what," he tenses.

"If you were any good or not," I retort, after a beat.

"I could help you remember," he rallies, twisting his wrists to retake my hands in his. He starts walking, trying to pull me with him, but I stop him.

"Look, I'm not interested," I tell him once he turns around. "Fuck you!" A glare. Then he stomps off.

I peruse the dance floor, spotting the guys and instantly zoom in on Justin and Brian. Their movements together are amazing...bodies in perfect harmony. Jealousy starts creeping up my spine and I force it down. I can't act like that. It will only lead to trouble. Justin must feel me staring, as he glances my way before breaking away from Brian, and heads towards me.

"Here all by yourself?" he jokes, bumping my hip with his. "I thought you came to have a good time...so let's go!" He grabs my arm trying to pull me onto the dance floor, but I stop him.

"This is not really my scene, Justin. I'm going home." He looks disappointed so I acquiesce and decide to stay a few more minutes, mainly just to see him smile.

I bonelessly let him lead me to the dance floor and we start moving together, in time to some techno beat. It's inevitable...really, we start grinding together. I tear my eyes away from Justin and see Brian staring dead at us. I don't give a fuck. Justin is driving me crazy and it's all I can do to stop myself from scooping him up and taking him home to make sweet and passionate love to him.

My feelings must be extremely transparent, because before I fantasize any further, Brian is shoving me out of the way and staking his claim. I keep moving, easing off the dance floor. I'm falling fast for my brother's boyfriend and there's not a damn thing I can do about it.

I return to holding up the bar and surreptitiously watching Justin and Brian. Justin shoots looks at me every few minutes, but doesn't come my way again. It's not like I'm too bored though since every few minutes I have a new guy hitting on me. Geez, what's wrong with this picture...fuck leaning against a bar all night. I grab the next trick and invite him home with me. Justin has me so freakin' horny that I have to fuck someone soon. Trick and I leave Babylon with me thinking that it won't be long before I get a little taste of that sweet blond. No, it may not be long at all...

Chapter 4

Brian

I watch the last of the smoke billow around my head before dissipating skyward. Stubbing the cigarette out, I pause before entering the Ice Queen's house. All of us together for dinner...this is going to be one hell of a night.

I walk inside, instantly noting the lack of dishes and food...good...they've already finished eating. I know I'm late. Like I give a fuck though.

"Brian," Joanie falsely chirps. "We started without you...didn't really expect you to come."

"Well, I'm here," I needlessly announce, scowling while plopping down onto a chair in the living room. Claire's kids are running circles around the house, screaming at the top of their lungs.

"Sit down," I bellow, "and shut up before I put both of your asses outside with the dogs."

"Brian!" Joanie admonishes, while the brats turn and run the other way.

"They're certainly energetic," Kevin comments dryly. Yeah, right...energetic my ass. That must be Kevin-ese for they're getting on his damn nerves as well.

There's banal talk for awhile before I decide enough is enough.

"Time for me to go," I say, rising from my seat.

"Yeah. Me too," Kevin agrees, placing quick kisses on both Claire and my Mom's cheeks. Christ! My stomach burns. They've been doting on him all night and I'm sick of it.

"Don't forget that you are going with me to church on Sunday," Mom speaks, beaming up at Kevin.

"Yes. And tomorrow you promised to go to the movies with the boys and I," he's reminded by Claire. I roll my eyes skyward, hustling out the door. I guess he's the ideal son and brother. I need a drink badly, but fuck if I'll give Joanie the satisfaction of knowing that. Fuck both their silly asses.

"I think it's time we got together," Kevin announces walking up behind me.

"What the fuck for?" I snidely ask.

"Cut the bull, you know what the fuck for...just lead the damn way." He scurries to his car then turns to look back at me. "Hurry up...I don't have all night and we need to talk!"

This fucker is proving to be a damn thorn in my side. I slide into my car and peel away from the curb, headed towards the loft. No need in putting off the inevitable.

I park and he's right behind me. Not that I was trying to lose him in traffic or anything. It's just that sometimes I go too fast for my own damn good.

"So this is where the great Brian Kinney lives," he lamely jokes. He's looking at my building and doesn't appear to be impressed.

I ignore his obviously snide remark and punch in the security code to enter the building. I take the stairs giving him no choice but to follow. Reaching my floor, I slide open the heavy metal door and step inside. Entering, he looks around grinning wide.

"What is it now?" I sigh, a little annoyed.

"Nothing...everything. It's..." he stammers, "it's just that my place in Denver looks a lot like this. My friend, Frank, is staying there while I'm away."

I pull two beers outta the 'frig then sit on the couch, exhaling noisily.

"You know something? I'm not blind. I know that you want Justin...I can tell by the way you look at him. Listen, I told you before...give it up. It's a lost cause... I just wanted to get that out of the way before we go any further." What I want to add but don't say to the fucker is that Justin is mine.

"I know that you're threatened by me Brian," he smoothly responds. "That much I can tell. I've come in and literally taken over your personal and business life, but..."

"...You haven't taken over shit," I vehemently cut him off. "Trust me. Spend some more time with my Mother and Claire and your ass will run screaming back to Denver. And as far as business goes, well... that remains to be seen." I head to my 'stash' box, take out a joint and light up. After taking a few hits, I decide what the hell and pass it to him.

"I don't smoke...anything," he informs me, practically bursting with pride. "My only vice is drinking beer."

"Well, goody for you," I snort before taking another hit.

"Brian, listen. I'm not here to argue. I just want to get a better understanding of who you are. Speaking of which...when we were at that Babylon, an awful lot of guys kept hitting on me thinking that I was you, which is understandable," he smiles slightly. But I have to ask...is Justin your boyfriend or not?" I immediately tense up and fight to remain calm.

"Justin is none of your fucking business." I'm not about to discuss Justin with this asshole.

"Brian...please don't get mad at me. I'm just asking because, well...I have to tell you...if he was mine, he'd never have that hurt look on his face that he gets every time another guy looks at you. With me, he would know that I only have eyes for him, and try as they might, no other guy would ever turn my head. With you he has no idea what to expect."

“You don’t know shit about Justin and me, so drop it,” I warn. He holds his hands out, palms up, in front of him and lies back in the chair he’s taken.

“So...tell me about Jack Kinney,” he demands. This guy has got to be kidding. I’m definitely not discussing Jack with him.

“Look, I don’t know if you thought we were some happy little family, but let me assure you, we weren’t and aren’t. Sometimes, after he’d had a few, he liked to come home and get a little happy with his fist. He hated all of us. Me. My Mom. Claire. All of us. Believe me when I say...you got off easy.” I watch him soak this all in. The smug look once on his face is gone and replaced with something that looks akin to pain. Pain to even think about what being a Kinney actually means.

“You don’t know what kind of life I’ve had Brian,” he says quietly. “So don’t judge me too quickly.”

“I’m not judging you,” I insist. “Besides...you’re right...I don’t know what kind of life you’ve had. Wanna enlighten me,” I added with a sneer.

“Well, I wasn’t abused as a child,” he counters. “I’m not saying my parents didn’t fight and get mad at me or each other...it just never got physical. And no matter what, I always knew that they loved me. I guess, in retrospect, you have had a harder life than me, but in no way is that my fault!” he says a little defensively.

“I never said it was. I’m just telling you like it is...plus you asked!” We are both getting uncomfortable at this point, so I’m kinda relieved when he changes the subject.

“Another question...tell me about Gus. Who’s his mother? Do you ever see them?” Damn, he wants to know every fucking thing!

“I see them all the time,” I sigh resignedly. “Gus has two moms...Lindsay, the biological mother, courtesy of one of my boyz...

“Huh?!” he interrupts.

“I donated sperm,” I tell him, simulating jacking myself off.

“Oh.”

“...and Melanie.”

“Lesbians?”

“Yeah. Lindsay and I met in college and experimented a little bit, but nothing ever really came of it. Her partner...uh, wife Melanie, hates me.”

“Are they the two other women that were in the diner the night we first met?” he asks.

“Yep...Lindsay is the blonde.”

“Why does Melanie hate you?” he questions. “Is it because maybe Lindsay is a little in love with you?” I don’t answer and he nods his head. Like he has it all figured out.

“What about the guys? Who are you closest with?”

“Mikey...Michael and I have been best friends since we were fourteen,” I sigh; these questions are so boring. “We’ve been through a lot together.” He fixes me with a strange look.

“He’s in love with you too, right?” Uh...where the fuck is he getting this stuff? He laughs at the _expression or rather dark look on my face.

“We’re not that different, Brian. Not really,” he sagely pronounces. “Anyway, tell me more. What does Lindsay do for a living? My friend, Sharon’s a writer and Frank is a reporter.” I have no fucking idea what the hell is going on, but in the course of thinking I’m not going to reveal anything to him, I begrudgingly admit, I’ve done just that. Somehow he’s gotten me to open up a little and here I am talking to him about the most important people in my life. Maybe it’s some kind of kinship I feel with him. After all...we are twins.

“Lindsay’s an art teacher, Mel is a lawyer, Ted owns his own porn Website, but he used to be an accountant, Em...”

“...Whoa back up,” he cries. “How the hell do you go from being an accountant to owning your own website, much less, a porn website?” Kevin looks dumbfounded and I burst out laughing. I get us some more beers before answering that question.

“You want the short story?” I joke. “Actually, that question’s a no-brainer. He got caught whacking off at work to gay porn and they fired his ass. I got him a job at my firm, but he quit, saying he wanted to do something he really believed in...and I guess that meant running his own porn business.

“Got to respect him for that,” Kevin grins and I agree.

“Emmett works in retail,” I continue, “and Ben is a professor of Gay Studies at Carnegie-Mellon University.”

“And...Michael?”

“He owns his own comic book shop. He used to work at the Big QMart until he grew some big ones and decided it was time for a change.”

“Sounds like a diverse group of friends,” Kevin observes.

“Yeah, I guess,” I simply answer.

“So what made him decide on comic books?”

“It’s what he knows...it’s what he loves, in fact.” I move towards the desk grabbing the latest copy of Rage and hand it to him. He looks it over and I see something that can only be described as amazement wash over his face.

“Art by Justin Taylor?”

“Yeah...it’s Mikey and Justin’s comic book.” I feel a sense of pride at saying those words.

“Why is it my face that I see?” he innocently asks. I stare at him, hard...trying to determine if he’s serious. I think he is. What a joke.

“That’s not your fucking face, it’s mine.” I laugh.

“Yeah right, sometimes I forget.” He has the good grace to look sheepish, so I don’t bother staying offended. “So...” he continues, “this Zephyr character has got to be Michael and J.T. must be Justin. I see they’ve done a gay bashing story. Excellent,” he smiles ruefully.

I feel a sudden shift in my mood. This is definitely a road I’m not ready to travel down. I change the subject.

“You know Deb, Mikey’s mom, is the president of PFLAG. She works at the Liberty Diner and has got to be one of the most accepting moms that I know. She’s one lady that will call you on your shit no matter what. Her brother, Uncle Vic lives with her. He’s gay as well.

“Sounds like a cool lady,” Kevin says and I make a mental note he should get to know her better.

“Speaking of Deb...she asked me to invite your over to dinner tomorrow night. The gang usually gets together at her house occasionally to eat, drink and be merry,” I snicker.

“I have a movie date with Claire and the boys tomorrow afternoon, remember? After that I’m free,” he says, choosing to ignore the scowl that crosses my face.

“Hey, I have an idea! Since we never got to do the whole switching identity thing that other twins get to do; how about we switch jobs for a day?” He can’t possible think I’m that stupid...can he?

“I’m not that naïve,” I say, shaking my head. I notice he’s allowed a sly smile to escape his lips.

“Scared I’ll get all your company’s secrets? You know it’s a good thing we didn’t grow up together...I don’t think you could have stood the competition,” he smirks.

“What competition? I’m not worried; you don’t pose any kind of threat to me. There’s nothing you could possibly do to hurt me,” I say this with a lot more confidence then I’m feeling. The truth is he may possible be the first person that I’ve ever felt threatened by.

He’s dead on his game. I can’t slip for a minute because I know if I do, he’ll be right there, lurking around the corner.

“So you don’t think I can compete with you, huh? Are we talking business [pause] or personal?”

“He’s not up for discussion.”

“Who’s not up for discussion?” Whatever. Like I need to mention a name. We both know who the other is referring to.

Justin?” he replies, as if reading my thoughts. “Brian, please. There is no need to worry. As I said before...I’m not going to steal your boyfriend.” God this guy is cocky and so full of himself. I may have to bring him down a few pegs. Not tonight though...but soon.

“I’m not worried about you stealing anything or anybody from me. I don’t go much on words. I prefer letting my actions speak for themselves.” He gets an I can see right through you look on his face and chuckles. Dammit! How in the hell am I going to stand being around him now. It’s bad enough Justin can read me like a fucking book; don’t need to throw someone else up in the mix.

“We shall see then, we shall see. Like I told you before once I close Vanguard down I may consider giving you a job.”

“We’ll I guess you’re a real pal then, huh,” I remark in a mocking tone causing him to laugh that much harder. I’m about to come back with another smart-ass remark when I hear the door to the loft creak open. I turn and see Justin standing there with a stupid ass grin on his face.

“Justin, hi! I didn’t know you would be coming over tonight,” Kevin says as he slides over on the couch to make room for the boy to sit down. He does just that, making a point of sitting at the opposite end of the couch. For some odd reason this bothers me. It’s as if he’s making a concerted effort to not sit close to the man, just for my sake. Leads me to believe that maybe Kevin’s on his mind more then I realize.

“Kevin, did Brian mention dinner over at Deb’s tomorrow evening” Justin inquires. Guess he wants to make sure Kevin is there.

“Wouldn’t miss it, Justin. So, I assume you’ll be there also?”

"Hell yeah! Then you'll see what I was talking about." Kevin looks confused and I, myself, wonder what the fuck Justin's yammering on about.

"Remember after the movie we ate at that little Italian restaurant and I told you that it was good, but Deb's was a lot better?" Geez; I'd completely forgotten about the day they spent together.

"Of course," Kevin smiles in remembrance. "I definitely can't wait to try her food then, 'cause she must be one hell of a cook!

"She's one of the best," Justin proudly states.

"You and she pretty close?"

"Yes. I used to live with her. She's like a second mom to me...to all of us actually." Justin makes sure to look my way when saying this.

"Really?" Kevin asks, also looking at me. He's trying to size me up. Trying to piece together parts of my life. Sticking his nose in places that don't concern him.

I wonder if Justin even realizes I'm still in the fucking room. He waltzed in immediately talking to Kevin. I didn't even get so much as a hello kiss.

I suddenly start feeling insecure. Almost like I did when Justin kissed the frat boy, but worse, even. I watch as Justin and Kevin chatter away like old friends overcome by the urge to get Justin as far away from Kevin as possible. Somehow though, I think the worst is yet to come.

Chapter 5

Kevin

Brian and I had planned to meet at his place and head over to Deb's together for dinner. Not really knowing anyone except for Justin and Brian, I'd rather not walk in there alone. Arriving at Brian's loft, Justin is there as well and we all leave together.

The boyz are perched in the Novotny living room when we enter. Debbie greets us exuberantly and a man I've never seen before rises from a chair, walking over to us.

"Which one is Brian and which one is Kevin?" he grins, glancing between the two of us.

"I'm Kevin...you must be Vic," I say, extending my hand. He shakes it and nods his head.

"It's incredible how much you two look alike. Must be like looking in a mirror," he cracks.

"It is sometimes," I say, looking at Brian who just rolls his eyes and walks off.

Ten minutes pass with general small talk before Lindsay and Melanie arrive and I get a first look at my nephew. He tumbles in, throwing his arms into the air for Brian to pick him up. He does just that, placing a kiss on his son's forehead.

"Hey, Sonny Boy...happy to see your old man?" he asks the child. I watch in awe as Brian plays with his son, showing a softer side I didn't think he possessed. I stroll over so that I can meet him. He looks between Brian and myself, confusion apparent on his little face, then let's out a little giggle. This, of course, makes everyone laugh. I hold out my arms to him and he jumps into them.

"I think that means he likes you," Melanie surmises. Not knowing Brian that well and having just met Gus, I can't explain why I feel like I'm holding my own son. He grabs a chunk of my hair in his fist and I get lost in his baby talk.

"Gus, come on." Brian takes the baby from my arms.

"Everyone...grab a chair and let's eat," Deb proclaims and we do just that.

I'm amazed at how close these people are...like family. They make me feel very welcome. So much so, I feel privileged to be a part of it and am truly sorry when the night comes to an end and I have to say good-bye.

The guys are heading over to Babylon, so I get Brian and Justin to take me back to the loft so I can get my car and go home.

"Sure you won't come?" Justin asks me. A feeling washes over me that he's not ready to see me leave, yet. That's a good thing...I think.

"Justin, the club scene is just not my thing. I'll see you Monday for lunch," I tell him, stepping out of the car. I resist the urge to kiss him before getting out.

"See you soon," he replies as I slide into the front seat of my car. Damn. I'm falling fast and there's not shit I can do about it.

~ ~ ~

Brian

All fucking evening I watched everyone falling all over themselves vying for Kevin's attention. Can't describe the feeling I got from that because it's mixed. I'm happy that they like and accept him, but when he was holding Gus, something inside me snapped. I wanted to snatch my son right out of his hands. Then, to top that off, every time he and Justin get together it's like their old buds. Their ease around each other bothers the hell outta me.

"Brian, let's stay in tonight...I don't want to go out," Justin says as soon as Kevin's car pulls off.

"Would you have rather gone with him?" I ask, nodding in the direction Kevin went. With a deep sigh, Justin shakes his head and walks into the building. Once inside the loft he begins removing his clothes.

"Whoa...what are you doing? I thought we were going to Woody's?"

"I told you...I want to stay in," he replies, voice husky. Walking up to me, he wraps his arms around my neck, making all thoughts of Woody's shoot right out of my brain. I remember a time when I would have left anyway; with or without his ass, but not anymore. Now things are different. Now I try to be more in tune with his feelings. Also, I begrudgingly admit, with my brother running around on the loose I can't afford to make any mistakes.

Not wanting to be the bad guy, I'll let their little lunches continue...for now. Fuck if I'm gonna become all possessive or anything like that...so I'll allow it, till I no longer need to. Last thing I need is Kevin having another reason to think I'm insecure where he's concerned.

"Let's go to bed," I whisper in his ear. He smiles, taking my hand and leads me to the bedroom. I get undressed and settle in for a long night of lovemaking.

I awake the next morning to a naked Justin sprawled on top of me.

"What are you doing," I grunt, clasping my hands with his.

"I thought you were the one who said that you could never get enough," he teases me.

"That's right," I tell him, pulling him to me. It's Saturday morning...no need to rush out of bed...

~ ~ ~

"Maybe we could meet for lunch, Monday or something," I offer. We finally hauled our asses out of bed and just settled down to watch some TV and eat. Predictably, Justin gives me a look that tells me he knows exactly what I'm doing.

"Brian, you know I have lunch plans with Kevin," he says, leaning towards me and caressing my thigh, "but if you want me to break them...I will." Hell yeah, I want him to break his plans. As a matter of fact, he can fucking cancel all of their lunch plans from here on out, but...I'm not about to come right out and tell him that.

"Don't let me impose on your plans. It was just an idea...forget I even brought it up." He eases onto my lap and kisses me on my right cheek. He then clasps his hands with mine.

"Don't you even try," he smirks. "You're meeting me for lunch and that's, that." He leans in, giving me another kiss. I smile to myself.

Finally, we make it out of the loft, after having decided to go to the mall. For what...I don't know, just something Justin wants to do. We casually stroll from store to store not really seeing anything of interest until Justin spies a frame shop. However, before entering the store, he notices a flyer taped to the window advertising an art exhibit. Of course it's for tonight and I can tell from the gleam in his eyes that he wants to go.

"What time does the thing start?" I demand, suppressing a sigh. I almost laugh out loud at the look of surprise written over his face.

"What? You wanna go...or not?" He grins widely in response.

"Yeah, I just didn't think you would. I was going to see if Kevin maybe wanted to go. It seems like something he would enjoy." I bet it does. Because Kevin is fucking perfect.

"If you want to ask him, go ahead...it's no big deal." I shrug my shoulders and he grabs my arm and leads me out the mall.

Of course I end up going and being bored out of my mind, but it makes Justin happy so...fuck it. Finally, after gazing at the last picture, we head to the diner to see what the guys are up too.

"So, Brian..." Emmett asks before I can even sit down "...where's Kevin?"

I glare at Emmett before responding, "How the fuck should I know?" He just shakes his head.

"You know, if I'd just found out I had a twin brother, you wouldn't be able to separate us for weeks!" the Queen exclaims. "I don't understand how you two can stand to be apart," Emmett continues, a far-off look clouding his face.

"We manage," I answer in a clipped voice, rolling my eyes skyward. Is there anyplace I can go where Kevin isn't shoved down my throat?

"Is he going to be at Babylon tonight?" asks Ted.

"No. It's not his scene," Justin replies and I swear I can see disappointment mar his features. Why does everyone want to be around Kevin or think he walks on water? The others I can deal with...kind of...but, not Justin. I don't want him thinking Kevin is me... only better. That he can do no wrong. That he's the answer to Justin's problems.

I've been working my ass off lately and it's been hard even taking a lunch break. But I'll be damned if I'll miss meeting Justin for lunch on Monday. Fuck Kevin. He needs to know that I'm still number one. That no matter how smooth he thinks he is, he can't take my fucking place. Not when it comes to Justin.

We end up going to Woody's, yet again, and before we get in the door good, Justin's cell phone rings.

"Hello," Justin answers. I pretend to check out a couple of guys playing pool, hiding what I'm really...listening to Justin's phone conversation. Only one guess needed to know whom he's talking to...Kevin.

"Well, we're at Woody's right now, but will soon be heading to Babylon..." I notice Justin's forehead wrinkle with a frown. "...I thought you said it wasn't your scene," he continues. I notice Justin start to blush and wonder exactly what was said to cause that reaction.

"Cool. Come on then...the guys will love to see you again, especially Brian," he coos, leering at me. Ex-cuse me. What the hell gave Justin that idea? It certainly wasn't me. I stalk off, going to the table the guys are sitting at. Justin comes over a minute later, smiling from ear to ear.

"Kevin's on his way," he announces to the fan club. Based on their reaction, you'd think the world's largest dick was coming. Fuck. What a bunch of losers.

"I thought he didn't like to hang out," I say in a totally bitchy voice. Justin blushes once again and looks away. It must be too much for him to answer my fucking question.

~ ~ ~

Justin

Surprised is one way to describe how I felt when Kevin called, saying he wanted to 'hang out.' I was slightly put off when he admitted why...he missed seeing my face. I try not to think much about what that means. Anyway...everyone, well everyone except Brian, who does his best to hide his true feelings, seems pretty happy that Kevin'll be joining us at Babylon.

I know Brian cares about him. I sensed that after seeing the two of them at the loft together, just hanging out.

Kevin arrives at Woody's and is there for about ten minutes before I get a chance to speak with him.

"Listen," I duck my head slightly, before continuing. "I'm going to have to cancel lunch on Monday. I'm having lunch with Brian." He doesn't seem fazed. Instead he gazes Brian's way, grinning slyly.

"It's okay, Justin," he speaks, voice low. "I realize you need to spend time with your man." I'll still be here; plenty of time for you and I to have many lunches together.

"Thanks for understanding," I murmur, resisting the urge to reach out and touch him.

Brian puts his arm around me and leads me towards the door while announcing..."time for Babylon!" Kevin follows closely behind.

We've been on the dance floor shaking our asses for at least an hour and Kevin's still rooted to the same spot, fighting off tricks left and right. I part from Brian and make my way over to him, determined to get him on the dance floor.

"You holding up the wall for a reason?" I tease. "Let's dance!" I grab his hand intent on pulling him to the floor with me. Instead, he pulls me to him. I stare into his eyes for what feels like forever, and then, pull back. The need to kiss him, touch him, is too strong...I have to get away.

"Fine. I won't make a fool of myself for you again," Kevin states...rather irritably. "I know you want me, Justin. I'm not blind. But I won't play this little games with you."

"What games, Kevin? You know I'm with Brian and you said you'd respect that!" Where does he get off with the attitude?

"I know what I said Justin," he grounds out, "but I can't help how I feel about you. I can't help it if I want you. Who wouldn't?" he cries.

"I'm going to get back," I say. I've been gone from Brian too long. Instead of answering me, he grabs the first trick walking by, whispering into his ear. I watch as the guy fucking lights up Babylon with a big-ass grin and they exit the club together.

I won't lie...my heart sinks a little at seeing this. It shouldn't matter, but it does. I rejoin Brian on the dance floor and realize the look on his face tells me he knows exactly what's going on and what I'm feeling. Oh, shit! What the hell am I going to do now?

Chapter 6

Justin

I've been waiting outside of the school a good ten minutes for Brian to meet me for our lunch date, before finally giving in and calling him. Cynthia answers his line saying "he's in a meeting and can't come to the phone." Guess that means lunch is cancelled. I decide to go ahead and meet Kevin at the little cafe he likes to eat at. I assume he'll be there instead of at the burger joint.

~ ~ ~

"Justin...thought I'd be eating alone! Where's Brian?"

"He had to work, so I thought it would be okay if we had lunch together." I take a seat.

"It's always okay, Justin. You know that. Sit down," he instructs. I take a seat, my mind flying back to when he left Babylon with his trick. I remember walking back to Brian and him grabbing me close and holding me. He didn't say anything and I didn't mention Kevin the rest of the night. Not to say that he wasn't on my mind.

"So...I saw your comic book. Imagine my surprise to see myself as a super hero," he grins.

"It's not you," I correct, "it's Brian." This makes him laugh.

"I know that Justin, but it's still my face." He looks reflective before saying, "the story of the bashing...Brian said it's true?" I stare past him, before deciding I can talk with him about it.

"I was attacked in the parking garage on the night of my Senior prom. Brian ended up coming and after we had this amazing dance, or so I'm told, I walked him to his jeep. When I turned to go back into the ballroom, a classmate came up behind me and struck me in the head with a baseball bat. If it wasn't for Brian coming to my rescue I probably wouldn't be here today." He reaches across the table for my hand and clasps it with his.

"I had no idea, Justin."

"I was in a coma for two weeks and in rehab for a month learning how to regain use of my right hand. I'd almost given up on being an artist because I didn't have good control over my hand. It's still not perfect, but Brian bought me a special computer to help me with my artwork and it's helped a lot."

"I'm glad you have him. Glad he was there for you. If you ever need to talk about it or anything else for that matter, I'm here...remember that. Anytime day or night, I'm here for you." he says and I feel my heart melt a little.

"Thanks," I say, slowly pulling my hand back.

"So...Brian went to your prom, huh? He really must love you."

"I know," I say. "We've been through a lot." I don't elaborate...no need to.

"I can imagine." He hesitates a moment before continuing, "Listen, have you ever thought about what you're going to do when you graduate college? I can have a job in our Art Department waiting for you..if you'd like." It's a sweet gesture, but there's no way I'd work in his firm. If anything, I'll go to Vanguard. I don't even want to consider Brian's reaction if I went with another firm particularly if that firm is Kevin's.

"I'm not sure that's a good idea."

"Oh, I forgot...we have to think about Brian. Whatever." He seems a little bitter and that instantly piques my radar.

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing. Just don't let all your choices be tied into Brian. What Brian wants. What Brian thinks. It's your life, Justin...not his. You have to do what makes you happy."

"I don't live my life through Brian and I resent you saying that. You know jack shit about our life. I'm not some little boy. I can make my own damn decisions!"

"I would never treat you like a little boy Justin," he reasons. "I recognize you for the man that you are. I know you're able to make your own decisions; can do anything you set your mind to. You're young, beautiful and very intelligent and I want you to be mine. Understand me when I tell you there is nothing in this world that I wouldn't do to see you smile and know I put it there."

"I'm going" I state, rising. He rises also and stands in front of me.

"Go. I'm not going to try and stop you. I know you'll be back," he says knowingly. "I walk out, forcing myself to stay calm, though my heart is beating fast as hell.

I go home, thinking about the situation I'm in. I love Brian...that I know. Then why is it so hard to understand these feelings I have for Kevin. I'm not exactly sure what it is I feel for him, but it's something.

Cell phone ringing jars me from my thoughts. It's Brian.

"Sorry about lunch, I got caught up in a meeting. I'm walking up the steps to your apartment now, so get your ass up and open the fucking door," he teases. "I open the door and Brian comes in, snapping his cell shut. I toss my phone down and practically jump into his arms, kissing all over his face. Don't know why, but I feel as if I can't get close enough to him. He senses my urgency and crushes me against him then we begin taking each other's clothes off.

"Bedroom," I demand. He chuckles while watching me head towards my bedroom I lay naked on the bed waiting for him. Brian enters and eases himself on top of me. He licks the side of my face, moving to gently bite at my neck, before gently turning me over. Starting a slow steady trail of kisses down my back, I instinctively arch my ass and am rewarded with the probing of his tongue at my hole. He proceeds to rim the hell of out me. That finished he again works his way up my back, his tongue, warm and wet, setting my body on fire. When he reaches my shoulders, he nudges me and I turn over, bringing his lips to mine and, for a while, we are lost in a most perfect kiss.

"I love you," I murmur. He leans down, giving me another kiss...this one gentle and soft. Words are not necessary as I know that he loves me.

We make love for the rest of the night and it's achingly beautiful. We wake up the next morning in each other's arms.

"I have to go to work," he says, getting up.

I tell him, "You're already late."

He just shrugs his shoulders and finishes getting dressed. Then adds, smirk intact, "like anyone's going to say something to me." He places a good-bye kiss on my lips and is gone.

~ ~ ~

Brian

It's come down to Vangaurd and Kevin's firm for this new baby food account. We both have presentations to sell before the final decision is made. I'm usually not worried about my abilities, but against Kevin I feel the need to be on top of my game.

Enough of this train of thought...I decide to surprise Justin and meet him for lunch. I smile inwardly at memories of last night. It was great. For a while there I was worried, no, make that concerned, about his feelings for Kevin. I thought they were getting a little out of control. After last night, I'm pretty sure I have nothing to worry about.

Where do Justin and Kevin meet for lunch? Something about a little burger joint...oh. Now I remember. I head over to the spot and upon entering, see that Kevin is sitting at a little table, alone. Wonder where Justin is?

"Eating alone?" I snort, taking a seat.

"It would seem so," he retorts. "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be hard at work on a baby food account or something? Actually, forgive me. No need for you to work on that...since I already have it in the bag."

"Yeah? Well, I wouldn't start celebrating yet," I let him know.

He seemingly contemplates my words, then very seriously says, "I'm going with Claire this weekend to some seminar. You should join us. It would be good for us sibs to spend some time, together."

"Do you want me to go with you and mom to church also?" I mock.

"It would make her happy," he chooses to ignore my mocking tone. "She's so caught up in this Reverend Tom, that you'd think he was her son or something. It may just be me, but I think..." he leans forward and whispers conspiratorally, "...he's gay." I chuckle.

"What?" he questions.

"He is gay," I simply state, outing the man. "Fucked him one night at the baths. Justin and I did a four-way...it was pretty hot," I tell him, watching as his whole __expression changes.

"You fucked Reverend Tom?! Did you know who he was?"

"Nope. Wouldn't have made a difference if I did. I'm an equal opportunity fucker." He's incredulous at this point, and secretly...I'm loving it.

"Did you say you and Justin were doing a foursome?"

"Yeah. What...are you shocked or something? We've done threesomes, foursomes and a whole lotta other 'somes; does it bother you?" He doesn't get a chance to answer, as Justin chooses that moment to walk up to us.

He head swivels back and force between us...like he's trying to decide who is who. We're both in suits and share the same taste in clothes. I'm not surprised that someone with a less classic taste in clothes can't tell our Armani's apart. Finally, he leans over, giving me a peck on the lips. Good boy.

"Hi, Brian," he says. I get the urge to fuck with him a little bit.

"Uh...I'm Kevin, but thanks for the kiss anyway." Priceless is the only adjective to describe the look on his face as he stares at Kevin.

"What's your name," he demands. Like he can't figure it out. Geez.

"I'm Brian," Kevin lies. "Now, give me my fucking kiss!" Justin looks between us again, then sits beside me rolling his eyes.

"You can't fool me anymore...I can tell you guys apart," he laughs. I grab him to me, sharing another kiss. We only come up for air when Kevin clears his throat.

"People are watching," he says, glancing around.

"Fuck'em," I sneer. Justin laughs.

"Yeah, fuck'em," he parrots.

"You two are one hell of a pair," Kevin lamely jokes.

"That we are," Justin says, smiling at me and leaning in for one more kiss.

"So Brian, is this a regular thing? You going to be meeting us here for lunch now?" Kevin brusquely asks. Why do I suddenly feel he wants me gone. Well...too bad. He needs to know right now that I'm not going any-fucking-where.

"Yeah. Why not?" I feign innocence. "It's not a problem, is it?" I ask, looking directly at Justin.

He wraps his arms around me and replies, "I think it's a great idea." I watch as Kevin rolls his eyes. That'll teach him to fuck with what's mine.

"I've got to get back to work," Kevin says, standing abruptly.

"Don't work too hard," I yell after his exiting back.

~ ~ ~

Kevin

I have to get out of this fucking place. Brian and Justin are making me sick. I can't watch their little love fest anymore. I want the lunches that Justin and I have to be special; don't need or want Brian intruding on that. Justin seemed pretty happy about Brian coming and that pisses me off. I get up to leave and the last thing I heard before walking out of the joint is Brian telling me not to "work too hard." He couldn't be more smug if he fucking tried.

I head towards work, thinking it's a big mistake to underestimate Brian, so I spend the rest of the day going over my presentation for the baby food account. I want everything to be perfect.

~ ~ ~

When I get home, thoughts of Justin are racing through my head. Won't go away, think about him all the time. I love the way he looked when he thought he'd kissed the wrong twin. So innocent, so cute. I think back to when I

grabbed that trick off the floor of Babylon and the look on Justin's face. I pushed the guy away as soon as we got outside.

I check voicemail...both Sharon and Frank have called. I decide on calling Sharon first.

"What's up?" I ask, after she answers the phone.

"Not bad. How's everything going? I mean with your family?" I'd told she and Frank everything that had happen the same morning I took them to the airport.

"It's okay," I answer sincerely. "We're starting off slow, but the important thing is that they accept me. They want to be a part of my life...want to know what's going on with me."

There's a pause on the other end, then she speaks. "Still, it must be hard on Brian. I mean...to have a twin you didn't know exists, come in and take over. How are you two getting along?"

"We have our moments." Then I drop my little bomb. "It doesn't help any that I've fallen for his boyfriend though..." I'm glad I called; I really needed to talk to someone about this.

"...You mean, Justin?" she gasps. "The young blond we had lunch with that day? I could tell you were taken with him. Does he feel the same way?" Sharon rapid fires these questions at me. I only consider thinking about her last question.

"I think he's interested. No...I know he's interested. But he and Brian are really close and it's obvious to everyone how much they love each other," I say, downcast.

"Don't get caught up in something you can't control, Kevin. I don't want to see you hurt," she admonishes. "You just found your twin brother...how in the hell can you even think about doing something like that to him? Don't you want to develop a relationship with him?" I can tell she hasn't liked what she's heard, but what can I do? I'm being completely honest with her.

"I want more than anything to be close with Brian, but I can't help how I feel about Justin. I tried to pull back, but I can't. Sharon...he's all I think about. In fact, I think..." I falter, sighing, "...I think I'm falling in love with him."

"Kevin, dammit! I'm coming back to Pittsburgh before you get yourself into trouble. Brian is your brother, for God's sake. If he and Justin are happy, then who are you to intervene? You say Justin may have feelings for you. How do you think that he's dealing with all of this? Don't you think it's tearing him up inside? If you really care about him, then you be the better man and step down. If you can't...I'm making plane reservations," she threatens and I know she means it.

I spend the better part of the night talking her out of dropping everything and running to my rescue. When I finally hang up with her I'm too damn drained to even consider returning Frank's call.

I contemplate long and hard about what Sharon said. I never took the time to think about Justin. What he's possibly feeling in all of this. Guess I'll have to find a new place for lunch.

Justin

Brian calls, telling me he won't be able to meet for lunch. I go to the burger joint alone and wait a whole fucking hour for Kevin...he never shows. I call him and he sounds annoyed after answering the phone and discovering it's me.

"I just didn't feel like it, Justin...okay? I do have other things to do with my time. Besides, I'll let you and Brian have your lunches. I mean I'm kind of like the third wheel anyway," he snorts. Who knows where this bullshit is coming from. Kevin has done a complete 180 degree turn.

"Look, you don't want to meet for lunch anymore, that's fine. But you could have at least called to let me know you weren't coming!" I huff into the phone. He sighs exasperatedly at that.

"The way you and Brian carry on I didn't think you'd even miss me. Unless, of course, Brian didn't show and you were sitting there alone?" I can feel him smirking through the phone and all I want to do is tell him to shut the fuck up. Instead, I hang up on his ass. Fuck him. I detest the note of jealousy I hear in his voice, anyway.

I head on over to Brian's and wait for him to get home from work. He finally arrives and I instantly note he's in a foul mood.

"What're you doing here?" he asks, stepping up into the bedroom, changing his clothes. What am I doing here?! He's never asked me that before, well, at least not in a while. He always seemed happy when he came home and I was here. So I don't answer him, just lie down on the bed instead.

"What.Are.You.Doing.Here?" he repeats, enunciating slowly. "Did you come over here just to go to sleep? By the way, how was lunch?" Now I get it. Now I see what the problem is. He's mad because he missed lunch and he thinks Kevin and I enjoyed ourselves without him. He's jealous. I know it's wrong, but the thought warms up my insides.

"Hmm. Oh, it was no fun without you. And being that Kevin didn't show up either, it was actually kind of boring," I say. He looks at me closely trying to see if I'm being honest.

"Kevin didn't show? Why not?"

"Doesn't want to have lunch with me anymore," I shrug. "Fuck him," I continue, pulling Brian onto the bed with me.

"Is that something you want to do...fuck him?" Brian suddenly asks, deadly serious.

"Why would you ask me something like that?" This is ridiculous. I get up and try to walk away, but he pulls me back down, looking me straight in the eye.

"Answer the fucking question, Justin." I can literally see fire in his eyes.

"If you're asking me if I'm attracted to him...then the answer is, yes. For Christ sakes, Brian. The man looks exactly like you!"

"Do you want to fuck him? That's what I asked you. Answer me, dammit!"

"S-s-sometimes," I say quietly, my voice shaky. I glance at Brian and my heart turns over when I see the look that comes across his face. I wish I could take it back. I wish I could tell him I was just kidding, but we both know that it would be a lie.

"Glad to finally get it out in the open," he says getting up and moving towards the kitchen. I slowly walk up behind him and forcefully turn him around...facing me. I put my hands on either side of his face.

"But that doesn't mean that I will. I love you, Brian. Only you. Never question that." He grabs my wrists, pushing my hands away.

"Love...yeah, right." Brian is very solemn. "You loved me before...when you fucked around with Ia...Ethan. You loved me the entire time you were fucking him. How am I to know this time is any different?" he asks. Since we've been back together he's not once thrown Ethan in my face. What it means now that he's doing that...I'm not sure.

"I'm leaving; I need to go out for a while, alone." Emphasizing the word alone. So I gather my stuff and exit the loft. I'll call him later when he's hopefully had a chance to cool down.

~ ~ ~

Brian

Watching Justin leave I fight the urge to call him back, wondering if he'll go running to Kevin? I could call him, but why bother...I'm going out.

I decide to hit Babylon. I'm on the prowl tonight. The first one I notice is a lithe Blond boy. I say the magic words and he follows me to the back room. After finishing with him, I head to the bar tossing back a couple of shots of Beam. It instantly calms my nerves. Spying a brunet who's obviously been eyeing me, I quickly snatch his ass up and take off, once again, for the back room. It's four in the morning by the time I finish up at Babylon and I'm so tired, maybe I can sleep without thoughts of Justin and Kevin dancing around in my head.

~ ~ ~

I can't fucking believe this shit! After busting my balls and working my ass off for them, the baby food company says *fuck you* to me. They're taking their business elsewhere. Oh well...at least they said the same thing to Kevin's firm, I chuckle to myself, getting a measure of satisfaction from that knowledge. I decide Justin is forgiven, so I'll just take the rest of the day off and go in search of my wayward youth.

"I'm leaving early," I tell Cynthia, on my way out the door.

I wait outside the building of Justin's last class for the day at PIFA. When I spot the familiar blond head come out, I blow the horn and motion him over. He looks a little suspicious, but walks over anyway, jumping in. He fastens his belt and the jeep leaps from the curb. He hasn't said a word...just stared out the damn window.

"When the fuck are you going to tell the cat to give your tongue back?" I snark.

"You're not mad, anymore?" He's very cautious when asking this.

"No...I'm not mad, Justin." I playfully slap his arm. "I took the rest of the day off. Whaddya want to do?"

"You mean it? He's grinning from ear-to-ear. My boy is so easy. "Anything I want?"

"That's what I said." He beams at me, losing the seat belt and leaning over to quickly kiss me. He then buckles back up, before running his hands through my hair.

"Let's go to the movies and dinner...then back to the loft and straight to bed," he purrs.

We hit the movies, eat dinner and, of course, stay in bed the rest of the night.

~ ~ ~

Things are good; can't complain. It's been four months since Kevin entered our lives. He and mom go to church together every Sunday and he and Claire are always getting together, doing something. They invite me along -- I've

been a few times -- only to have to listen to Claire whine the entire time. I don't know how Kevin puts up with her ass.

He seems to have drawn away from Justin. They don't meet for lunch anymore and when both are around they take care to avoid each other. Probably don't think I notice...well, I do. Anyway, Justin, I and the rest of the gang are in Babylon when some trick saunters up to me.

"Remember me from the other night...in the back room? You were awesome, man. Up for another round tonight?"

"Fuck off!" I growl, causing him to stumble backwards, then hurry away. I side glance Justin and right away can tell that he's pissed. He's very subdued the rest of the night.

When we finally get back to my place I call him on his behavior.

"I never said I'd stop tricking, Justin...not ever. But I respect you and keep it out of your face. You don't have to see it," I reason with him.

"So, let me get this straight. It's okay for you to fuck around and not me? Is that how it works, Brian? Make me feel guilty for even thinking it and all the while you're out here fucking everything that goddamn moves!" he's backing up while screaming at me. I'm scared that he's ready to bolt for the door.

"What are you doing?" I ask. He looks at me like I just lost my mind.

"What the hell do you mean, what am I doing? I'm fucking leaving, asshole!"

"Don't go," I say, reaching out to him.

He sighs heavily, his mouth turned downwards. "Give me a reason to stay, Brian."

I suck in my lips and just simply state, "I don't want you to leave Justin. Let's go to bed and talk about this in the morning." I pull him to me and he melts into my arms.

"Brian, please...give me a reason to stay." I look at him. Tilt his head up and force him to look into my eyes. I can't say it, but it's all there in my eyes. My soul laid bare for him to see.

He hugs me close, whispering, "Let's go to bed, then." I take his hand and lead him there. We get undressed, him laying his head on my chest, I, holding him to me. We sleep that way the rest of the night.

~ ~ ~

When I walk into the office Monday morning, Cynthia does a comical double take. She jumps and rushes into my office. Only one thing could cause that reaction and I know exactly who it is. I stroll into MY office and see Kevin sitting on the couch. Cynthia looks like she's ready to faint.

"Cyn," I casually state, "I see you've met Kevin." She just looks at me, waiting for an explanation no doubt.

"Kevin Miller," I formally introduce them. "He's my twin...long lost twin," I further add, recognition lights up her face.

"B-but...", she sputters, "he's a partner over at..."

"...I know," I cut her off. She eyes Kevin and he smiles at her.

"Don't let my brother fool you. He's Kevin and I'm Brian." Kevin winks good naturedly and I suppress a laugh. I should be pissed with him for coming here in the first place, but it's not like he was rifling through files or trying to search for stuff on my computer..he was just sitting on the couch, waiting.

"I don't give a fuck who is who or which is which...as long as I get my paycheck every week!" Cynthia rages before storming out of the office. Both Kevin and I crack up at her antics.

"Lovely assistant you have there," Kevin chuckles, straightening his tie.

"She's special," is all I'll admit to, taking a seat in my executive chair. "So...what brings you to Vanguard? " I get right to the point.

"Hmm...just wanted to get a look at where my brother works," he answers, nonchalantly (or so he thinks) surveying my office.

"Where I work..." I repeat, my voice trailing off. "Okay...tell me why you're really fucking here."

"I'm here covertly trying to see what ideas I can steal and take back to my firm," he deadpans.

"Find anything?" I quip. Two can play this game.

"Not really. In fact, now that I know I have nothing to worry about regarding you taking any business away from my firm, I think maybe we can meet for lunch," he suggests.

"Whatever," I reply.

~ ~ ~

I pick Justin up for lunch and when we walk into the diner, Kevin is already there.

"What's he doing here?" Justin asks, having immediately noticed the man seated at a booth.

"Meeting us for lunch."

Kevin has a loopy grin on his face as we approach the booth. "Justin, hi. Didn't expect to see you. I'm glad you came." Justin nods and politely smiles.

"Listen, Frank and Sharon are visiting next week...maybe we can all get together or something." He says this, eyes never leaving Justin's face.

Justin wriggles his nose at the suggestion. "I don't think they like me."

"Don't like you? They don't know you, Justin. They acted the way because they thought you were some crazy person," Kevin says.

"And you didn't...did you?" Justin questions, though unnecessarily, if you ask me.

"No...I didn't," Kevin smiles and Justin returns his smile. I start to feel that old familiar feeling again. The same one I felt about the damn fiddler.

They talk all through lunch, acting as if they haven't been avoiding each other the last few months. I don't like what I see, but I'm Brian-fucking-Kinney, so I say nothing. I just sit back, letting it eat me up inside.

I can't find Brian...anywhere. I've called the loft, his cell phone. No answer. I've been to Woody's, the diner...and still no Brian. I finally decide to just head on over to his place.

I slide open the door and am greeted with moaning. Shoulda figured. He's here of course, in the bed fucking two tricks like there's no tomorrow. I doubt he even heard me come in I surmise, easing back out the door. I could confront him, but what would be the point? He never said he'd stopped tricking or that he would even consider it.

I go home and curl up with a cup of hot chocolate. What pisses me off is that he can fuck whomever he wants whenever he wants and there's not a damn thing I can do about it. I must really be pathetic sitting here alone while my boyfriend is having the fucking time of his life.

"Hello?"

"Kevin...it's me, Justin. Can you come pick me up?"

"Sure, Justin. Hang on a minute, let me get a pen and pad to get your address." There's a slight pause before he returns, getting my address and indicating he's on his way to get me...no questions asked. I wait outside my building for him and when he arrives I jump in the car barely giving him a chance to stop and then we're off. It's quiet all the way to his place, but that's okay. Once there, I get out looking around. It's a very nice neighborhood...one that even my parents couldn't probably even afford. I'm surprised at the size of his house. It's huge.

"What do you need with such a big house?" I ask, walking into the living room and taking a seat. He sits beside me, answering my question.

"Sharon and Frank have to have their own room. Then there's a nursery for when the baby comes...I wanted a room that I could use as a study. And you can never have enough guest rooms," he adds.

"It's really nice," I say quietly, "I like it." My head falls slightly forward, a look of dejection marring my features. Kevin notices immediately.

"Justin? Is everything okay? Having nightmares again?" He seems so concerned.

"No...I'm not having nightmares." I take a deep breath, rubbing my neck. I just...I just needed to talk to someone. I love Brian...I really do. But sometimes...it gets hard." He nods his head in understanding.

"I can only imagine, Justin. Just keep in mind that any relationship is hard; no matter who you're with. It takes work. Now, since we both know you already know that...what's really going on?"

God, I can't believe I'm going to discuss my boyfriend...with his twin, no less...said twin who also happens to be in love with me. How fucked is that?

"I know who he is, Kevin. I know he goes out and still tricks, but we've been back together for a while now...and this is the first time I've seen him doing it in his loft... In his damn bed! He had to have realized I could walk in at any time, but obviously he doesn't care. Brian does what he wants and fuck what everyone else may say," I fume, allowing Kevin to take my hands in his.

"Justin...you said, since you got back together. What made you break up before?" Now we're really getting into it. I decide honesty is the best approach, while trying to remain cool as his thumbs trace patterns on my hands.

"I cheated on him with a fellow student violin player at PIFA named Ethan, who I met him at one of his concerts I attended. Lindsay and Melanie took me there as a birthday present."

"Your birthday?" Kevin blinks, his thumbs halting their soothing patterns. "Why on Earth were you with them that day? Where was Brian?"

"Home. He had no desire to celebrate my birthday...said celebrations were only for achievements. Anyway, his idea of a birthday present sucks..."

"...Yeah?" Kevin interrupts.

"...Yes," I sigh. "If you can believe it...he had a hustler waiting for me, and..." I gush out, "...and, the guy had a fucking red ribbon on his dick!" I shudder, the memory still inducing a cringe, which Kevin sees.

"You must have been pretty upset?" he says, shaking his head and looking me in my eye. I can only nod my head.

"Well, between that...and a few other things," I continue, not finding it necessary to elaborate on a few other things... "I started seeing Ethan and before I knew it...we were heavily involved."

Kevin looks skeptical, but who can blame him. "Brian had no idea?"

"Not at first. Michael saw us kissing on the street and told him. Brian made sure that both Ethan and I knew he'd found out." I recall that day at the diner vividly; still picturing the hurt ___expression on Ethan's face and the smug one on Brian's.

"So...what happened?" Kevin asks. He's dying to know.

"Brian threw a party at Babylon for Michael and I celebrating the first issue of Rage," I answer in a monotone voice. "Short of the long...I left with Ethan. It took a long time for Brian and I to reconnect...for him to start trusting me again."

"There's no way in hell I'm gonna believe that you cheated without reason," Kevin fumes. "I know you and I know Brian. It's not as cut and dry as you make it seem. You can't hold all of the blame. We all make mistakes, Justin...all of us. Obviously, it was a lack of communication that led to your breaking up. Do you want to make that mistake again?" he says sincerely.

"You don't understand...it's not easy to talk about," I reason. "I know who he is, what he does and..." I falter slightly, my voice low, "...I accept it." I slide down further in the chair and he takes the opportunity to run his fingers through my hair, calming me.

"Justin...my sweet, Justin. I hate seeing you so sad. Go talk to my brother. Try working it out. It may be easier than you think," he surmises.

I tense, tightening my shoulders. "You want me to go?"

He smiles slightly, looking deep into my eyes. "I want you to do what ever makes you happy. I won't make any decisions for you...it's your choice." His breathing is heavy; a slight sheen of sweat breaks out over his top lip. "If you want to go...then go...you want to stay..." he stops then. I recognize this as a turning point. He's not just referring to my being here...with him; he's talking about something else entirely all together.

"I want to stay," I whisper, knowing those words have changed everything; knowing there's no turning back.

"You sure?" he simply asks. My heart is literally beating through my chest, because of what is surely going to happen.

"I'm sure." My head is spinning in anticipation...or...is it dread. All I know is... everything is going to change. For Kevin...for Brian. And, especially, for me.

"Follow me," Kevin insists, standing up. "I promise that you won't be disappointed." I exhale deeply and do as he instructs.

He leads me back into his bedroom. Candles, in various shapes and scent, rest on just about every available surface. He begins lighting them then switches off the overhead light. The room glows invitingly, soft yellow light washing over us...it's very romantic...

"Justin..." my name is softly uttered by Kevin "...I'll be right back." He returns with a bottle of wine and a pair of glasses. He then pours both of us a glass, handing me mine. I feel like I'm having an out of body experience as I sip while watching him drink from his glass. He leans forward, hesitatingly at first, before kissing me and spilling some wine into my mouth. It's one of the sexiest things I've ever experienced and I can't help returning the kiss fervently, trying to remove his shirt...but, he stops me.

"There's no need to rush, Justin." We're both breathing heavily, panting almost. "We have all night," he hums, slowly unbuttoning my shirt, then slipping it tantalizingly slowly down one shoulder then the other. He cups my face and...stares...just stares. It unnerves me how easily I can read his emotions, but I relax, leaning into his touch as he begins to kissing me. Little nips on my neck, trailing down to circle his tongue around my nipples. Hands knead my waist. I run my fingers through his hair begging him for more. He playfully pushes me down onto the bed before removing my shoes and socks. He then takes my right foot in his hand and starts massaging it.

"How's that feel?" he questions, pressing his thumbs into the ball of my foot.

"Good," I murmur, shifting slightly as he takes my other foot, rubbing gently. I gasp sharply, startled by a wet feeling on my foot that's quickly replaced by low moaning. He's licking my toes, placing soft kisses on my feet and I grab the sheets, whimpering. I'm reeling from the intense pleasure now and all I can think is how much I want him. How much I want him inside me. I rise a little and clutch at his biceps. Making him understand what it is I want.

He grins crookedly at me, grabbing my pants and underwear and simultaneously sliding them down together. I'm now totally naked and practically writhing on the bed under his heated gaze. He stands, stripping himself, before edging to the bed and dropping to his knees. Starting at my ankles, he commences kissing his way up my body. Slow, wet, open-mouthed kisses...kisses that leave me tingling...like I'm ready to shoot just from his touch. Instinctively I start rocking underneath him, my thighs gripping him to me. He reaches my inner thigh and begins to nip at my skin then blow on it...cooling it down. I yelp, pump my hips and grab his head holding it between my legs. Finally, he reaches for my cock and, without preamble, takes the entire member into his mouth. Down...Up. Down...Up. DownUp.

"Um. Ohhhh!"

He works his magic and I cum. Lips are licked as he settles on top of me, allowing for me to catch my breath. We kiss...gently. He then opens a bedside table retrieving a condom and lube. He passes the tube to me and I slather some in my hole, fingering myself in preparation as he slips the condom on.

My legs on his shoulder, he slowly enters me. I gasp from the intrusion, but will him on, enjoying the feel of him. He pumps slowly; there is no rush...just a slow and steady pace.

"I love you," he admits, looking into my eyes. I know he means it.

~ ~ ~

I wake up to a delicious smell...breakfast in bed. I could get used to this.

Kevin is sitting on the bed smiling down at me..."Wanna be fed?" he teases.

"Come here," is my reply, voice husky. He leans down and I kiss him good morning. I know I'll have some consequences to face regarding last night, but right now I just want to live in this dream world for a little while.

"Morning, Justin." He smacks another kiss on my lips. "Sleep well?"

"Mmm...like a baby," I say, chewing around eggs I've just stuffed into my mouth. He rises, presumably to get dressed for work, while I finish off my breakfast.

"Are you going to school?" I shake my head, no. Things are too fucked in my head right now to even think about sitting through any class.

"Stay here, then...I'll be back for lunch. Hey, want me to go to your place and pick up a few things you may need?" I think about it. Do I want to go home? Will I be able to face Brian? Will he be able to tell something happened? I feel like hiding out just a little bit longer, but know I can't.

"Can you drop me off at home on your way to the office?" The look in his eyes kills me, but he knew the deal before we lay down together.

"Sure, Justin...if that's what you want." He backs out of the room and returns...a key in his hand.

"Here's the key to the house," he hands to me. "Use it whenever you want. Whether Sharon, Frank, or for that matter, anyone else are here, it doesn't matter...you can use it at any time you feel like it. No strings attached," he adds. "You can have a room of your own. I just want you to be happy," he says, caressing my face.

I lean into the caress and simply state, "thank you," punctuating it with a kiss. He pulls me to him and the kiss grows deeper.

"You have to get to work," I breathe softly, feeling him remove his suit.

"Fuck work," he growls, as we succumb to passion.

~ ~ ~

"What are you doing?" I ask. It's a little after lunchtime before we finally make it to my place of which said steps he is now walking up.

He turns around, arms open. "I want to see where you live. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing," I say, going past him to open the door before walking in. He follows, looking around...especially at the pictures hanging on the wall. There's a lot of them. Most are of Brian...or Brian and someone else.

"Dare I think that one of these may be of me?" he kids. I point to one...it's of Kevin...when he's sitting in the café gazing out the window.

"It's you." I watch as he walks to that spot I pointed at and takes it off its hook on the wall.

He studies it closely, face hard to read. "How much?"

"What do you mean, how much?" I innocently ask.

"The picture. How much for the picture...I want it."

"If you want it you can have it...no charge." I saunter over and upon reaching him smooth my hand across his cheek.

"Thank you," he says pecking me quickly on the lips.

"No...thank you." I suddenly feel shy and I think Kevin notices it, trying to lighten the mood.

"Well, I better get to work...gotta put in a few hours. Uh...see you later?" he asks. Who knows...who truly knows, I muse.

"I'll call you," I say in response. He kisses me one last time before walking out the door. This is a fine fucking mess I've gotten myself into.

~ ~ ~

Brian

I can admit this only to myself, but...I called Justin all night and even stopped by his place. I have no clue where the fucker is and stewed about it all night. I figured I'd stop by there again on my way to work, even though it's out of the way, and he's still not home. At lunchtime I point the jeep towards PIFA and watch his classmates spill out of the building, but...still no Justin.

No...I didn't worry for the rest of the day where his ass was. I went home after work to change clothes; the gang is meeting at Deb's for dinner and God forbid you not show. I check to see if maybe he had called, on my way out, but there's nothing on the answering machine. Hell, I ain't gonna call him again or wait around the loft for him ass. Maybe he'll show up at Deb's...

~ ~ ~

"It's about fucking time you got here..." Deb screeches, pulling me through the door "...you think linguini holds all night!" I shrug my shoulders, sucking in my lips. I mean really...what the fuck do I care. I see everyone else is already here...including my wayward youth. I palm a joint and motion for the kid to join me outside. He quick glances Kevin – wonder what the fuck that was about – before rising from his seat to follow.

"Where 'ya been? I've called you all fucking night." No sense in beating around the bush. He looks away from me; then gingerly sits down on some old bench of Deb's.

"You going to answer me?" He shakes his head no in response. I ponder this while lighting up.

"You're not going to tell me where you've been all night?" I ask in a clipped voice. He again just shakes his head and I feel like throttling him. Where the fuck does he get off keeping secrets from me. What's the fucker been up to? I take a long toke before continuing.

"You don't want to tell me...fine. But you can bet your sweet ass, I'll remember this." I sneer at him for emphasis. He blinks at me then loses it completely.

"Remember this, huh?! Well, remember this," he hisses, voice deadly low. "Remember me walking into the loft yesterday and seeing you with two tricks fucking your goddamn brains out. Remember that, Brian!" he shouts. Fuck! How was I to know...didn't even hear him come in.

"Justin...you know what I do," I try reasoning with him. "I don't bring them home anymore out of respect for you. Yesterday just...it just happened; I'm not even sure how we ended up back at my place." I know it's lame, but under the circumstances, it's the best I can do.

"What...too fucking high to even know what you were doing?" he asks, a disgusted look clouding his features.

"What do you want me to say, Justin? I'm trying here...okay? Dammit, I'm trying." He rolls his eyes, but then pulls me into a hug. He give's in a lot easier then I would have thought, but it could be his guilty conscience at work here.

"Now are you going to tell me where you were? I prod.

"No. It's not important," he says. That alone lets me know just how important it is. We walk back in, all eyes are upon us.

I spread my arms wide, asking..."what?"

"Nothing," Ted smirks. I know they all think we've probably been outside screwing around. Well it's none of their damn business so let em think whatever the fuck they want. We sit down and I notice the looks that Kevin keeps shooting our way. What the fuck is his problem?

We get ready to leave and I notice he and Justin pass by each other. The sexual tension radiating off of them can't be missed. Now it all makes sense.

I recall going to meet Justin for lunch and he never showing. Matter of fact...neither was Kevin. Doesn't take a genius to figure out what's going on. I can't fucking believe Justin would do this. There has to be another reason but damn if I know what it is. I won't say anything now. I won't confront either of them. I'm going to sit back and watch. That's what I'm going to do. Sit back and watch the both of them.

So Justin won't tell me where he's been. I guess he thinks that keeps him from lying to me. Well I've got news for him...he's fucking wrong.

Chapter 9

I'm in the bathroom and hear a knocking at the door. I come out and am greeted with the sight of Kevin strolling in.

"You make a habit of just barging into someone's house?" I ask him.

He goes to the refrigerator, grabs a bottle of water and points it in my direction, "I wanted to invite you over for dinner...to meet Sharon and Frank." He unscrews the top and guzzles some down his throat.

"Your friends...? When are they coming?" I don't really care they're visiting, but since he appears to be making himself comfortable...guess I'll engage in conversation with him.

"Already here," he replies. "They want to meet you, so they can compare us or whatever," he jokes, rising to once again rummage around in the 'frig. What the fuck...is he starving or something?

"Uh...may I help you with something? What the fuck are you looking for, anyway?"

"Just wanted to see what's in there...that's all." He still makes no move to stop.

"Hey," he adds, "bring Justin along with you." I'm sure the guys'll want to see him again. He pulls out a bowl of leftovers and peeks inside. Am I under inspection or something?

"Surely you make enough money to feed yourself."

"Sorry...just wanted to see what you eat," he mumbles, walking over to a chair.

"Yeah? Well, we've eaten together plenty of times...you should know what kind of food I like. Besides, it's not like you're going to find a secret file or some ingenious advertising scheme in there...so cut the bullshit.

"Brian...look. I have no idea what to cook. I wanted to surprise you with a dish you like and thought peeking in your refrigerator would give me some kind of idea. Damn...are you always so fucking paranoid?" he chuckles.

Right...all of a sudden you care about me...shoulda' thought of that before you fucked Justin.

"With you on the prowl...it pays to be paranoid," I inform him.

"Oh...so you admit you feel threatened by me," he asks with a smug look on his face. Nothing I'd like more than to punch it off.

"Threat, my ass. Though I'll admit to being leery of your underhanded ways."

He dramatically places a palm over his chest. "Brian, you wound me."

"Not as much as you've wounded me," I say, a little too harsh. He glances at me and I'm forced to look away. I don't want him to know what I'm thinking...let's just say it's not pretty.

"Well, I'm going to go. Why don't you come over around eight tonight." I walk him to the door, letting him out, then sit down and think about the situation at hand.

Guess I could be wrong, I think, picking up the phone to call Justin and tell him about dinner at Kevin's; maybe nothing is going on between them. And...if there is; he has some balls coming in here inviting me to dinner.

~ ~ ~

We arrive at Kevin's house and I sense how nervous Justin is. We've hardly spoken two words on the ride over and the tension is thick. I ring the bell and the door opens to reveal a woman who I assume is Sharon. Her eyes get round as saucers and she audibly gasps as she eyes me.

"Damn! You look exactly like Kevin...come in, come in." She ushers us inside and links her arm with mine, causing a major rolling of my eyes. Just what I need, another het chick worshipping the air I float on. Kevin and Frank are in the living room talking and both stand up when we approach. I notice a quick look Frank shoots Justin. Something along the lines of envy, maybe even...hate. We sit down and still Justin has not said one word, looking very uncomfortable.

"Brian," Sharon starts, crossing her legs, "Kevin has told us a lot about you..." There's a pregnant pause, then... "...so, did you really fuck your Mother's priest?" I hear Justin intake a sharp breath, but don't look at him, instead smirking at Kevin who just shrugs his shoulders.

I turn my attention to the blunt bitch-friend and answer her. "I fucked a willing ass...totally coincidental that he was a priest and my Mother's priest."

"I could never do that," Frank responds, disgusted look on his face. "That's taking it a little too far, man." I'm about to come back with a smart-ass remark, but Kevin beats me to the punch.

"No...you'd never fuck your mother's priest...you'd just fuck her husband. Which is sicker?" I bust out laughing at this revelation. "You fucked your mom's man?" Justin shrinks in his seat. Sharon looks shocked.

"What?! I didn't know that. You sorry bastard...just when I thought my opinion of you couldn't go any lower...God, you make me sick." She lets out a sound of disgust and slides her chair away from him causing Justin and I both to chuckle. These friends are so lame.

"Fuck you, Sharon! You act like you're an angel or something! Frank's face is red, his lips forming an angry slash.

"Don't make me tell some of your secrets, even though I'd pay to see the reactions if some of your business was brought out in the open." He has a smug look on his face and looks from me to Justin, baiting us to ask questions.

"Why don't you just shut up Frank; you stupid sonofabitch," Sharon hisses. Christ! This dinner makes all the dinners at Deb seem like eating with the Walton's. What the hell is wrong with these people?

"What's the matter, Sharon..." Frank sneers, "...Kevin hasn't fucked you today?" Justin and I are now loudly laughing our asses off. Kevin shoots Frank a death glare and speaks, "Frank...that's enough! See what I have to put up with." I guess Kevin is speaking to Justin and me.

"Oh boy..." Justin's giggling dies down and he rises from his chair. "I'm going to the powder room," he says walking down the hall. Hmmm. Interesting, he knows exactly where to go.

"Justin...can you bring me that yellow candle from out of my bedroom. I want to place it on the table." I gaze at Kevin trying to see if letting me know that Justin has been here, but he's turned his attention onto his friends. Justin returns, candle in tow, and that's all I need to know. I get up, stare at Kevin and see a guilty look pass over his face. I then look at Justin, but he's staring at the floor.

"Well folks...I'm fucking outta here." I trudge off and Justin follows right behind. I get in the car and he scrambles quickly into the back seat just as I'm gunning the engine. We drive straight to his apartment and I pull over, waiting for him to get out.

"Brian," he says quietly. I don't answer just stare straight ahead. He gets out and walks over to the driver side.

"Brian, please...look at me," he pleads. I tap my thumbs against the wheel, teeth clenched before I pull away from the curb with a screech.

~ ~ ~

I walk into the diner and head straight to the booth in the back corner. I lean back, watching people come and go. Well, what do we have here...Frank...in the diner. Hmmm...revenge can be so sweet. I motion Kevin's boy over to sit with me, imagining the look on his face when he finds out his boy is screaming someone else's name in ecstasy.

"You can wipe that fucking smile off your face," Frank snarls, plopping down. "By the way...why aren't you with boy toy?"

I peruse him languidly, belying my feelings. "Why don't you ask Kevin that?" He just shakes his head.

"What?" I sigh.

"What?! So...what are you doing here? Waiting for some trick to fuck and suck you and make yourself miserable? Why do you think Justin and Kevin did what they did. What the fuck do you want, Brian? You want to push Justin even farther away? Instead of talking to him and finding out what's wrong, finding out why he would do what he did, here you are doing what probably caused the problem in the first place."

"Hold up!" I lean across the table and glare at him. "You don't know shit about me and Justin."

"I know that you need to talk to him; satisfy him, or...or do something so he'll stop running behind Kevin, begging for the affection you won't give him. I do know that!" he spits out.

"FUCK.OFF!" I place my hands on the table, abruptly get up, prepared to stalk off. Something makes me glance back at him...the raised eyebrow pisses me off as I kick open the diner door and stride out.

~ ~ ~

Kevin

As soon as I ask Justin to bring the candle out I know we're fucked. I'm not even thinking; confirmed, of course, by the look Brian gives me. I see the hurt in his eyes...the look of betrayal. Damn, I sigh inwardly, considering the mess Justin and I find ourselves. I won't apologize though. I love Justin, plus...he came to me. Called me! Still, he's my brother's boyfriend and it's wrong. I'd feel guilty...if my feelings for Justin weren't so strong.

As for Justin...I just don't know. I don't know if what happened between us had to do with us, or if it was all about he and Brian. It sure as hell felt real, but I'm not so blind to not realize Brian played some part in it. I wonder where we go from here? Neither Sharon nor Frank is thrilled with me. Frank left right after Brian and Justin did. Sharon just gave me an evil look and retreated to her room, slamming the door shut. I tried calling both Justin and Brian, but didn't get an answer. Damn...I can't help wondering what the fuck is happening. Who do I care more about? What

do I care more about? Do Justin and the possibility of what we could have, mean more to me than my own damn brother? Is it too late for me to even have a relationship with either of them? Will they ever speak to me again? God, my head hurts pondering these thoughts.

I lie back in bed and realize what my problem is. I want to have my cake and eat it too. I want to have a relationship with my brother, be friends with the man. I also want Justin in my life. Want him beside me, and not with Brian. I take a deep breath. Why the hell does it have to be so hard? I'm not sure how long I lie there, when a knock on the door snaps me out of my reverie.

"Come in," I call out. Sharon and Frank both shuffle in and lie down on bed with me.

Sharon kisses me on the lips, then leans back to stare at me. "No matter what...no matter how many mistakes you make...we still love you." Frank nods his agreement then turns my face around, ramming his tongue down my throat. Sharon wraps her arms around me. Guess they don't hate me anymore.

"Forget about 'em baby," Frank purrs rubbing his hand over my crotch.

"Let us make you feel good," Sharon breathes into my ear. I get lost in them for a minute...it's good pain management...but I have to put a stop to it.

"No...can't do this," I moan out. "We can't do this...not anymore." I run a hand frustratedly through my hair.

"Let's just go to sleep...we'll deal with the rest in the morning." They both heatedly stare at me for a while, then pull the duvet back and we crawl under it. I wait until I'm sure they're both asleep before creeping out of bed and calling Justin. This time he answers the phone.

"I can't talk to you right now, Kevin," he sighs. "I...I just can't."

"Justin. Please," I beg him then hear Brian screaming something in the background. I quickly hang the phone up and go get a drink. Maybe they're working their problems out. I presume I should be happy for them; however, all I feel is if I'm willing to do the right thing and step aside...or...do I say fuck it all and go after the man I love and lose my brother in the process...

Justin

I know, halfway up the hall, that I've made a mistake. But I keep going...bring the candle and set it on the table. Glancing at Brian and the look on his face breaks my heart. He storms out of there and I'm right behind him. I don't even bother trying to sit up front with him, instead laying low in the back seat. A peek out the window reveals we are headed to my apartment. Once we arrive, I jump out and try to talk to him, but the only thing he does is stoically look straight ahead and peel off, tires screeching, leaving me standing in the street staring after him. As soon as I get inside, the phone rings. Once it stops, my cell starts ringing. I check caller ID and see it's Kevin. I'm really not in the mood to talk right now. I let a single tear run down my face as I try to sort out what I'm going to do. I decide to pick up my sketchpad and draw, not sure how much time passes because I'm so caught up in my work. When I'm finished I look intently at what I've drawn. Myself...split in half with Brian or is it Kevin sketched on one side and vice versa on the other. Which side is Brian and which is Kevin? That's an important question considering in one I'm smiling from ear to ear and there's a ray of sunshine beaming down and on the other it's raining and I look like I've been through hell. My internal struggles; charcoal to paper. Which way do I go? I hear a rustling at my door then Brian storms in.

"We need to talk," he says, towering over me. The phone starts ringing again, but I try to ignore it. I know who it is and, apparently, so does Brian.

"Answer the fucking phone, Justin," he spits out at me.

"Brian...sit down," the phone stops ringing "...let's talk." He does just that...when the phone starts fucking ringing again.

"Answer the damn phone, Justin!" he bellows at me. "I fucking mean it!" I pick it up, my hand trembling.

"Kevin...I can't talk right now," I whisper. "I just can't!" Steam is practically billowing out of Brian while he shakes his head.

"Justin, please," Kevin breaths out, tugging at my heartstrings. Brian must sense this because it's then that he snaps.

"Un-fucking-believable! Un-fucking-believable! What the fuck does he want, Justin?" I get so caught up in Brian's yelling I don't even notice Kevin has hung the phone up. Once realizing this, I place the phone down and calmly take a seat beside Brian. He stares at me for a moment, chest heaving, before he speaks.

"We're going to make some decisions right now...do you understand me? I'm going to talk and you are going to fucking listen!" I breathe deeply and mentally prepare myself for what lies ahead.

Chapter 10

Justin

I watch as Brian works up the nerve to what he wants to say.

"I could tell you that you've crossed the ultimate line and there is no going back; I could tell you that you've betrayed me in a way that I will never forgive; I could tell you that I never want to see you again; I could tell you there will never be a future for us. I could say all of those things to you, but I won't. The only word I have for you is, why? Why, Justin? Why did you do this? You told me when you came back that you knew what to expect from me. Were you just fooling yourself?" I take a deep breath, trying to process what he's asking of me.

"I didn't lie, Brian. I know what to expect from you and I thought maybe I was okay with it. I don't know what happened, Brian. I'd be lying to you if I said that what happened between Kevin and I meant nothing, but I'd also be lying if I said that what happened with him means more than what you and I have." I reach out to touch him, but he backs away. I use the moment to collect myself before continuing.

"Brian...I left with you. I could have stayed there with Kevin, but I didn't. Instead I followed you. I'm trying to make this work with you. You're what matters...not him. Sure, I allowed myself to become conflicted, but thinking about life without you is unbearable. I can live without him, but...but you, I can't do without. Don't you know that by now? I plead with him.

"How could I, Justin? Especially when you keep leaving? How the fuck am I supposed to know anything?"

"Because I'm telling you. Because I could be with him, but I'm here begging you to give us another shot. Why? Why would I do that if you didn't matter? Why would I even try if you didn't mean the world to me?" I'm grasping at straws and can't be anything but honest. I love Brian. My feelings for Kevin are minor, at best, and truth be told are actually more tied into Brian than anything else.

"You could have fucked anyone Justin, anyone. But you crossed the line when you fucked my brother, my own damn twin at that. It's not something I can forgive so easily. No matter how sorry you are and no matter how much you may love me...you crossed the line."

This is killing him, I can tell. Hell, it's killing me. We stare at each other for a minute; try to feel the other out...attempting to find an easy answer, when really there isn't one. A look I can't decipher crosses his features then he leans over and lightly brushes his lips against me.

Our lips are only an inch apart when he breathes out a low and anguished "goodbye, Justin." So...this is it. I could beg him not to go; could throw myself at his feet, letting the tears spill over my eyes, but I won't. I've said all I can

say. I'll do anything for Brian, and he knows that, but I refuse to give away my pride...not anymore. He's looking at me expectantly, waiting for something to be said. I stare defiantly back at him before finally he speaks.

"I guess he's a new and improved version of me, huh? Everything that I'm not...me... only better. Is that right, Justin? With him you can have it all, he'll say all the things to you I won't."

"I didn't fall in love with that, Brian. I fell in love with YOU. Whatever faults you may think you have doesn't stop me from being in love with you. Yeah, I'm man enough to admit...I have a problem with the tricking and it's something I'm really working on, but it doesn't change how I feel about you...about us. I haven't lost sight of that; I want only you, Brian...not Kevin."

Brian looks at me, regret clouding his eyes. "You didn't lose sight of that Justin. You wanted to fuck Kevin; wanted to see what it was like to be with him. You fucked my brother and I won't forget that; can't forgive you." He walks out, the door closing softly behind him.

I slump down onto the couch, waiting to hear the familiar sound of his car starting. Not hearing it, I get up and gaze out the window. Brian is still outside with his head laying on the steering wheel. My heart tells me to go to him, but my soul fights it. I don't know how long I stand there, staring, until finally, he lifts his head and drives off. Away from me, away from what could have been, and it's my fault, this time it's all my fault. I feel numb, like I should be crying, but I can't. I'm not sure how much time passes when shrill ringing makes me jump. My heart leaps out of my chest then, because I think maybe...just maybe, it's Brian calling.

"Hello!" I answer, sounding a bit too desperate.

"Justin, are you alright?" It's Kevin...I can't talk to him. I just can't.

"Kevin, I can't talk to you...not now...I..."

"...Justin! Don't do this. Don't shut me out like this," Kevin begs.

"It was a mistake, Kevin. What happened was a mistake and because of it I've lost Brian," I say in a voice I don't even recognize.

"Justin, I'm sorry...I never intended..."

"You understand why I can't see you anymore? Why I can't talk to you anymore? Even if Brian and I never get back together I just can't be with you, and I did have feelings for you Kevin I did, maybe I still do, but I think they are more tied in to Brian than either of us realize," I hear him let out a sigh then the click of the phone.

Kevin

Justin's words echo in my mind, it was a mistake. What can I do with that? What can I say? I'm not sure if that's how he really feels or if it's just grief and guilt over losing Brian. Either way it hurts. And as I sit back, pondering all of this I realize that some of the blame lies with me. I went after another man's man, my brother's man, to be exact, with a vengeance. If I'd kept my promise to Brian and left Justin alone none of this would have happened. I've completely destroyed any kind of relationship that Brian and I could have had, and, because of me, all three of us are hurt. I can only hope day Brian and I can move past this. One day, Brian and I can strengthen the bond that had started to form between us.

Brian

After finally leaving Justin's apartment building and not wanting to brood alone, I head to the diner and run into Mikey, Ben and Emmett. I try losing myself in their conversation, which is tough considering they're asking me where Justin is...have I seen Kevin...shit like that. They finally give up their questioning and we fall out of the diner for a night on the town. I'll deal with my feelings for Justin and Kevin tomorrow or, maybe...the next day.

~ ~ ~

I'm surprised just how difficult the first couple weeks without Justin are. I'll see him sometimes, quickly heading somewhere, or see something that reminds me of him or someone will bring him up and I'd feel betrayed again. The only one who knows what happened is Michael, though I'm sure the rest of them can figure it out...doesn't take a genius to realize since Justin and I aren't attached at the hip and Kevin rarely hangs around anymore. Also when he does make an appearance and Justin is there, they don't speak.

Two months pass and I slowly start talking to Kevin again. Not like it was before, mind you, but a quick conversation here and there. Four months later and it appears that Kevin and I have reestablished a relationship, tenuous though it is. It's the impetus I need to consider, once again, forging a friendship with Justin. I would catch the looks he'd give me when he thought I wasn't looking. Could see the look of longing on his face. And, to be honest, satisfaction coursed through my veins knowing that he still wanted me.

When we first stopped seeing each other I was sure he and Kevin would hook up, become a couple. I was just waiting for the day when they would walk into Woody's hand in hand, but it never happened. When Kevin and I first reconnected he told me he and Justin never talked again, after that night. Made me feel good. Maybe Justin was telling the truth...the thing between he and Kevin was a one-time mistake.

I can't count the number of nights that I'd lie awake wishing he was in my arms. How many times I picked up the phone and started dialing his number, only to hang up like a pussy. I forgave him once and it got thrown back in my face. As much as I may have wanted to reach out to him, I know I wouldn't. I couldn't.

~ ~ ~

It's seven months after Justin and I hit the skids when I see him scurrying down a sidewalk. God only knows where he's headed. He has a bunch of items in his arms and keeps dropping them. As soon as he bends to retrieve it...another one falls. It's a laughable situation and I dutifully smirk. I finally take pity on him, driving alongside him.

"Get in; I'll give you a ride." He debates for a second, while something else falls out of his hands, then decides after picking up the item, to hop in, placing his bags in the back and slipping onto the front seat.

"Where to?" I pull away from the curb, surreptitiously glancing at his profile.

"Uh, actually...I have a few places to go," is his response.

"Okay. Where's the first place?" He gives me directions and we start on our way. There's a moment of awkward silence before Justin turns in his seat, facing me.

"Brian...how have you been? I wonder about that..."

"You do?"

"Yes...I do." He starts to laugh at his choice of words, but I shoot a glare at him, effectively killing it.

"I'm fine, Justin," I concede. "And you? Been up to anything, lately?"

"Well...to start, I do this three days a week," he sighs.

"Do?" I question, that single word hanging in the air. "What the hell is it you are doing any damn way?"

"I do part time work at an art gallery and part of my job description is dropping miscellaneous items off at different locations. I like the gallery, but it's a drag relying on public transportation with my schedule."

"Maybe I can help you with that..." I find myself saying "...so you don't have to struggle...I don't mind." A shrug of my shoulders let's him know it's just a friendly gesture. Can't have Sunshine reading too much into it and thinking that something could possibly come from it.

"That'd be great!" he enthuses. "I'll give you a copy of my schedule." So it begins.

Three times a week he and I start slowly rebuilding what we had. I start looking forward to the time the two of us spend together and the look of excitement that washes across his face when he talks about something he's really interested in. I can't help smiling at the expressions he makes...wrinkling his nose when deep in thought or at something he doesn't like; tugging at his ear and ducking his head during a shy moment. I find myself pushing errant strands of hair out of his face and leaving small soft kisses on his lips more often than not.

Everyone notices. The way we are around each other; the ease that we share; the way that we joke with each other; the small touches. I can't tell you when things between us changed...don't even remember when I started to forgive him; didn't even realize when I'd not only forgiven him, but was also starting to want him back in my life.

Now...I'll never forget what happened, mind you, but forgive him I can. I did it before when he left with Ethan and we deserve this chance.

It's with these thoughts Mikey interrupts me, while nursing a beer sitting at the bar in Woody's. I can tell by the scowl on his face he has something of imminent importance (his thoughts...not mine) that he wants to say.

"Brian," he breathes deeply, short of breath, "I know it's none of my business, but..."

"You're right...it IS, whatever it is, none of your business." He's a little taken aback, but regains his equilibrium and continues.

"Whatever. Listen...I know you; can see you falling all over again. Do you really believe things will be different this time? Would you really think about taking him back?"

"I don't wanna talk about it, Mikey...just leave it alone," I tell him, gesturing for another beer.

"I won't leave it alone! Know what I think? I think he could leave you a hundred times...no, a thousand times and you'd still forgive him; still take him back because that's you who you are. You don't know how to love half way. You love with every fiber in your being...there's no middle of the road for good ole Brian Kinney. I know you love him Brian and know you can't help that, but what about him? How much more can you take? How many more times can he break your heart, put you through hell...one more time? Two more times? I'm not dissing him, Brian, but you need to understand that he's young and is just finding his way. Finding out what living is all about." I ponder Mikey's words; swirling them around in my head 'til suddenly it all makes sense. He's right. I would take him back again and again and that should bother me to no end since I promised myself I would never be that vulnerable to anyone, but for some reason...it doesn't

"Brian..." Mikey's voice snaps me back to reality. "...can you say without a doubt that Justin is still going to love you five, even ten years from now?" There's no need for a dramatic pause, I already know the answer.

"Yes." I give him his answer; straight, no chaser. We stare each other down for a moment, before he takes a seat, a smile crossing his face.

"So do I, Brian, so do I. Can't say I'll ever be happy with the way he can just walk in and out of your life, but I won't lie and say he doesn't love you. I can see it...hell, everyone can. I just wanted to make sure you understood the reality of your situation and that..." Mikey's voice hitches, "...that, I just don't want to see you hurt, again." He leans over, brushes his lips against my cheek and walks out of Woody's.

~ ~ ~

“Brian, what are you doing?” I’m at Justin’s place and have just planted an open mouth kiss on his neck. “You sure about this?” He’s searching my eyes trying to see just where I’m going with this.

“Sure as I’ll ever be,” I conclude, bringing my lips down on his.

We start anew that night. Are things perfect? No...nothing is, but this time around, we have a better understanding of who we are and what we expect. No illusions and, more importantly, no false pretenses.

The End

Mirror Image (Alternate Ending ~ Kevin)

Justin

“We’re going to make some decisions right now. Do you hear me? I’m going to talk and you are going to fucking listen!” I breathe deeply, preparing myself for what lies ahead.

“I’m not going to tell you what to do nor will I ask you to choose me. I want you to decide for yourself.”

“You mean it’s not over?” I asks, shock registering on my face I’m sure.

“Justin, I can understand how you would become confused. I can see how your feelings could get mixed up; still, if you’re going to be with me then I can’t excuse what you did. I’m not saying you were wrong or right, or that I had it coming or any silly bullshit like that; all I’m saying is that I can see how you could get confused. You’re still young and have a lot to learn.”

“So...you’re not mad? You don’t care?” I immediately wish I hadn’t asked. His whole demeanor changes, a cold look steeling his face, his jaw clenching angrily. He shakes his head, chuckling in disbelief.

“You should know me better than that by now, Sunshine,” he taunts, eyes never leaving my face. I get it now. He’s not happy about what I did nor is he ready to forget, but he is willing to try and hold on to what we have.

“I understand, Brian. I get it.” He audibly sighs, looking everywhere but at me. I reach out tentatively to softly touch his shoulder and...the phone rings shrilly, just as I’m about to make contact, effectively ending the moment. I don’t make a move to answer the phone...don’t have to. I know who’s calling and, apparently, so does Brian.

“You know what...fuck it!” he snaps storming out of the apartment. I gaze at the phone transfixed by the ringing. I finally pick it up then slam back down, taking the damn thing off the hook.

I sit a long while that evening, thinking. Thinking about what I want; what I need and finally deciding to be true to myself.

~ ~ ~

Standing in front of the bed, a feeling of deja vu overwhelms my senses. I’m reminded of the last night I spent with Brian before leaving him for Ethan. I study him as he lies in bed and try not to lose my nerve under his scrutiny. I begin stripping just like I did that night and he has a similar look on his face only it’s magnified, more intense. He pulls back the duvet and I crawl into bed with him allowing the cover to be placed over me. He laces his hand with mine and spoons me from behind. No words are spoken, just deriving comfort from each other.

It’s early the next morning and we’re lying in bed, both of us are awake, but neither of us are daring to say anything.

Finally, Brian breaks the silence.

“He’s my brother, Justin.”

“I know, Brian...I’m sorry.” I turn over facing him. The time has come for us to talk.

“Justin, be honest, don’t fuck with me, but...what went wrong?” I have no answer for him. I wish like hell that I did, but I don’t. I shrug my shoulders lamely.

"I wish I could turn back the hands of time, Brian. Wish we could go back to the time when we first met, you know when everything was relatively simple. When I knew where I stood with you, when there were no doubts." I start getting choked about thinking about old times.

"Hmmm. Is that when you were supposed to be living at Deb's..." he chuckles, ..."but spent most of your time here?"

"Yeah, all I wanted then was to be with you, that's all I ever wanted Brian... to be with you. We had fun, enjoying each others company..." I can't help it. A few errant tears slide down my face.

"I wish I could go back to that time. Brian, I love you so much, you have to know that!"

"But you love him more." Brian states a fact.

"I don't understand how this could have happened. I never wanted to hurt you again, Brian...God, do you have any idea what you mean to me?" I sob out, tears now streaming and I could care less about stopping their flow. This is so fucking hard.

"I don't want to hear that you love me Justin. You don't want me; you want my brother. What difference does it make how much you claim to love me if you love him more?"

"It's not a contest!"

"Isn't it? Isn't it what this whole fucking thing is about? You think Kevin cares about you? You think he loves you? It's all about me Justin. He wants what is mine. Can't you see that?" Brian's voice becomes white noise because, as realization dawns, all I can see is red.

"It's always about you right, Brian? Everything is about you? Heaven forbid someone actually give a fuck about me; really show interest in me," I seethe.

"Stop being such a fucking drama princess and think about it?" Since he came to town he has tried to take everything that's mine. It's all a game to him, Justin. It's cat and mouse." I slide off the bed and start throwing my clothes on. I don't want to hear this shit. He watches me the whole time, but doesn't attempt to stop me. I'm almost through the door when he calls my name. I turn back to see him standing at the top of the stairs his arms hanging loosely along his sides.

"I don't want you hurting anymore and I don't want him to hurt you either," he admits.

"I'm sorry, Brian," I whisper determination stiffening my back and strengthening my resolve as I walk out.

Kevin

I keep phoning Justin until it's obvious his phone is off the hook or unplugged. I make a hasty decision to pay him a visit, but 45 minutes later, admitting he doesn't want to see or talk to me, I head home, where Sharon and Frank stay out of my way, sensing my foul mood. I rush past them both intent on showering my misery down the drain. As I step into my bedroom, pulling my robe around me...there he is...sitting on my bed, evidence of tears marring his face. I quietly sit beside and rub his back gently.

"We broke up," he says needlessly. I sigh deeply.

"You okay?" I continue rubbing his back and he takes my free hand in his.

"I guess, but...it's hard, you know? he sniffles. I've loved him with my whole being for so long, and, and..."

"Shhh. It's okay," I coo. "Did you ask him to try and work it out?" I'm hoping like hell he didn't.

“Oh, Kevin. Uh, no. I..I broke up with him actually, not the other way around.” I'm now starting to understand.

He chose me. He's here not because he was rejected by Brian, but because he chose me over Brian.

“Kevin, let me ask you something. Is this all a game to you? Is the only reason you're interested in me because of some stupid competition with Brian?” He looks deep into my eyes waiting for me to confirm or deny.

“Why would you even think that, Justin? I wanted you before I even knew you were Brian's boyfriend. I wanted you when I first spied you in that café. How could you think any different? Is that really what you think of me? That I would mess around with your emotions like that?” I lean over hesitantly before placing a small kiss on his lips, knowing exactly where he got this idea from.

“Don't let Brian put ideas into your head, baby. I love you and it has nothing to do with my brother...okay?” He stares at me for a moment, before nodding his head.

“I believe you.” I'm rewarded with a beautiful smile.

“But you know something, Justin? You need to dig deep, asking yourself if this is not in some shape or form, about Brian. I hope you don't see me as some other version of Brian because I'm not. I'm my own man. Now, I've done some things that would make you run out of here screaming...I want you to know that going into this that I have my faults. I'm not perfect, in fact, I'm very far from it. Knowing that...are you sure that it's me you want?”

“I've thought long and hard about this Kevin and I know what I want. I know whom I want. It's you, only you.”

“Can we really do this Justin?” I breath out, “can we really be together?”

“I don't have to answer to anyone else, Kevin. It's our lives, if we want to be together than we will.”

Justin stays the night and we mostly talk. One thing I need to do is talk to Brian. I want to make things right between us, but I have to tread cautiously...I'm not willing to give Justin up. I have no idea what will happen between us considering how wrong Justin and I did him. I regret hurting him, but love Justin too damn much to let him go.

Brian

When the gang learns what happened between Justin and I, it's not at all like I imagined it would be. I'm actually not being blamed...well, except for Deb, that is. She loves her Sunshine and blames me completely for the breakup. Said if maybe I'd kept my dick in my pants, Justin may have stayed. I tried so fucking hard with Justin; trying to be with him, but remaining true to myself. No sense in boring Deb with this...her mind is set. Anyway, as I was saying...Justin and Kevin got the brunt of the blame. You would think that would make me happy or at least make me feel better, but it didn't. I've never liked anyone speaking poorly about Justin and I still don't. I did notice Mikey going easy on him this time and when he did happen to mention Justin's name, he did so with trepidation. I guess he thought I'd punch him again.

~ ~ ~

I see them sometimes you know, he and Kevin. They do seem happy together and that's all I've ever really wanted. With fiddle fuck I figured it wouldn't last, but with Kevin, it's different somehow. Justin is happy and he deserves to be and I'm not going to complicate matters by tipping my hat and letting him know just how hurt I am. Why cause him turmoil when all I've ever really wanted is his happiness.

Kevin and I don't speak for a long time. Joanie and my sis try their best to find out why. Guess I could tell them it's because he stole my boyfriend, but that makes me sound like some ridiculous, pimply faced teenager, so I don't bother. It's none of their fucking business, anyway.

Justin and I manage to avoid each other for an even longer period of time. I can't be around him without wanting to pull him to me and take him into my arms. He pushed by me once on the dance floor of Babylon and I couldn't help myself...grabbing him forcefully by the arm and kissing him squarely on the mouth. He stood planted to the floor in shock before regaining speech.

"Brian, don't." That's all he said before walking away from me. I don't think I'll ever stop wanting him; don't think I'll ever stop holding out hope that maybe, one day...Justin and I may get another change and actually get it right.

Justin

Seven years. Seven happy years together, Kevin and I. It's been challenging, but also rewarding. We've had our share of fights, screaming, yelling and carrying on, but we always, always make up.

Everyone, Deb excluded, was pretty mad with Kevin and I when they first found out. But I guess time does heal all wounds. Now we're just as close as before, which is actually a good thing, considering Gus spends weekends with us...us being Kevin, I and the two children, a 6 and 4 year old, that he had with Sharon and who live with us. I had hoped that Brian would have settled down by now, but no such luck. Oh, he's had a few men who I thought were serious, but he never stayed with any of them. I happened to cross paths with one of his ex's while leaving the job to pick up something for dinner. The guy's name was Totton and he looked pissed. When I waved at him in greeting, he shot me a menacing glare before stalking the other way. I ran to catch up with him.

"Hey," I yelled out.

"What the fuck do you want?"

"I'm sorry...did I do something to you?" I really didn't understand his angry attitude towards me.

"He loves you so fucking much, he won't allow himself to even love someone else. Everything is Justin this, Justin that. No one lives up to the great Justin-fucking-Taylor. He has you so far up on a pedestal I'm surprised your nose isn't bleeding from the altitude. Do you know how hard it is living in your shadow? Do you have any idea how much he fucking loves you?" I stand there a flabbergasted look plastered on my face.

"Are we speaking about Brian?"

"Who the fuck else would I be talking about?" he asks, the words hanging in the air long after he leaves.

After all these years I could have done without hearing that. I hate thinking of Brian still hurting because of me, but

I have to live my life and I hope one day he can move on.

No regrets...no regrets.

The End

Standalones

The Price of happiness

Brian and Justin meet for the first time (in a different way)

I'm in the grocery store, trying to figure out what to fix for dinner. I reach for a box of ziti at the same time as someone else. I look up and see what I'm pretty sure is the face of God.

"Sorry," I say, a little embarrassed.

"No problem," he shrugs his shoulders.

"Justin Taylor," I stick my hand out.

"Brian Kinney." He shakes my hand.

"So you're cooking ziti tonight?" I ask, feeling like a complete idiot for asking such a dumb ass question. He smiles and looks at me.

"I'd be interested in tasting your ziti. Where are you headed when you leave here?"

"No place special, just home. I only got off work."

"Where do you work?" We are both making our way to the checkout line by now.

"Over at Skylark; it's an advertising company. I'm head of the Art Department."

He lets out a low chuckle. "I know what it is...you're the competition. I am a partner over at Vanguard," he states casually.

"No shit. Well, putting that aside, I would be happy to let you taste my ziti," I smile. He looks unfazed, very confident, like he didn't have a doubt in his mind that I would say yes.

"Write down your addresses," he tells me. So I do, and then pay for my groceries and wait for him to do the same.

"Come around 7," I tell him, before I walk off in the direction of my car.

I hear the ringing of the doorbell and go answer the door. I glance at the clock. Shit. He's early. I check myself over in the mirror before opening the door. He walks in, a bottle of wine in his hand.

"You didn't have to," I tell him pointing to the bottle.

"I don't usually fraternize with the enemy, but this should be very interesting."

I set the table, pour the wine, and we begin to eat. We talk about advertising for a while, and then make small talk about this and that. I'm noticing how comfortable I am with him; it's like we have known each other for years. He

tells me about his sister and about his parents; I gather that they are not close. He then goes on to tell me about his friends, Mikey, Ted Emmett. He talks about Mikey's mom, Deb, and Mikey's, Uncle Vic.

I tell him about my sister, Molly, and my best friend Daph. How I was seventeen when I came out. I tell him how my Mom is cool with it, but that my father and I have a very strained relationship.

Finishing dinner up, we go on like that for a while, just talking and learning more about each other's lives, until finally I glance at the clock.

"Shit! It's 6 a.m. I have to get ready for work. Do you realize that we just talked all night???"

He looks at his watch. "Fuck. Look, I've got to go. Shit." He jumps up and is at the door before I can even blink.

"Here's my business card," I say, hurrying to the door to hand it to him. He takes it and then reaches in his wallet and hands me his.

"When will I see you again?" I ask. Besides in my fucking dreams, I add to myself.

"Soon," he answers, before giving me a kiss and walking out, leaving me with the taste of him on my mouth.

Brian

I check my watch. Thirty more minutes and I'm out of here. It's not like I've had a very productive day at work anyway. My mind has been on one thing...Justin.

I never knew it could feel so good just to sit and talk with someone. This is new for me. I have never spent a whole night with a guy and not fucked his brains out. Except for Mikey, but he's not even an option. That's a line that I will never cross.

Justin. Fuck. Seems like I've been saying his name all day. I remember the feel of his lips. Soft and tender. We only shared one kiss. I can't explain it; he's different. I didn't feel the need to do anything, but be with him, listen to him laugh and see that bright smile of his.

I can't believe how open and at ease I was with him. It feels like we'd been together for years. It certainly didn't feel like the first time. But of course I had to pay the price: I got my ass chewed out so bad when I got home that I kept feeling back there to make sure I had some left.

I'm supposed to meet the guys at Babylon tonight, but to be honest, I wouldn't mind seeing Justin again. I take out his business card, look at it and his number.

"Yeah." That's how he answers the phone.

"Justin?"

"Who's calling?"

"It's Brian, from last night." I swear I can see him smile through the phone.

"Brian. What's up? What are you doing tonight? Would you like to come over again?"

"Let's go out," I hear myself say. Whoa! What the fuck? Since when do I go out on dates?

"Sure, what do you have in mind?"

"You know how it goes – dinner, a movie, and maybe some dancing afterwards."

"Sounds good. What time should I be ready?"

"I'm not sure. I'll just come by when I get off work."

"Later, then"

"Later," I say, hanging the phone up and feeling a little silly. I'm looking forward to seeing him. Hell, I'm anxious, if the truth be told.

Justin

"You have to leave now," I tell Daph, pushing her out the door.

"Why can't I meet him?" she asks.

"Maybe because I don't want to scare him off," I tell her.

"Too late," she smiles, pointing to the black jeep pulling up. "That's him, right?" she asks me.

"Yeah, that's him. I'll introduce you, and then you go!"

"All right! God, calm down."

I watch Brian get out the jeep and come to the door. He looks from me to Daph.

"Your name wouldn't happen to be Daphne would it?" he asks.

"Yes, it would. And you are Brian?" He nods his head.

"Well, I'll leave you two alone," she smirks and walks away.

"Want to come in?" I ask.

"No, we'd better go if we're going to make the movie."

I get my coat and follow behind him.

Brian

So we did the movie and the dinner; the only thing left is Babylon, and I'm having my reservations. The guys would never let me live this down. Not with my "I don't believe in love" and "Never the same guy twice" policies.

"So where to now?" Justin asks me.

"Your place."

"I thought you wanted to go dancing."

"Not tonight," I tell him.

We get to his place and he gets us both beers, then he sits beside me and smiles.

"What?" I ask.

"Nothing, it's just that you are fun to hang out with, that's all."

We kiss.

"So are you," I whisper.

"Maybe next time we can go dancing." He smiles again, but I tense up and he notices.

"What did I say?" he asks me. I look at him, look in his eyes, and I want to be honest with him. I feel like I can trust him. So much so that I consider telling him about my home life. But I push it aside; I know if he knew who I went home to every night, he'd probably run away screaming. Besides one confession a night is enough.

"Justin, the reason I didn't want to go to Babylon is ... I don't ... I didn't ... Look, I have a reputation, all right?"

"No, you are 'not'," he looks surprised.

"No, I'm not 'what'?"

"No, you are not 'that' Brian Kinney?"

"So, you've heard of me?"

"No. Well, yeah. I mentioned you to a guy at work. He said the only Brian Kinney he knew was an asshole who liked to fuck guys and then never speak to them again. He said you've broken a lot of hearts and that you were referred to as the king of Babylon."

"Is that all?"

"He said you were the best fuck out there."

"That's me in all my glory," I smile.

"I told him there was no way we were talking about the same guy. I guess I was wrong."

"Does it really matter?"

"Why should it? You're not that way with me. Fuck what everyone else thinks."

"It's what my friends think also."

"Your friends don't know the real you?"

"Nobody does," I laugh.

Justin gets up and reaches out his hand to me. "Let me show you my bedroom," he purrs. I look at his hand out, waiting for me to take it, and I freeze. I can't do this.

"Justin, sit down and let me explain something to you."

He does as I ask, but he looks confused.

"It's not that I don't want you," I tell him.

"What is it then?" He looks hurt, so I hurry up to explain.

"Usually when I have sex with a guy that's it; I lose all interest. I have no desire to be in the same room with him, much less anything else. I just don't want to feel that way about you. Do you understand?"

"Yeah, I do. You could have me if you want, but you are choosing not to. That must mean that you care. I can certainly understand that." He smiles and I make a decision.

"Let's go," I stand up.

"Where?"

"To the diner and then to Babylon to meet my friends."

"What about your reputation?"

"Fuck it. Let's go."

Justin

We walk in the diner and go to a table with three guys sitting at it and a woman standing there talking to them. Brian does the introductions.

"This is Mikey, Ted, Emmett, and Mike's mom, Deb."

"And what's your name?" Deb asks, looking at me and I smile. "Don't tell me. With a smile like that it has got to be Sunshine!"

"I'm Justin," I say.

"Well, sit down," she tells me.

"Could you point me in the direction of the bathroom?" I ask.

"Come on. I'll show you," she says and starts to walk away, so I quicken my step to follow.

Brian

I watch Justin walk off then sit down.

"What's the deal?" Mikey whines.

"What do you mean?" I play ignorant.

"What's up with the blonde in the bathroom?" Ted asks.

"None of your fucking business," I snap.

"Do you work together or something?" Emmett asks.

"No, he works for Skylark. He's head of the art department there." I look over at Mikey. He's quiet and I know he can see through my bullshit. Thankfully, though, he knows me well enough to know not to push.

I see Ted lick his lips and I follow his gaze to Justin walking back our way.

"He's beautiful," Ted drools.

"He's taken," I snap before I can stop myself. Shit. All of their heads whip around toward me.

"By whom?" Ted asks. Fuck it; I want them to know to keep their hands off.

"By me," I say.

"No fucking way," Mikey says. "Don't tell me mister 'I don't do boyfriends' has finally fallen. He must be great in bed."

"I wouldn't know," I say.

"Wouldn't know what?" Justin asks.

"Nothing," I say, pulling him onto my lap, fully aware of the shocked expressions around the table.

"Why are we still here? Let's go," I say. We get up to leave and Mikey pulls me off to the side.

"I know you well enough to see what your feelings are toward him. Have you taken him to your place? Let him meet you know who?"

"Why should I?" I ask.

"It's the right thing to do."

"He doesn't know, and I want it to stay that way. OK?"

"It's your life," he shakes his head and I walk off to catch up with Justin.

When we get inside of Babylon, I grab Justin's hand. "Show me what you've got," I tell him. We start to dance and I swear that we are in perfect harmony. I feel as if I could dance all night. Shit. I don't know what the hell he's doing to me. I grab him by the waist and pull him for a deep kiss. Then I lift him up in the air; he throws his head back with laughter. I look at him and think about what Deb said. Sunshine. My sunshine.

Justin

I wake to the sound of the doorbell. I get up to answer it. Shit. I have a major hangover. Last night with Brian and his friends was fun but no way could I do it every night.

I open the door and Brian breezes in. "What's up, Sunshine?" he asks. I look at him and smile at the nickname Sunshine.

"What time is it?" I ask.

"Three in the afternoon."

"Shit, I slept that long?" he shrugs his shoulders.

"I guess, because I did call a few times."

"What's on the agenda for today?" I ask, a little weary.

"Nothing."

"Good." We sit down and talk for a while, order in and watch a movie and spend the rest of the night talking. I am slowly falling in love with this man, there is no doubt about it.

Brian

It's been three months since Justin and I got together, and I can't get enough of him.

I love being with him, just spending time together. We spend whole nights just talking. I think I'm secure enough in us now that I'm ready to take the relationship to the next level. Tonight I want to come clean about everything. I have to make love to him first, though, because after he finds out about the person at home he may never want to see me again.

Justin

Brian's acting strange tonight; I wonder if he's okay. I'm about to ask when his lips attack mine. "I'm ready to see your bedroom," he whispers. My heart does a little leap: I've waited so long for this. My stomach is full of butterflies; I lead the way to the bedroom.

He slowly undresses me, then himself. He pulls me to him for a kiss and we fall back on the bed. He starts on my neck, then works his tongue down my body. I'm on fire with every touch. My whole body is tingling. He stops at my cock. Our eyes meet for a moment before he takes me in his mouth. He's very talented. Never have I felt like this before. He grabs my balls and gently rubs them, all the while deep-throating me. I can't take it any more; I shoot right in his mouth and he drinks it up.

Brian

I lay down and let Justin go to work. He takes my dick into his warm mouth and wraps his lips around it. Then he pulls away.

"Justin."

He smiles and then does it again.

"Stop teasing me," I gasp. Then he devours it, working his tongue in ways that I've never imagined. I don't last long. I cum all over his mouth and watch as he licks it up.

I pull him up and plant kisses down his back.

"Now, Brian," he whispers. "Now we've waited long enough."

So I apply the lube, make sure that he is ready and place the condom on my swollen cock.

He lies on his side and I spoon up against him, lace my hand in his and slowly penetrate him. His muscles clasp around my dick, inviting me in. I slowly work my self in and out of him, loving the sound of his moans.

Justin

He's going so slowly and I love it. I reach behind me to his butt, to pull him closer. I want him as close to me as he can get. I lean back for a kiss, close my eyes, and I swear that I see fucking stars. I'm so close now and I feel him take my dick and gently begin to massage it until I cum.

Brian

When I bring him to release, I hear him cry out and I let go as well. I don't pull out and he grabs me to hold me there.

Finally I get up to go to the bathroom. I get my phone knowing that I need to check my messages. I have five, all from the same person. Shit. It must be important. I call home and get no answer. I'm about to lose my mind when Justin comes up to me.

"Is everything all right?" he asks. I know that the time has come for me to be honest with him, but my phone rings before I can say anything.

"Hello" I answer.

"Get your ass up here, now!"

"How close are we?"

"It's over." Click. Shit. Fuck.

"Bad news?" Justin asks. I look at him and decide: what better way to tell him, than to show him.

"Put your clothes on, you're coming with me."

I pause in front of the door and look at Justin. I know that he's full of questions, but he's about to find out the answers.

Justin

I walk into the room with Brian, and I see a dark haired lady leaning over the bed of a blonde woman who is holding a baby.

"Where is Gus?" I hear Brian ask.

"With Deb. Where the hell have you been? And who the fuck is this?" the dark haired lady asks.

Brian turns to me and motions to stand beside him. "This is Justin," he points to me, and I wave.

"Justin this is Melanie," he points to the one doing all the talking. Then he looks at the blonde and back to me. He seems nervous and I don't understand why. Finally he lets out a sigh and speaks.

"Justin, this is Lindsay, my wife." I take a couple of steps back. Everything feels so surreal right now.

"Your wife?" I ask in disbelief.

"Yeah, and this is our baby, Crystal. We decided on the name Crystal as soon as we found out it was a girl." He takes the baby in his arms and places a soft kiss on her forehead. I look at them, the perfect family, and I feel like an outsider. I look over at Melanie and I swear I see the same look on her face. Then something occurs to me

"Who is Gus?" I ask.

"Our son," Lindsay smiles. I can't deal with this shit right now; I begin backing away.

Brian places another kiss on the baby's head then gently hands her back to Lindsay.

"Let's go talk," he says and leads me to the roof.

"Why are we up here?" I ask. He tries to take my hand, but I pull it away.

"Justin, look, try to understand."

"Understand what? That you are a fucking liar or that you are happily married?"

"Let me explain," he asks in a very quiet voice.

"Maybe you should go in there and explain to your wife why her husband is the fucking king of Liberty Avenue. Don't you think that she has a right to know?"

"She does know."

"What?"

"If you would just shut the hell up and let me talk, I'll explain. Like I said, she knows that suck cock, just like I know that she eats pussy.

Okay, I did not see that one coming. "Are you sure?" I ask.

"Who do you think the other woman in there is?"

"That's...her girlfriend?"

"Finally, you are catching on."

"Why are you married?"

"She got pregnant, senior year in college."

"By..by..by...you?"

"Yeah, we fooled around a bit. It didn't mean any thing, being that we are both gay. But her parents found out that she was pregnant and she begged me to marry her just for a year to make them happy. They don't know that she's gay."

"And neither do your parents," I state.

"It's none of their goddamned business!" he explodes.

"So, if you two don't have sex like other married couples then where did the second baby come from?"

"Gus is getting older, and Lindsay felt that he needed a little brother or sister."

"And how did you feel?"

"I love Gus, and I didn't want him to grow up alone so...I mean did you see her? She is beautiful," he said.

I smile when I think back to him holding his daughter. It was a beautiful picture. I look at him and sigh. I still have a few questions.

"If it was only to be for a year, then why are you still married?" I ask and he laughs.

"Now you sound like Melanie. Look, I don't want to be away from Gus. Lindsay and I don't share a bedroom or anything like that. We have a big house and I have lots of space to my self. The only thing she does not like is me staying out all night; she gets worried. Other than that, everything is fine."

I look at him and think that this is clearly a man who loves his family.

"Where do I fit into all of this?" I ask.

"Wherever you want to, Justin," he answers.

"Why didn't you tell me? I thought we shared everything, now it all seems like a lie."

"Justin."

"I would have loved to have met Gus and maybe become friends with him. He's your son, Brian. What's the problem? Are you ashamed of me or something?"

"Stop being a drama queen, Justin. It's not like that at all."

"I'll catch a cab home," I spit at him.

"Fine. Fuck it then," he tells me as he turns to walk away.

Brian

It's been two weeks since I last talked to Justin. I swear it feels like somebody ripped my heart out, but I won't go after him, I won't chase him.

I walk into my house and go straight to Gus's room. He's asleep but I kiss him good night anyway. Then I go to Crystal and do the same. I lock myself up inside my room and start to undress when the phone rings.

"Hello," I yawn.

"Brian." It's Justin. My heart starts to beat fast.

"Can you come over here?" his voice breaks.

When I get there, his door is open and he rushes out of it. Before I can say anything, he's in my arms.

"I missed you," he tells me between kisses, pulling me in the house.

"Let's go to bed," I tell him, and that's where we stay all night.

Justin

I wake up to see Brian watching me.

"Good morning, Sunshine," he grins.

"What time is it?" I ask

"Just about morning."

"I guess we need to talk," I say, starting to get out of bed, but he pulls me back down.

"Let's talk right here," he tells me. So I get back under the sheets and turn on my side to face him.

"Why the change of heart?" he asks.

"I missed you. I tried to understand where you were coming from. I put myself in your shoes. I still think you should have been honest with me, but I understand better why you weren't."

"I wanted to tell you."

"I know," I say, sliding closer for a kiss. "So what did you tell Lindsay?" I ask.

"She asked, but I didn't want to talk about it."

"So she has no idea who I am?"

"She will tonight."

"How?"

"I want you to come over."

"What, for dinner or something?" Brian looks at me like I'm crazy.

"No, I just want you to meet everyone."

"By everyone, you mean Gus and Lindsay?"

"Yeah, you up for that?"

"As I'll ever be," I sigh.

We decide to get something to eat before going to his house.

We walk into the diner and sit down at the table with the guys. I notice the exchange of looks between them.

"What?" I ask.

"Nothing, just surprised to see you two, that's all," Emmett says.

"Together," Ted adds.

"What the fuck does that mean?" I ask.

"Nothing, baby," Emmett pats my hand.

We all sit there in silence, no one having anything to say I guess. Finally Brian announces that it's time for us to go.

When I get out of the jeep at Brian's house, I stop and pull him back before we reach the door. "What if they don't like me?" I ask.

"Would you just come on?" He takes my arm and pulls me to the door. The first person I see is Lindsay. She stops short when she sees me.

"Lindsay, you remember Justin?" Brian asks.

"Yeah," she shakes my hand.

"Where are the kids?" Brian asks.

"Crystal's asleep and Gus is in the back yard with Melanie."

"Come on, Justin," Brian takes my hand and we start toward the back door.

"Ah. Could I talk to you for a minute, Brian?" asked Lindsay.

He looks at me. "I'll be right back." They move to another room, but not out of hearing distance.

"What's he doing here, Brian? Who is he to you?" Lindsay demands.

Silence.

"I'll ask him, if I have to," she threatens.

"He's important to me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean he's an important part of my life."

"Is he the reason you've started staying out all night?"

Silence.

"I guess so," Lindsay says.

"What's the problem?" I hear Brian ask.

"What are you trying to do Brian?"

"I want him to meet Gus."

"Why?"

"What do you mean 'why'?"

"What I mean is, I don't think it's a good idea to just bring people in and out of our son's life."

"Yeah. That's why he's out back with Melanie now."

"Melanie is his mother, just as much as I am. She loves him she would never walk away from him."

"Aren't you being a little too uptight about all of this?"

"No, Brian! I don't like this. You stay out all night, now I'll admit the last couple of weeks you had gotten better, but last night you did it again!" Lindsay exclaims.

"I can come and go as I please. I don't punch a clock for anyone."

"What about your children? Don't their needs come before your own?"

"Always, Linds. I always put my kids first and you know that, so try another line of offense."

"I just don't like it. Why are you doing this?"

"Doing what? You would be happy if I was out at Babylon every night getting my dick sucked in some alley?"

"At least it would be you, Brian. I don't judge you. I accept you for who you are. I would never want to change you. Why would you want to be around someone who does?"

"He's not trying to change me, Lindsay. You don't even know him."

"Nor do I have any desire to, and I would prefer if our son didn't either."

"Fuck that, Lindsay. If he can call Melanie 'momma,' he can sure as hell meet Justin! I'm not asking, here, Lindsay, he's my son, too."

I don't want to be here any more; I walk out of the house and go to sit on the front porch. The last thing I want is to cause Brian any problems.

"Why are you out here?" I look up and see Brian smiling at me. "Let's go meet my son."

"You sure it's okay?" I ask, a little tentatively.

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"I don't know. I just don't want to cause any problems."

"What are you talking about?"

"Nothing, let's go." We walk around the house and into the back yard where Gus and Melanie are.

"Hey, Daddy," Gus runs into his father's arms.

"Hey, Sonny Boy. What are you doing?"

"Playing with momma."

"I have someone I want you to meet."

"Who?" Brian takes my hand.

"This is Justin, Justin meet Gus."

"Hi, Gus. Your daddy has told me a lot about you."

"He has?" Gus asks. Just then Melanie walks up.

"I know you from the hospital, right?" she asks me.

"Yeah, you're Melanie. I remember."

"So, what are you doing hanging out with Peter Pan?"

"Who?"

"Brian."

"Oh." I look at Brian and laugh. He ignores both of us and turns to Gus.

"How would you like to go to the zoo tomorrow with me and Justin? Maybe we can even catch a movie afterwards?"

"Yeah!" Gus screams with excitement. Melanie smiles at him.

"Sounds like a fun day, huh?" she asks him.

"Yeah, I'm going to tell mommy," he runs off in the direction of the house.

"Plan on taking Crystal, too?" Mel asks.

"She's just a baby," Brian answers.

"I know, but she gets older everyday, and you are going to have to start including her in some of these father and son activities."

"She's right, you know. You should listen to her," I tell him.

"I like him," she tells Brian, pointing to me. "He should come around more often. Though what he sees in you, I have no idea." Brian gives her a look that says 'fuck you' and she smirks. I wonder if these two get along.

"Do you plan on staying out all night again?" Melanie asks.

"None of your fucking business!" Brian snaps.

"Well, it makes Lindsay worry, so maybe you could show a little consideration for someone besides yourself for a change."

"What I do is not anybody else's fucking business."

"You are such a selfish asshole." Mel is getting madder by the minute, if that's possible.

"One of my best qualities," Brian smirks.

"Don't you two ever stop?" Lindsay asks, walking up. They both turn to look at her.

"Brian, Gus told me about your plans for tomorrow. I thought I made myself crystal clear." She gives me a quick look and I start to feel uneasy.

"What are you talking about?" Melanie demands. Lindsay shoots me another uncomfortable look, but remains silent.

"Lindsay thinks it's a bad idea for Justin to be around Gus," Brian speaks up.

"Why?" Melanie asks Lindsay.

"I just don't think it's a good idea to bring people in and out of his life that's all," Lindsey answers.

"Bullshit!" Melanie responds.

"What if Gus gets attached to Justin and he walks out of his life? What then? Where does that leave Gus?"

"That's the chance he will have to take with anyone in his life. So why don't you cut the shit and tell us what this is really about." Melanie asks.

"I already did," Lindsey tells her.

"You're jealous," Melanie accuses.

"Of who, Justin? Please. Why would I be jealous of Brian's friend?" Linds nervously laughs.

"I think we both know he's more than that."

"Do we?"

"Look, Linds, don't make me take up for this asshole," Mel pleads.

"We have to go," Brian interrupts.

"How long will you be gone?" Linds asks.

"You know where I will be; there's no need to worry," Brian tells her.

"I just don't think you should be out all night."

"Why?"

"It's just that" Lindsey starts.

"Look save the worried wife routine for Melanie here," Brian tells her. He grabs my arm and we walk into the house and up to Gus's room.

"I'm ready to leave, but don't forget about tomorrow," Brian says to Gus.

"I won't," Gus smiles, and Brian leans down to give him a kiss on the forehead.

"Bye, Sonny Boy."

"Bye, Daddy. Bye, Justin," he waves.

"He's adorable," I tell Brian, as we walk out of Gus's room.

"I know," Brian says.

We walk into another room where Crystal is sleeping. He picks her up and places a kiss on her forehead as well.

"Let me see YOUR room," I tell him. He gives me a smirk then leads me to another part of the house. We walk into a very big room. He has it set up like an apartment. He's got a living room and a bedroom off to the side, plus a full size bathroom. I look at him and he shrugs his shoulders.

"I told you I have my own space," he laughs. I go to sit on the bed.

"I don't want to cause problems, Brian."

"Linds is just a little overprotective, that's all."

"It seemed like more than that to me."

"Well, it's not, so just drop it," he tells me. I kick my shoes off and lay back on the bed.

"What are you doing?" he asks.

"I'm sleepy. Let's take a nap," I tell him. He looks at me for a moment and then proceeds to take his clothes off. So I take mine off as well. We slide between the sheets and he wraps his arms around me and places a small kiss behind my ear before we both drift off to sleep.

Brian

I wake up to the back of a blonde head. Justin. I sit up and look around; we are in my room. I go to the bathroom and come back to see Justin scrambling to put his clothes on.

"Whoa, what are you doing?" I ask.

"If Lindsay finds out I stayed here all night, she'll...."

I cut him off. "This is my home, too. Stop being a drama queen. You know that you are always welcome here." He sits on the bed to watch me as I get dressed. I pretend not to see him looking at me. I go very slowly, putting on a very sexy show for him. He's practically drooling. I look at him with a smirk and he looks away, only to turn right back to my still-smirking face.

"You asshole, you were doing that on purpose."

"Doing what? I was just getting dressed. Come on let's go."

"Where?"

"Downstairs." We walk down to see Lindsay and Gus at the table and Crystal in her bassinet.

Justin

"Where's Melanie?" I whisper before we get to the table.

"She'll be here," Brian tells me.

"Does she live here?"

"Might as well," he sounds annoyed.

"Good morning, Sonny Boy," he tells Gus.

"Good morning," Gus says, in a very subdued tone.

"What's wrong?"

"I have to go with Grandma and Granddaddy today," he answers, still sulking.

"What's he talking about?" Brian asks Lindsay.

"My parents are taking him for the day."

"We had plans," he tells her.

"We've already been over this more than once, okay? So just leave it alone OK?" He doesn't answer, just turns and walks out the room. Gus gets up as well and heads up stairs. Leaving me, Lindsay, and the baby, alone.

"How did you and Brian meet?" she asks me, as she places a bagel and a cup of coffee in front of me.

"Thanks," I tell her, as I spread butter on my bagel and take a bite. I'm pretty hungry, being that Brian and I slept most of yesterday away.

"We met in the grocery store."

"How long ago?"

"Almost four months."

"Yeah, that's about when he started staying out all night. He doesn't make a habit of that, so I was really worried."

"Sorry about that. When we talk time just seems to fly by."

"Talk?" she looks skeptical.

"Oh, that's all we did the first three months is talk," I laugh.

"So all those nights he was out, you two were just talking? So you never. You know?"

"The first time was the night we came to the hospital."

"That is not Brian." She seems deep in thought for a minute, then she brightens.

"So Justin, what do you do? What line of work are you in?"

"I'm an artist. I work for an ad company"

"Is your last name Taylor, by any chance?"

"You know my work?" I ask.

"Are you kidding? I'm an art teacher, by the way. But to answer your question, of course I know your work. You donated a lot of pieces to the GLC. Mel and I are on the Board.

"Does she teach as well?"

"No. She's a lawyer." She looks back in the direction that Brian went, then turns to me.

"You seem like a very nice person, Justin, but you understand I can't have people just barging into my children's life."

"I don't plan on going anywhere any time soon," I tell her. She gives me a sympathetic look.

"You don't know Brian like I do. He'll never be able to commit to anyone."

"You seem pretty sure."

"He's not your boyfriend Justin. He's not going to ever be your boyfriend; that's not who he is."

"I don't think you know him as well as you think you do."

"I've known him a lot longer than you. I accept him for who he is. I have no illusions when it comes to Brian. I'd never try to change him."

"Nor would I," I say, looking up to see Brian coming back our way. He seems to have just gotten out of the shower. He has on a clean pair of clothes.

"I'm going to take you home so you can change," he tells me.

"I called your parents to tell them that Gus would be spending the day with me."

"So you are going to deliberately disobey me?"

"I'm ready, Daddy," Gus squeals, bouncing down the steps.

"Let's go," Brian says as we walk out the door, leaving a seething Lindsay inside.

Well, we took Gus to the zoo, and then the movies that day, and it has slowly become our routine. We've even started including baby Crystal.

Things are great between Brian and I. Now, if we could only get Lindsay to just accept it, everything would be fine.

The End

Defenseless

Brian and Justin reflect. Neither is happy with the results...

Justin

When I wake up in the morning I see the lights. Blue lights, that is. I blink my eyes trying to shake that image, but it won't go away. I turn to my side and see Brian sleeping, a very content look on his face. God, I hate him. Hate what he does to me. Hate the power that he has over me. He's so fucking sure of himself. So fucking confident. I don't know how I keep falling into his trap. I really thought when I left with Ethan that it was over. Completely over. But here I am, right back where I started. I feel ...I don't know, this feeling is new to me. I feel...so hopeless...self loathing. I hate that I let this man have this effect on me after everything that he's done. After how he made me feel unworthy of him, unworthy of his love. Why I let him make me feel like that I don't know anything. Sometimes I think that maybe I am cursed. Cursed to spend my life beside a man who is so emotional crippled that he could never show me love.

I watch as he turns over and automatically reaches for me. So fucking sure. So fucking sure that I'm going to be right there. I could never have that kind of assurance about him. I never know where I stand with him, but I'm starting to wonder if I even care. He'll never give me what I want, I faced that fact long ago. He'll never love me like I need to be loved, but I could never love him the way that he needs either. Not the way that Mikey does. I want things. I need things and I won't settle for less. He couldn't give me that, so I walked away. I watch him smiling in his sleep and wonder what it is that he's dreaming about. I think I hate him. I really think that I do. So what am I doing here? See that's the thing. That's his power. That's what holds me here. Keeps me from completing walking away.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Brian

I open my eyes to see two pools of blue staring at me. He seems lost in thought. I don't know how we keep ending up here, together in this bed, night after night, but it has to stop. I won't let Justin pull me back in with his bullshit anymore.

He thinks he can fuck me over for Ethan then come running back here whenever he pleases. So sure that I won't turn him away. So sure I'll let him into the door of my heart. Well, fuck that! Never again. I'll never let him get that close to me again. Sure, I'll fuck him. I'll never stop wanting to fuck him, but that's as far as I'm willing to go. That's all he's getting from me. Suddenly I feel a wave of emotion wash over me as I realize that, that's all he wants. To fuck. Shit, he has no desire to be with me, he just wants my cock. It's not love or caring that's bringing him to me, it's just plain old sex. I gaze at him, still lost in his own thoughts, and I silently ask, 'how could you do this to me Justin? How could you make me feel like this? How can you bring out emotions in me that I've tried so hard to suppress? Make me love you. Make me want you. Make me watch you walk away with someone else and not like it.' All I feel is anger when it comes to Justin. A lot of pent-up anger that I can't bring myself to express. I want to hurt him, badly. I want him to feel what I felt when he pushed me away. When he walked out on me. When he stopped being my Justin and turned into someone else, someone I didn't recognize.

"What are you thinking about" he asks, looking me straight in the eye. "Trust me, Justin you don't want to know" I think, while peering at him cautiously. Something in the look he's giving me, leads me to believe that he's not too happy with me either.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" I query.

He looks at me forlornly and replies, "Just thinking."

"About what?"

"Nothing important" he sighs. "Just things, you know."

"Noooo, I don't know. That's why I asked, but fuck it." He gives me a look that essentially tells me he's not in the mood for my shit. Yeah, well he gives a fuck what he's in the mood for?

"Don't giving me that fucking look Justin! You're in my loft, in my bed, or did you forget?" He gives me a sarcastic chuckle, then gets up and starts getting dressed.

"Does it make you feel like a big man when you say stuff like that, Brian? Does it make you feel important?" He laughs in a mocking tone, which pisses me off to no end? Who the fuck does this kid think he, laughing at ME!

"Why, exactly are you here Justin? Why keep coming back? What the fuck do you expect?" I'm practically screaming at him by this point.

He stops mid-dress, pondering my questions in a mocking manner. "Why am I here? Why do I keep coming back?" he smirks. "Why do you keep letting me back? Even asking me back some nights? And, as for what I expect, the answer is nothing. Absolutely, nothing! I expect nothing expect, maybe a good fuck every now and then." He says this last sentence, smugly satisfied with himself.

"Humph, that's all I'm good for, right?" I quietly ask.

"For me and half of gay PA, yes. That's what you are good for."

Geez, what a smartass, I'm thinking. "Maybe that's all you want anyway."

Finally, he explodes. "Why else would I be here, Brian? I learned a long time ago what you would and would not do relationship-wise, so what other reason could I possibly have for being here. I thought you knew that?"

"Just making sure you're not getting your hopes up." I pronounce, trying to keep my anger at his ass to a minimum.

"I left fairy tail land a long time ago, Brian. You, made sure of that."

I wonder just what is going on in that blonde head of his. I don't know and don't like not knowing. I want him and I want him to want me. To want to be with me, to beg me to take him back. Then I'll show him. I'll reject him, like he did me. Show him what it feels like to be pushed aside in favor of another. But this is not that same little twink I picked up in another time. This kid is on the cusp of manhood and trying to figure out exactly what he wants and I'm unsure of what the end results will be. That's what truly frightens me, the unknown. I can't let go of him, at least not yet, even though I would like nothing better than for him to be out of my life forever. Can't let him go. Can't hold on too much longer. So where does that leave me? More importantly, where does it leave us?

SURRENDER

(SEQUEL TO DEFENSELESS)

Brian and Justin talk a little more

Where does that leave us? Maybe the question should be – what does that make us?

Fucked? Crazy? In love? Who the hell knows? I hate this. Hate needing him. Hate loving him. Hate wanting him. Hate the way he makes me feel. Hate the way he makes me hurt.

"What are you thinking about now?" he asks me.

"Do you still fuck Ethan?" I ask, before I can stop myself. Shit. Where the fuck did that come from?

"Why wouldn't I?" he asks. Emotions are coursing through my whole body. I'm hot, horny, mad, and hurt; that's a very fucked up combination.

I reach for him, and throw him down. He looks at me, gets off the bed, and stands there, looking at me. Looking down at me. Fuck this shit. I jump up and grab him and kiss him. I kiss him hard – it's the only way I know to release my anger, short of beating the shit out of him. He doesn't push me away; his passion is as furious as mine. I pull his head back and kiss him until I taste blood. Then I throw him on the bed again. He gets on all fours and I tear open a condom pack and began to pound into him. "Who the fuck do you think you are?"pound ... pound"You hurt me?"pound ... pound. "Leave me alone"pound ... pound.....

I'm not thinking about pleasure, just the pain that I'm in, that I've been in since he left me. I need release right now, that's all I'm thinking about so I pound into him more as he grabs the sheets, moans loudly, and meet my thrusts, pound-for-pound.

Finally I'm spent and find release. I collapse on top of him, but he's having none of that. Oh hell no. Now his fire is lit. He pushes me off of him and rolls me over. Grabs a condom and pushes right into me. Fucking me with the same urgency that I fucked him with.

Justin

I get off of Brian and look around. I'm so fucking charged right now. I feel like I could fuck for ten hours straight. He rolls over and gets up as well.

"It's time for you to go," he tells me, walking to the bathroom. That's fine with me. I start to put my clothes on, but I notice him watching me. I don't know why, but this pisses me off.

"What the fuck are you looking at?" I ask, in a not so nice voice. He ignores me and goes to the kitchen and opens up the refrigerator. I go up to him and slam it shut.

"I said, what the fuck are you looking at?" I get closer to him and he looks at me with a very amused look.

"Big, bad ass Justin," he smirks.

"You are a fucking case," I tell him. He looks confused.

"Case of what?"

"Mental. You are a fucking mental case."

"We can't all be geniuses," he sneers.

"Why do you always push me to this point?" I ask him.

"Why do you let me?" he asks very simply. And there it is. There it fucking is. Why do I let him push my buttons, or better yet, why does he let me push his?

"I could ask you the same question," I tell him. He raises his eyebrow staring at me, that amused look still on his face.

I turn to leave the kitchen. I make it as far as the living room before he grabs me.

"Where the fuck are you going?" he asks.

"Let me go," I demand, only to have him laugh at me.

"I said, let me go, Brian."

"And I asked where you were going?"

"Home," I say, struggling to get out of his embrace. He raises his eyebrow to look at me.

"Home?"

"Yes, home." He lets me go. Pushes me away.

"Well, then, get the fuck out," he walks away. Turns his back on me. I run after him and push him. He turns around and grabs my shoulders.

"Stop it," he hisses, before turning around and walking up to the bedroom. I follow, pushing him again, harder this time, almost knocking him over. He turns around and grabs me by the throat.

"Is this what you want?" he whispers in my ear. I don't answer and he lets me go. Pushes me on the bed, climbs on top of me, and assaults my neck. I grab his hair and run my fingers through it. I love the feel of it, love the feel of him. He works his way down my body and I clasp him to me. Eyes meet and emotions flow. Love, hate, wanting, need, desire, lust, and hopelessness, maybe even despair.

I reach up to him and touch his face. I let a single tear flow out of my eye and down my face because I know that this is our fate. I look into his eyes, they are sad because he knows it too. He rolls off of me, lies down beside me, and holds me to him. I wrap my arms around him and there we lie. Holding onto each other. Neither of us wanting to be there, but neither of us able to let go.

One of a Kind

Warning: Deathfic

The dust had finally settled. Dickerson had won and Stockwell was being asked to answer some very tough questions.

Justin

I'm on my way to Lindsay and Melanie's house. It's been two weeks since Stockwell lost and we all are able to breathe now and celebrate. Everyone else is already there. I left to take Gus to the babysitter's house. I smile as I think that with the exception of Gus, everyone that I love is in that house.

My parents and sister are there. We've been through our ups and downs, especially with me coming out at seventeen. But now everything has calmed down with them. They support me; they love me, that's what matters.

Deb, who has been like a second mother to me, is there with her boyfriend, Carl Horvath. Deb's brother Vic is there with his husband, Rodney. Deb's son Michael is there with his man, Ben, and their son Hunter. Ben and Michael found the boy selling himself on the street when he was only 12 years old. They took him in and have raised him ever since.

Emmett is there with his boyfriend, Dijon; they've only been together a few months. Ted is there with his boyfriend Blake. At one time Blake had a drug problem and he even pulled Ted in with him but they've both been clean for over a year now.

My best friend Daphne is there. I was surprised to see her. She has been through a lot lately. She'd met a boy named Tony Gills, whom she thought she loved. I'd never liked him for some reason; he gave me a bad vibe. One night a bunch of his friends came to Daphne's apartment and they got her drunk, gang raped and tortured her. Every time I think about it, I want to kill those motherfuckers. Too bad Daphne's dad beat me to it. He hunted them down one by one and blew each of their heads clear off before the police were able to catch him. Daphne has never been the same. She's taken baby steps, though, and coming tonight is a huge step. I'm so proud of her.

Lindsay and Melanie are the mothers of Brian's son Gus. Brian and Lindsay met in college and have been best friends since. They sent me to take Gus to the babysitter's tonight because they didn't want him to be kept up by all the noise that we're sure to make at the party.

Brian that's my man, my lover of almost three years. We've been through some really hard times but we've always held on to each other no matter what.

When I get to the house all I see is chaos. There are police everywhere and there is a lot of yellow tape. My heart speeds up and I get a feeling in the pit of my stomach that tells me my life is never going to be the same again. I try to get by the tape, but some cop pulls me back.

"I live here," I lie, willing to say anything to get me inside that house. I'm released and I rush inside... Someone else stops me and shouts "Who the hell let him through here?"

"Please, Officer, that's my family in there," I plead. The police officer looks at me with pity in his eyes. And I feel my chest began to rise and fall with an uncontrollable force.

"We lost one of our own in there tonight, son," he says, squeezing my shoulders. Carl?

“Carl? You mean Carl’s dead?” He gives me that look again and just nods his head. Oh my god, Debbie must be beside herself

I walk in and I feel the wind knocked out of me. I grip the wall for support as my ankles buckled under me. Suddenly I can’t seem to get enough air into my lungs; I take deep breaths and look at the scene before me.

Debbie is the first one that I see. She’s lying in a pool of her own blood and she has a bullet hole in her head. I look past her and that’s when I feel the bile in my throat. Everyone is dead. Everyone! No one was spared. I look at my parents and I go to my mom. There are policemen everywhere taking pictures and they won’t let me near my mom. I want to hold her in my arms. I want to kiss her and tell her I love her. I look at my father beside her and I turn away. My sister is lying on the floor only a few feet from my mom.

“Oh god Molly!” I sink to my knees and let the sobs take over my body. “Oh god, not my baby sister, not my baby sister, MOLLY!” I scream to the top of my lungs. Someone pulls me up and takes me to the other side of the room. That’s when I see Daphne. I feel my heart tighten. She was just starting to get better, just able to come out again. I notice that I don’t see Brian anywhere. Where is Brian? Maybe he’s okay.

“Brian! Brian!” I began to yell as loud as I could. I run into the kitchen, thinking maybe he’s there. I’m right; he is there, lying on the floor, blood everywhere.

“Brian, I’m here now, you can wake up now,” I say, falling to the floor beside him. “It’s ok, you can wake up now. Brian, please wake up!” I sob, rocking back and forth on the floor. I go to grab him up in my arms and some one pulls me up.

“It’s all over son. There were no survivors.”

“What happen to them?” I begin to shout, beating at the cop who is trying to hold me back.

“We don’t know, son, we just don’t know,” he says, and then all I see is blackness.

I wake up with an EMT standing over top of me.

“I’m okay,” I say, getting up. Gus! Gus is alive! I need to get to Gus.

Two weeks after everyone is laid to rest, I sit back and watch Gus sleep. I know what I have to do. There is no one in this world left for me to love but Gus and only one person who could even begin to understand what I’m going through.

Brian left most everything to me and Gus in his will. My parents left everything to Molly and me, and if something happened to either of us, the other got that share as well. I look at Gus sleeping. As soon as I can, I’m out of here.

Gus and I sit in the car in the back of a dark alley.

“Well, this is it Gus. Are you ready?” He nods his head. It’s been really rough on him; he cries for his mommies and daddy every night, and it breaks my heart every time.

“Maybe where we are going you will be able to see your mommy, daddy and everyone else again. Would you like that Gus?”

“Yay!!” he says clapping his hands in the air. I let a silent tear roll down my cheek. ‘I’m doing the right thing’ I tell my self.

I've cashed in and sold every thing that Brian and my parents left me, all except the loft. I know I will never need it again. I have the money in the car with us.

"Okay Gus this is it, are you ready?"

"Yeah! Want to see mommy and mamma and daddy, too! Yay!" he says. I choke down my sobs and lean my head on the steering wheel. I take a deep breath. This has been my home all my life. Here in Pittsburgh is where I was born and raised.

I push my fear aside, take Gus's hand and do what must be done.

Brian

Justin and I party with everyone else on Liberty Avenue until the break of dawn.

We get back to the loft and fall into the bed. I don't get up until I hear:

Bang! Bang!

Someone's knocking at the door.

"Who the fuck is it? Don't tell me you're giving a tour this early?" Justin says, getting up and going to the bathroom. I swing the door open and see Mikey, Ben and Hunter on the other side.

"We came to bring your keys back," Mikey says.

"I thought you were gone. What the fuck happened?" I ask them.

"I didn't get too far before I came back. We went back to get Ben, and we came up with a plan.

"What kind of plan?" Justin asks, coming down the steps and into the living room.

"Hunter said when his mom first put him out he was scared and so she used to stay around the area where he was, telling him 'it's alright, Mommy's here' and 'remember, we need the money' and things like that.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" I ask, but they all look pretty serious.

"So we saw her riding up and down the street, waiting for us to come back, not knowing we had already slipped in," Mikey says. "Ben called her up and we held up an old tape that we had in the apartment, and told her one of the johns had taped the whole thing and she was on there egging Hunter on. We told her Hunter had the tape all along and that when she brought the cops back we were going to give it to them."

"So what did she do?" Justin asks.

"She said she would drop the custody claim and then she ran, got the fuck out of there as fast as she could," Hunter says.

"How's my car?" I ask Mikey. "Did you hit anything?"

"Your car is fine, Brian," Mikey says, as they all head out the door.

Two weeks later things are starting to calm down a little. Ted is in rehab and Emmett is still living with Lindsay and Melanie. Mikey and Ben still have Hunter and they have not heard back from his mom. For the most part everyone is still the same.

We're all sitting in the diner and Deb is telling everyone not to forget the little celebration for our win over Stockwell. I look at Justin, he seems deep in thought.

"What's wrong with you?" I ask him, he's been in a funk all day.

"Daphne's new boyfriend," he says, I look at him waiting for him to explain further but he just stares off into space again.

"What's wrong with Daphne's new boyfriend? Did you fuck him or something?" I ask.

"Not everything is about sex, Brian," he says and rolls his eyes.

"What the fuck is the problem, Justin?" I ask, starting to get frustrated.

"I hate him, Brian. His name is Tony Gills and I hate him," he sighs.

"Are you jealous?" I ask.

"No, I'm not jealous; I just get a bad vibe from him. I'm telling you, something is not right with him. I tried to tell Daphne and do you know what she said to me?" he asks.

"Um...let me see, she told you to fuck off," I say

"Can you believe it? And all I'm doing is trying to look out for her," I laugh at him and he gives me a sour look.

"Hey, don't forget tonight at Mel and Linds; I expect everyone to be there," Deb says, floating by with a tray of food.

We're at Mel and Linds' for Deb's little celebration. Everyone is there, with the exception of Ted, of course, who is in rehab.

"Where's Justin?" Jennifer asks, looking around. "Everyone is here but him."

"He said he would be here; ask Daphne she probably knows," I say, walking away. I see Jennifer walk over to Daphne and I pull out my phone and call him. No answer. Maybe he has his phone off.

I'm talking to Mikey and Linds when Carl comes through the door.

Deb cuts the music off when she sees him.

"Carl, what are you doing here?" she asks him. He stands stony-faced, watching us all and I began to feel my throat go dry. He looks over at Jennifer and I see the fear in her eyes. He walks over to her.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he says, holding his head down.

"Where is my son?" she asks, looking around the room with panic in her eyes.

"Sunshine, did something happen to Sunshine?" Debbie asks, walking up beside Jennifer.

“We found him in the alley about two blocks from his apartment. He has one gun shot to the head; he didn’t make it,” Carl says, and I see my life float away from me. Justin dead? That can’t be what he said.

“Excuse me, but where the fuck is Justin?” I ask, waiting for Carl to explain himself.

Mikey walks up to me and he has tears running down his face. He pulls me into a hug.

“Shit, Mikey, what the hell is wrong with you? Justin is alright,” I say, looking around the room. Jennifer has collapsed on the floor and Debbie is beside her, both of them crying.

“Not my baby, not my baby,” Jennifer is shouting over and over again. Lindsay is on the couch doubled over crying, and Melanie and Emmett are hugging each other. Vic has his head in his hands and huge sobs wrack his body. Rodney is rubbing his back. Daphne is sitting in a corner rocking back and forth, silent tears falling down her cheeks. Hunter is off to the side looking shocked.

Ben has tears on his face and he’s trying to get some information out of Carl.

“What the hell is wrong with you all? Justin’s not dead!” I shout out.

“Brian come on and sit down,” Mikey says, trying to lead me to a chair.

“We need someone to identify the body,” Carl says and I go for the door. I’m not going to listen to this bullshit.

I start toward Justin’s apartment to tell him to hurry up and get his ass to the party so everyone can just calm the fuck down. I step out of my car only to realize that I’m at the hospital. I walk down to the morgue and tell them why I’m here, they pull the sheet back and I see my Justin lying there and then blackness. When I wake up, I’m in a hospital. I’m hooked to an IV and Lindsay is sitting in a chair.

“Brian, you’re awake.” She gets up and leans over me. I’m confused for a minute and then I remember Justin; I let out a groan and turn over, trying to crawl back up into myself again.

“Brian don’t, please. You’ve been here for two days. Justin’s funeral is tomorrow. You have to be there. If you’re not, you will never forgive yourself.” She presses the call button for the nurse to come in and check my vitals. My eyes are heavy and before I know it I’m sleep again.

When I awake again, I decide it’s time for me to go home.

Justin’s funeral is pretty much a blur for me. I remember Mikey and Emmett on either side of me trying to hold me up. I remember seeing the tears of Molly and wondering if she knew just what an extraordinary brother she had; I remember seeing Craig and Jennifer hanging on to each other for support. And I remember thinking what a shame it is that Craig never took the time to know the beautiful man that his son had become.

I could have turned to drinking, drugs, and sex to try and block out the pain, but for some reason, I’m not sure why, I threw myself into finding a job. If I had to sit around that loft with nothing to do but think about Justin all day long, I would have gone crazy. Words can’t even begin to express how much I miss him, how much he really meant to me and how much I regret the fact that I never told him that I love him. I never fucking told him. And no one knows how bad that shit eats me up. No one knows how many times I reach out for him at night, how many times I’ve cried into his pillow because he’s not there. I see him all the time but it’s not him.

I had to find a job before I lost it, so I went hunting with a vengeance. I finally got a job as a consultant to another advertising agency. My work and Gus have become my life. With Justin gone, what else beside those two things do I have to live for?

It’d been some months when Jennifer and Lindsay got together to open a show for the last of Justin’s pictures. They’d yet to catch the person who killed Justin: there’s no motive, no reason for his death. He wasn’t robbed, nor was he raped. Horvath has been working around the clock, with Debbie right on his heels. But so far nothing.

I walk into the Galley. It's filled with Justin's work and I feel closer to him. I feel surrounded by his love. I start to feel warm all over and I'm not sure that I'll be able to leave this place when the time comes.

I see everyone is here; even Craig Taylor and Ethan Gold are here. A lot of people I don't know, but I'm sure Justin knew a lot of tonight's guests. He was always easy to get along with. He made friends at the drop of a hat. Everyone loved him. Everyone loved him.

Justin

Gus and I are in Pittsburgh and I've not done what I'm supposed to do yet. I wanted to find us somewhere to live first. I look for a house and soon settle on one that suits us. We move in and I go about fixing it up, trying to make Gus comfortable. He's all I've got now and I'll do anything to make him happy. He wants to see his parents like I promised him and all I can tell him is soon. I don't want him to get his heart broken. I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing. Some times it's still hard to believe that everyone is gone. I have nightmares of them all lying on the floor shot to pieces. I miss them all so much: my mom, Molly, Brian, all of them. At night after Gus is sleep I allow myself down time. I allow myself to cry. I want Deb to call me 'Sunshine.' I want Molly to annoy me by repeating everything that I say, I want my father to look at my report card and tell me how proud he is of me, I want my mom. God! My mom! I want her to rock me to sleep at night, I want her to read me bed time stories, I want her to fuss at me for not keeping my room clean, I want her to ... oh hell, I just want her here! Then there's Brian, I want him to hold me at night, I want him to brush my hair out my face, I want him to go dancing with me at Babylon. I want him to love me.

I put Gus's stroller in the car. Tonight is the night. I'm nervous as hell, but I have to see him. I have to. When I get there, I pull his stroller out of the car. I roll him inside and see the shocked looks on everyone's face.

Brian

I'm talking to Lindsay when I see Justin and a baby whose face is coved up with his hat and coat come in. Then I take a second to collect my self because it is Justin I see. If this is someone's idea of a fucking joke it's not funny. I look around and see everyone else trying to compose themselves.

"I'm...I'm looking for Justin. I know this is his show, where is he?" the imposter begs. I look over just in time to see a knowing look cross Craig and Jennifer's face. They know something. Finally Deb asks the question that we all want to know.

"Does Justin have a twin that we never knew about?"

"No," both Jennifer and Craig answer at one time.

"Then who the fuck is this?" I ask, unable to control myself any longer. I want so badly for him to be Justin, my Justin. He looks just like him, hell; he's even got Justin's clothes on. What the fuck is going on? I look at him and I want to reach out and hold him. I didn't think I'd ever see him again. But there he is in all his glory and he's fucking beautiful. I don't know what to do. No one does.

"Please, I just need to see Justin, he can explain everything," the boy says, tears rolling down his cheek. He's looking at us with a very wistful look on his face.

"Justin's ...dead," Jennifer says, her voice breaking. He looks as if someone has punched him in the stomach.

"No, he can't be," he says, the tears slowly running down his cheeks.

"Who the hell is this?" I ask. Jennifer and Craig share a look and then they take a step toward the boy. He looks like he wants to reach out to them. They grab his shirt and lift it up. I began to question their sanity, along with my own.

“Oh my god!” Jennifer gasps, while Craig looks like he’s ready to fall over.

“Come on everyone,” Lindsay says, shooing us off to a private room in the Gallery. Everyone takes a seat and look to Craig and Jennifer for an explanation.

“When Justin was around three, he had a friend whose name was also Justin and who also had a mother name Jennifer and a father name Craig. I mean we never believed him, and we figured it was harmless. Then one day he told us that the other Justin had a cut on his side so now every one could tell them apart. We never paid it much mind, and when Molly was born, Justin told us that the other Justin had a sister and her name was Molly, too.” Jennifer stops for a minute to compose herself and Craig takes over the narrative.

“We asked Justin where the other Justin lived and he said ‘He lives here, Daddy,’ and I asked him “Where? Pittsburgh?’ and he said ‘Yeah, he lives in Pittsburgh, but he lives in our house with his family. And he said he has a best friend name Daphne too.’ Daphne looks at the other Justin and he looks at her and smiles.

“When we’d had enough of it, we began to worry about him. We tried to show him that no one lived in the house but us. But Justin laughed, he said the other Justin lived in this house but not in this house. We never understood what he was talking about.

Justin

As soon as I walk in there and see all those people that I know and love, I almost lose it. I want to fall into my mom’s arms. I want Brain to pick me up and hold me, but this is not my mom and it’s not my Brian.

When she tells me that Justin is dead, I feel everything go out of focus for a second. Could I have been so wrapped up in my pain that I didn’t feel him die? How could I not know this? Was I so caught up in my own pain that I didn’t notice that he was dead?

After we are put into the other room and mom...I mean Jennifer, starts to explain things, everyone looks at me for some sort of understanding.

“It’s called quantum mechanics; it deals with the string theory that says that one universe may have two or more dimensions that are the same, existing at the same time, having the same people all going through life. Some people have to power to go from dimension to dimension. I have that power.”

“Bullshit!” Brian explodes, jumping up from his chair.

“Brian, please,” Jennifer says, and he looks at her for a moment before he sits down.

“Justin and I have led a life almost identical. I had all of you in my world,” I say and I don’t try to stop the tears from coming down my cheeks.

“So how do you go from dimension to dimension?” Ben asks me.

“I don’t know, it’s not hard to do, I’ve always known how to do it. These dimensions are right beside each other. Existing in the same time. I came to this one when I was three and Justin and I became friends. Eventually I stopped coming and we both went on with our lives. Then, right after Stockwell lost the election, you all died!” I blurt out, and then I’m unable to stop the tears. Mom-Jennifer pulls me into her arms. I compose my self and pull out.

“When you say we all died, what exactly do you mean?” Emmett asks. So I tell them the whole story. The only part I leave out is about Daphne’s rape and torture. She’s sitting right here and I don’t want to scare her.

When I finish they all look kind of shocked. Just then Gus wakes up and is fighting to get his coat and hat off. I help him and as soon as he can see, he sets his eyes on Lindsay.

“Mommy! You came back! I knew it! You came back!” he squeals. I let him loose and he runs for Lindsay and Melanie. They look at me and I beg them with my eyes to not break his heart.

Lindsay is overcome with emotion and she holds him to her and cries. Melanie holds on to her and she’s crying as well. Gus lets go of them and looks at Brian.

“Daddy! You’re here, too! Hey, Daddy!” he leaps into Brian’s arms and I can see the fear cross the man’s face.

“Hey, Sonny Boy, how are you doing?” he asks in a voice unlike his own.

“I miss you, Daddy,” Gus says, and then he hugs him around the neck.

“Look, I’m sorry to come here. I didn’t know about Justin, I just wanted Gus to see you and maybe be a part of your lives, because he’s just a baby and he deserves his family.” I start to cry again. “If I’d know about Justin, I never would have come, I never would have done that to you, I say. I look over at Gus and he’s so happy right now, I hate to snatch this away from him.

“So I was in a committed relationship with Dijon, and Ted and Blake never broke up. They just got hooked on drugs together?” Emmett asks.

“Yeah, but they had been clean for awhile,” I tell him.

“So we found Hunter when he was 12 and we never had any trouble from his mom?” Ben asks, and I nod my head yes.

“There are some things that are different. We always have free will. It’s the people we interact with who are the same, but it’s never too different, just a little here and there,” I say and began to reach for Gus. He’s not having any of it. He leaves Brian and goes back into Lindsay’s arms. I bite my lip to keep from crying.

“Come on, Gus, we have to go now,” I tell him.

“No! I’m staying with Mommy!” he declares.

“Justin, it’s okay. If it’s all right with you, we’ll take him home. If what you say is the truth, then the only thing different will be that he sees another Gus,” Lindsay says.

“He doesn’t understand; he’s just a baby. It’s hard and he feels safe with us, so we’ll take him home,” Melanie says.

“But...But he’s all that I’ve got,” I say, trying to remain calm.

“Things are different now that Justin’s not here. We can’t stay, we’ll have to go back; I would never hurt you all by being here in your face everyday,” I say, and start to reach for Gus.

“Please don’t go!” Jennifer says, and she starts to cry. “Craig, please don’t let him leave,” she begs. I look at Brian, but he’s turned all the way around in his seat and I can’t see his face.

“But what if people see me?” I ask.

“They just did, Sunshine. Fuck ‘em, we’ll tell them that you’re a twin,” Debbie says. “You just can’t come here like this and leave. Look at that little boy over there,” she points to Gus, who’s happily talking to Lindsay and Melanie. “He needs us. None of this is his fault; when he gets older you can tell them the truth, but for now he’s happy, that’s what you want right?” she asks me. It’s true, that is what I want.

“But aren’t people going to wonder how Gus and Justin both all of a sudden got a twin?” I ask her.

“Will you please just stay?” Craig asks, and I relent.

"Okay I'll stay," I say. I write down my phone number and address and give it to Melanie and Lindsay because they have my Gus. Everyone seems to want it and they all copy it down, everyone except Brian.

I look at Gus, still not sure that this is a good idea.

"Justin, would you like to stay with us tonight? With Molly and me?" Jennifer asks. She's still crying and I nod my head yes. I'm still not sure this is a good idea, but I want to be near her. I want to be near them all; I miss them so much. So I agree to go home with her.

Brian

I watch Jennifer as she begs the fake Justin to come home with her. She's setting herself up for pain. It's hard enough to lose somebody and have someone around who looks like them, but to have someone around who not only looks like them but in a sense **is** them, someone who answers to the same name, and has almost all the same experiences, well, that's too much. It can only lead to hurt. I can't set myself up for that.

The next morning I go into the diner, and see Lindsay and Mel there

With

Both Guses. They exchange a look when they see me.

"What?" I ask, sitting down in the booth with them.

"How are you doing with all of this?" Lindsay asks me. I look over at

the

kids, who are both eating. They are the exactly the same, they seem to

be

talking as if they are old friends. Maybe they will grow up and tell

people

they are twins. Maybe that's all they need to know.

I look back at Lindsay and ask her "What do you mean? How am I doing with

what?

Are you talking about this carbon copy that's on the scene?"

"Brian, please," Lindsay says.

"I'm out of here," I say, getting up and leaving.

Two weeks later everyone is finding how hard it is. Some of Justin's memories are the same as the other Justin's, so when someone gets caught up talking, they may say "Remember when this happened or that happened?" and sometimes the carbon copy remembers and he's laughing with everyone else.

Then either he will have a different memory or someone else will and it all goes to hell. It's then that the carbon copy remembers that these are not the people he once knew, and it's when everyone remembers that this is not the Justin that we all knew. It's a hard fall; I know I've allowed myself to get caught up once or twice.

I go over to Lindsay and see that Justin is there.

"Hey, Brian," he says, looking at me with that look of longing.

"Hey," I say, trying to walk past him.

"I know how hard it is seeing me here everyday, but it's hard for me too, to see my mom and Molly and you. I've lost all of you." He takes a seat on the front porch.

"I know," I say, looking away. Sometimes it's easy to forget how hard this is for him too.

"Yeah, Gus is in the house, you know, I'm just dropping him off. It's hard for him. While he loves me and all, he doesn't understand why he has to live with me now that everyone is back. He's lived here more than with me."

"I noticed," Brian says.

"Look, will you follow me?" he asks, holding his hand out to me. I hesitate for a second, then I reach out and place my hand in his.

We arrive at his house; I've never been here before, but I know the

address. When I walk inside I'm not prepared for what I see. There on the walls are his paintings. Justin's paintings. They are from many aspects of our life.

Some I recognize, some I don't. I look at the one of Lindsay and Mel's wedding. I'm there holding Gus, with Justin beside me. Justin sees me looking at it.

"Mel and Lindsay's wedding. You were great putting together all the last minute details for them. Everyone thought you were going to the White Party, but instead you give the tickets to Lindsay and Mel for their honeymoon and we kept Gus for the whole weekend. It was fun." He smiles at the memory until he sees the look on my face.

"I gave the tickets to Lindsay and she gave them back; I went to the White Party," I tell him.

"Did Justin go with you?" he asks.

"No, at the last minute he said he was staying," I tell him, and he smiles at that. I look around and see a picture of us at the prom. He's in my arms and I'm holding him up in the air. I shoot him a quick look.

"It's the only thing I can remember from the prom. That's it, nothing else," he says.

"You were bashed?" I asked him.

"Yeah, by Chris Hobbs," he says. "Did that happen here?" he asks, and I nod my head, going off to look at more pictures. I see one of us sharing an ice cream kiss; I see one of me and him sitting in the audience as Ethan Gold performs on stage.

"Ethan's great," he smiles. "He's a genius on the violin; I remember going with Lindsay and Mel to his concert and you showing up at the last minute.

Then we went home and you gave me my birthday present."

"What was it?" I ask, sure it's not the same thing.

"A hustler, someone who looks like the guy from my favorite TV commercial.

You wanted to make me happy, but you didn't understand that being with another man was not what I wanted. But I knew you thought you were making me happy," he says.

"Yeah, so what did I do? Bring you home some red roses or something?" I ask, making him burst out laughing.

"You? Bring flowers? No, we never really spoke of it again," he says.

"I guess some things are the same," I say. "So did you and Ethan ever you know...?" I ask him.

"Yeah, we did, but it didn't work out. He was still in love with his old boyfriend and I was still in love with mine." He looks at me and I start to look at other pictures, pretending that I didn't hear him. I see one of him winning the King of Babylon contest. I see the one he drew of me when we first met. The one that I bought from the Gay and Lesbian Center.

"I didn't buy this?" I ask him

"Yeah, you did. I found it one day when I was looking for a gray sweater of mine," he says.

"Some of these things happened, some I don't remember," I tell him.

"In this other world I have parents?" I ask him and I hope that, like the other Justin, he can figure out what I'm really asking.

"You were not close with them. You told your father you were gay right before he died. Your mom can over to the loft one day and saw me, and then she knew you were gay," he says.

"Yeah, so that's the same too, huh?" I say. He looks at me and laughs.

"I remember something else that happen around that time. Did it happen here? Did you fucked your mother's priest?" he asks me, and I can't help but laugh as well.

"You said your dad was there too? He went to celebrate the defeat of Stockwell? That's surprising," I tell him, and he looks bewildered.

"Why is that surprising? I know when I first came out he was mad, he beat you up, tried to kill you with his car and all, but that day you took me home, the day when he said I couldn't see you anymore or talk about my disgusting lifestyle, he came for me that night. He came back and got me from your place. I was back at your place a week later. Then he came and got me again, but he still wanted me to be straight. I came back to you again and then your loft was robbed and I ran away to New York. You came and got me, and everyone decided it was best if I just lived with Debbie," he tells me. Well, that's a little different.

"So your parents never got divorced?"

"Yeah, they did, and at the time I thought it was all my fault. You helped me with that, you and Debbie. My parents got divorced, but neither of them ever stepped out of my life. They both came to accept me for who I am."

"I'd like to see this Pittsburgh that you grew up in," I say.

"Take my hand," he tells me, and I do, and before I know it, we're in a different place. I look around and see that we are in my loft. There are some differences. I look around.

"What the hell happened to my place? It wasn't like this when I left this morning."

"This is not your loft; it's the other Brian's," he tells me.

"You mean we're in the other dimension?" I ask him and he nods his head yes.

He opens the loft door and I see a pile of newspapers outside the door.

"What are you doing?"

"Help me get these papers in. I want to see if they caught the people who killed you all. Maybe it's the same person who killed Justin," he says.

"I also want to check the mail." He goes to get the mail, and I start to look through the papers.

"I got a letter from Daphne's father," he says.

"Why would Daphne's father send you a letter here?"

"He sends it here, because here is where I live."

"Oh, still, why is Daphne's father sending you letters?" I ask.

So he tells me the story of Daphne's rape and torture and how her father is in jail for killing the men who did it. He opens the letter and then takes a seat, reads it, and passes it on to me. I read it and I take a seat as well.

He's telling Justin how glad he is that they finally caught the murderer of Daphne and everyone else. I read the name and then read it again.

"Damn," I say.

"Do you think maybe she killed Justin, too?" he asks me.

"I'd say it's a good possibility. I'd also say that she'll never do a day of time for it. Who the hell is going to put the police chief's wife in jail?"

I look at the postmark date on the letter, then I grab a few papers that are a couple of days before that date. We look for a minute until we find it. It's the article telling how she hired some thugs to do the job and how they found two of them and they give everyone else up, including her.

"So maybe she hired someone to kill Justin, too. I'm going to kill that bitch!" I bang my fist down on the table.

"What do we do now?" the other Justin wonders.

"We confront the one that's here, so that when we go back to my Pittsburgh, we can bring down that one," I say.

"Brian, you can't show your face around here," Justin looks panicked.

"You show your face in my Pittsburgh," I remind him.

"Because of the number of people killed, this was a highly publicized case.

A police detective was killed, along with a lot of other important people.

An award winning advertising agent, that's you; two college professors, that's Lindsay and Ben; an successful accountant, that's Ted; a party planner to Pittsburgh's richest citizens, that's Emmett; my father was a well known business man; Michael was a business owner; Melanie a big time lawyer; Daphne had just been in the news for rape, so when news got out about her murder, of course it was big news. But me, Justin, no one seemed to care about one little gay boy," he says.

"I care, and there's a whole hell of a lot of people back home who care," I tell him.

"I know you do, Brian," he says.

"So what do we do when we see her? How do we make her cooperate with us?"

"How do you think she would feel if she saw my face?" I ask him and Justin shakes his head.

"I don't think so," he says.

"Then can you think of something better?" I ask him. He pushes his hair back out of his face and suddenly I just want to take him to bed. He looks up at me and some hair falls back down. I take my hand and smooth his hair back out of his face. He closes his eyes and takes my hand and kisses it. I gasp, then I grab him to me and crush my lips down on his.

"Oh god, Justin!" I say, picking him up and taking him to the bedroom.

"Make love to me, Brian, I've missed you so much," he tells me. I pull his clothes off, as well as my own.

"I've missed you, too, " I tell him. We tear at each other our need is animalistic. Both of us needing the other so much; both of us thinking we would never feel this way together again.

When we finish, we lay in bed in each other's arms for a while.

"Was this right, what we did?" he asks me, sitting up in bed.

"I know you're not my Justin, just like I'm not your Brian," I tell him.

"Yeah but...still there's something," he says, and I put my lips on his to let him know that I feel it too.

"It's hard right now because some things and some memories we share, and some we don't. And even the ones we do share are not with each other, but with our other halves," I say, taking him in my arms again.

"Do you believe in life after death?" he asks, me making me snort.

"Brian, I'm being serious, because maybe my Brian and your Justin are together now. Keeping each other company until we can join them some day."

"Where did you get that from?"

"Just a dream I had," he shrugs his shoulders.

"I had the same dream," I admit.

"So maybe it means it's okay for us to be together?" he asks me, and I begin to kiss his neck in lieu of an answer.


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They have yet to arrest Stockwell's wife, so we go straight to her house.

She answers the door, and looks at Justin with hate in her eyes.

"May I come in?" he asks her.

"What do you want?" she asks him, and I take off my hat and my shades so that she can see who I am. She gasps and steps back.

"What's going on?" she demands.

"Answer our questions and I won't hurt you," I tell her.

"You're not real! You're a look alike," she tells me, so I start to tell her things that I learned while working on her husband's campaign, things that I pray are as true for the Stockwells in this dimension as they are for the ones back in mine.

"What do you want from me?" she asks me.

"Why did you do it?" Justin asks.

"You two destroyed my husband," she says, looking between us. "My kids are called names in school, they taunt them that their father is gay.

Everyone figures if he was friends and partners with Reickert so long, and he helped him cover up murder, then maybe he had something to do with it; maybe he's gay too. A lot of our friends have abandoned us. I wanted you to pay for what you did, so I set a plan in motion to kill him," she says pointing to Justin. "I wanted to take away something that you loved, Mr. Kinney, but I scratched that plan and decided to just take you all out and to let him deal

with it," she points to Justin again. "I wanted him to deal with the pain of the loss of you," she spits. I see Justin flinch and I take his hand in mine to try and help him hold it together, at least until we get what we want.

"Then we will just need every single detail of your first plan, the one in which you kill Justin." I take a deep breath and I feel Justin's hand on my back. I want to kill this stupid bitch, I want to hurt her, but I have to control myself. She then gives us what we want and we take it all in.

"I hope you rot in hell, bitch," Justin spits at her when we are on the way out the door. She smirks at him and I have to pull him out of the house all the while he's screaming "You killed my family, you killed my family!"

We get outside and he collapses into my arms.

"It's okay, it's okay," I tell him until he calms down.

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Justin

We get back to the other Pittsburgh and we stay at my house, thinking of a plan to make her pay for Justin's death. When we're sure of what we are going to do, we go to the diner. As soon as I walk in, both Guses run to me.

"Whoa," I say, sitting down so I can take them both in my arms.

Everyone seems to be in the diner today. I hear the bell ring and I see Daphne come in with Tony Gills. Something inside of me snaps. When I think of Daphne's battered and bruised body, her catatonic state, I can't control myself.

I rush at him. I began to pound on him; all I can see is Daphne lying in the hospital bed, bruised and broken. Then I feel hands pull me off of him.

I feel Brian take me into his arms. I hear a lot of shouting. Everyone wants to know what the hell is wrong with me. That are all looking at me like I am crazy and Daphne is crying.

"Everyone just shut the fuck up!" Brian finally yells. He looks at Daphne.

"Has he asked you if all his friends come to your place and party yet?" he asks her.

"Tonight, a lot of his friends are coming by tonight. What does this have to do with Justin going insane?" she asks. Brian looks at Tony before he answers.

"Leave now or not only will I let Justin loose, but I'll help him."

"If you ever come near her again I'll fucking kill you, do you hear me?"

You stay the fuck away from her!" I scream.

"Justin, will you please stop this?! What the hell is wrong with you?" Daphne asks. I take her to a booth in the back, but of course Deb, Linds, and everyone else follows. The other people in the diner who are not a part of our 'family' go on about their business, probably thinking with Tony gone, all the action is over.

"Your father is in jail for murder in my Pittsburgh," I tell her.

"Who did he kill? Are you sure? My father would never..." she says.

"He killed Tony," I tell her, and I see that look of disbelief cross her face.

"Why ..why would he do that?" she asks.

"Because he and his friends raped and tortured you. When they were done with you, you were never the same again. It's took so much to get you to open up again. You came to the celebration, and that was the first time you'd really been out since it happened," I tell her. She holds her hands in her head.

"Of course if you don't believe him, you could keep your plans with him tonight just keep right on seeing him," Brian tells her.

"I believe you, only because I know my Justin would never lie about something like this. I believe you," she says. I reach out to her and pull her into a hug, squeezing her tight.

"Is there something we can do? Deb, can't you talk to Carl?" Emmett asks.

"He's not done anything yet, so there's nothing to charge him with. Just stay the hell away from him," Melanie advises.

"Don't worry, after this I don't think he'll be around anymore," Daphne says.

"Well, if that's over, Justin and I have something to tell you," Brian says, going into detail about what we learned about Stockwell's wife.

"So she killed Justin?" Jennifer asks.

"Looks that way," I say.

"So what are we going to do?" Debbie asks.

"Brian and I went over a bunch of plans until we decided to just take the most simple approach. Go to her and lay her plan to kill Justin out for her with policemen nearby. We'll go to Carl with this, and he can set something up without Stockwell's knowledge. Once we make her confess, she'll be arrested. Plus we have where she bought the gun from and we know where she hid it. She pulled the trigger herself."

"That's only if the two plans are the same, right?" Jennifer asks.

"Right," I tell her.

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We go to Stockwell's wife, and she has the same reaction at seeing me as the other one had at seeing Brian. We tell her what she did in exact detail. We lay out her plan before her; we tell her that we know who she bought the gun from and we tell her that we've got the gun that she used. She confesses as easily as the other one, except this one is arrested.

"But he's not dead! There he is right there," she screams as they carry her out.

"No ma'am, this is his twin," one of the officers tell her.

Brian

Stockwell's wife was sentenced, and no one has seen Stockwell since.

He took his kids and skipped town.

Justin is still here with us. He's not our Justin, we all know that; he doesn't call Jennifer "Mom" or Craig "Dad", but he is a part of their lives.

He's a part of all of our lives. We love him, and he knows it. I told him that I'd never told my Justin that I loved him, and he told me without a doubt he knew how I felt.

His Gus is living with Lindsay and Melanie, and he's happy as can be.

Justin still sees him, well, both of them, and I do as well. Justin gives them plenty of money to take care of his Gus and I give them money for my Gus, and Melanie recently had the baby, so I guess Michael gives them money as well.

Justin and I are together, but we have no illusions. I know exactly who he is, and he knows exactly who I am. He could never take the place of my Justin and I could never take the place of his Brian, but we're happy and that's good enough for us.

The end.

## Twice over

Brian and Justin are dealing with a couple of surprises.

It didn't take long for people to figure out whom the Concerned Citizens for the Truth were. Didn't take long for people to figure out that it was Brian, and Brian alone, who had brought down Stockwell. It also didn't take long for people to want to help...of course, Brian would never accept it. So it was all done in the utmost secret. There were many gay business owners. Business owners who hated Stockwell and everything that he stood for, business owners who loved Deekins, and businessmen who just plain hated the police. Then there were former associates who all pitched in and by the time the final tally was figured the total reached \$350,000. This amount was sent to Brian in the form of a cashier's check, note attached reading...\*from other concerned citizens for the truth\*; Justin was at the loft with Brian when he got the check...

Justin

Brian and I were on the couch going through the mail together. In the last couple of days he'd been getting a ton of letters and cards from people who wanted to say thank you for the whole Stockwell thing. We took turns opening said mail and reading them aloud. I opened one beige vellum envelope, pulling out and opening one piece of paper – made of heavy cardstock – of which a check apparently fell out of, fluttering to the floor read simply... 'from other concerned citizens for the truth.' I bend, retrieving the check, my breath catching in my throat upon reading the amount.

"What?" Brian asks, taking in my shocked \_expression. I don't answer just pass it on to him.

"Holy fuck!" He looks at me eyes wide and I shrug my shoulders.

"Don't look at me...I sure as hell don't have \$350,000 dollars to give you." He nods his head, looking at the check again.

"I guess now," he sneers... "I'm a fucking charity case." My eyes roll in response, sensing he's one step away from full drama queen mode, so I cut him off.

"Brian, you went \$100,000 in debt, never asking anyone to help with a damn thing," I remind him. "Let me ask you something...why should you have to shoulder the financial responsibility alone? Accept the check..." \*graciously\* I add to myself.

"I'm Rage...remember?" he smirks.

"Bringing down Stockwell benefited a lot of people, Brian. Not just you and me; not just the good folks of Liberty Avenue. People want to show their appreciation; want to give a little back to the one person not afraid to show Stockwell for the snake he is!" He muses over this for a minute. "When you sold your belongs how far out of debt did that bring you?"

"\$50 grand." He's pacing the floor of the loft, wheels turning in his head; trying to think of ways to get back on his game.

"\$350,000...so, even after I pay off all five of my maxed-out gold cards, I've still got a heap of cash left...shit...Justin," he calmly states, "get your mom on the phone." I give him a puzzled look, but do as he asks.

Brian

Justin hands me the phone just as Jennifer says hello.

"Look...I need for you to find me a house. Preferably, three bedrooms...maybe two baths. Something nice I can rent with no problem and also build some equity in." I note the confused look on Justin's face and choose to ignore it...for now.

"Well..." she responds. "I have a house that may be perfect. Five bedrooms, three bath, nicely landscaped. It's been on the market for a while and the owner is anxious to sell. He's had money problems – and to be honest – I'm sure he'd be more than willing to reduce the price; even though it's been reduced twice already," she adds. House sounds like a snake pit, if you ask me.

"Okay...spill. What's wrong with it?" She exhales primly.

"There's nothing wrong with it, Brian. As I said, he's been experiencing some financial difficulties...okay," she sighs, whispering conspiratorially, "between you and I...he has excessive gambling debts which is forcing a quick sale of the house. He started off asking three times the appraised value of the house – against my professional judgment, of course –" ...of course, I chuckle inwardly. ...and soon discovered no one was willing to pay the price, so he reduced it, meeting the appraisal value, but still...nothing. He's desperate now and ready to settle for the best offer, so I'm sure he'd settle for an bid in the price range you're considering."

"I'm paying cash," I inform her. "He should be able to reduce it even fucking more!"

There's a momentary lull over the phone line, but Jen recovers quickly, saying... "Brian...where did you get the mon-"

"Let me know something...soon." I abruptly cut her off and hang the phone up. Justin is looking at me incredulously.

"What now?" he asks.

"Now I," announce, tone slightly belligerent, "call Cynthia."

~ ~ ~

"Hey, Vanguard's doors are still open?" I tease upon hearing Cynthia's hello. She laughs before turning serious.

"To be honest, Brian...a lot of clients are threatening to pull their business if you're not rehired...immediately."

"Hmmm...that so?" I smirk. It's not really all that surprising considering when Vance bought the company from Ryder he made it seem like the clients would stay regardless if I had a job there or not. I later found out that nearly all of my clients were ready to walk with me if I'd been forced to leave. Good 'ole Vance...just trying to test me.

"Yeah, Vance has been going out of his head trying to think of ways to rehire you," Cynthia keeps on. Well...this day just gets better and better.

"In that case...you tell him that after being my loyal and able assistant for many years you have a pretty good idea of how to get me back."

"And what exactly is it that I think will get you back?" Cynthia poses, amusement evident in her voice.

"It...is me having an equal controlling share and a hefty signing bonus," I say without hesitation. "Make it happen." I hang up the phone and see Justin staring at me intently.

"How does it feel to be back?" he grins. I walk over, pulling him into my arms for a kiss, in way of an answer.

~ ~ ~

Jennifer called back later that day and told me the price he was willing to sell for. Sweet...right up my alley. After reciting the address, we decide to meet at the house.

She's waiting as Justin and I pull up. The house is located in an upper middle class neighborhood and is stunning. It's a rambler with a natural stone front and sets back a good distance from the road showcasing a nicely manicured yard.

"Seems in good condition so far," Justin surmises. We walk onto the front porch approaching a smiling Jennifer. She hugs Justin, pecking him on the cheek then rubs my arm before opening the door and we all walk inside. There's a formal living room adjacent to a small hallway which we follow that leads into a formal dining room. Off of the dining room there is a eat-in kitchen with a huge bay window. We retreat back down the hallway.

"This is the master bedroom," Jennifer indicates with a wave of her arm. The room is large and sports a bathroom with a huge shower.

"Damn," Justin whistles, looking around. Sounds like he's falling in love with the place. We leave that room and go to the next bedroom.

"Now this room," Jennifer intones, as she leads us through the full bathroom, "shares a bathroom with the bedroom beside it."

"Sorta like the Brady Bunch," I joke. Justin grimaces while Jennifer half-smiles.

"So...is there a lock on each side?" Justin asks.

"Yes, dear," his mom replies. The only thing that connects the two rooms is the bathroom and you can keep that door locked at all times." We go back the way we came and enter the hallway.

"Now...the next two bedrooms are the exact same as the other two and also share a bathroom. We go through and so far everything is fine. The house is in good shape as far as I can see. We go down the hall and walk into a den. It has two windows and a door that leads to a side porch. We retrace our steps and Jennifer points in the direction of a doorway which leads down into the basement. It's a big empty space, but at least it's finished and completely carpeted.

"So...what do you think?" Jennifer asks, expectant look on her face. It's a no-brainer ...nothing to think about. I eye Justin and he's smiling. All the reason I need.

"I'll take it," I announce. "As soon as we close, I'm going to furnish every inch of this house and have you put it up for rent." Jennifer hides her shock nicely and extends her hand for me to shake.

"Brian, I have some paperwork for you to fill out; stop by my office tomorrow and we'll get started." We exit the house and wait as Jennifer locks up. Once she's sufficiently hugged her baby and safely ensconced in her car, we head to our car and zoom off.

"Shit!" Justin bounces in the seat. "Can you imaging living in that house?"

"Yeah...I guess. Maybe I can give it to Lindsay and Gus someday," I add.

"Ya think it'll take long to rent out," he asks, squinting at me.

I crinkle my forehead in thought. "It shouldn't." We pull up to the loft and get out.

"How does it feel to be a homeowner?" Justin teases as we enter the elevator.

"I already am a homeowner. The loft...remember," I remind him, before pushing him against the elevator wall and sinking my lips onto his. We don't pull away until the elevator stops.



"When's your suspension over?" I ask Justin seemingly out of nowhere.

"Huh? he says breathlessly. "Oh...I go back to school in two weeks." He's removing clothing as he speak and I watch, smirking, as he makes his way into the bedroom, a path of clothes trailing behind him.

"Well, with you going back to school and me maybe going back to work...you know what that means," I seductively joke.

"Hmmm...what?" he whispers, falling back onto the bed completely naked. I flop down beside him having removed all my clothes as well.

"No" \*kiss\* "more" \*kiss\* "all"\*kiss\* "day" \*kiss\* "fuck-a-thons" I finish, planting myself on top of him and slowly rotating my hips over his groin.

"Guess," he moans, "we'll have to make up for it now."

~ ~ ~

The next day Cynthia calls and says Vance wants to see me. She told him what 'she thought I would like' and he brooded over it for a while before asking her to call me in.

"I think he's going to go for it," she shrieks.

"We'll see...when does he want to see me?"

"At your earliest convenience" she deadpans. Yeah, whatever...it's not like I have a host of other things to do.

"Let him know I'll be in later today or tomorrow."

"Will do," she says and hangs up the phone.

I go to Vanguard the next day and Vance offers me a full partnership plus a signing bonus if..."I'll come back." His words, not mine. He seems quite nervous and I pretend to think it over before agreeing to his terms. The dumbass now can't make a move without my approval and vice versa.

~ ~ ~

Justin

I'm sitting in the living room of the apartment Daphne and I share, sketching a picture of Molly kicking a soccer ball. Her game of choice lately, but I can't complain, she's good at it. Anyway, I'm sketching this picture when a knocking on the door startles me. I get up and open it...Brian bursts through, lifting me off my feet while planting a kiss on my lips that leaves me breathless. He's holding a bottle of champagne and smiling from ear to ear.

"What is it?" I ask, smiling as well. I can't help it...Brian's smile is contagious.

"Not only am I a full partner, Sunshine...but I got a bonus that makes what the concerned citizens gave me look like peanuts." He pulls me close and kisses me again, popping the top off the champagne and handing the bottle to me to down it first.

"You're back baby," I purr, the champagne flowing down my throat.

"You're damn right I am," he acknowledges, grabbing the bottle back and taking a swig himself.

"What're you drawing?" He's taken of my sketchbook now lying on the floor.

"Molly...playing soccer. I told you she was on the team...I try and make it to all her games."

"Is she any good?"

"Yep." I beam proudly, thinking about my little sister going for the goal with iron determination. "She's the best," I append.

"Yeah?" he snorts, adding... "you're more than a little biased."

"Come to one of her games...you'll see," I challenge.

"Fuck that shit," he says with a look on his face so horrific, I can't help laughing at him.

"Mikey called last night," Brian sighs, removing his coat and leaning back in the chair he's now occupying.

"He and Hunter okay?" I inquire. This is the first anyone's heard from Michael since he and the teen hustler ran off.

"I don't know about he and Hunter," Brian shrugs, "but he did say my car was fine...not a scratch on it. Now that they're back, I won't have to drive the jeep anymore and ..."

"Brian!" I exclaim, not finding his little joke funny at all.

"They're fine," he counters. "When the police arrived, Ben told them Michael had said something about taking Hunter to see his aunt in New York, but that they wouldn't be gone long because Hunter didn't take his meds with him. So, of course, his mom wanted to know what he needed medication for and Ben told her that Hunter was HIV+ and that he hoped she had a good insurance plan."

"How did she take the news?"

"She came back later, without the police, telling Ben that she'd called them off and how she wasn't able to care for someone who was positive. Maybe it would be better if he stayed with them since she was sure they were used to dealing with that sort of thing."

"What a bitch!" I swear loudly.

"Yeah, and," he chuckles... "she also said maybe she would stop by and see him from time to time."

"Hmm...playing the loving mother to the end," I snark, as Brian rubs the nape of my neck. I love it when he does that.

"So...Mikey called Ben; told him the good news, and he and Hunter came home last night. He'll bring my car by later today," Brian finishes.

"Where were they all this time?" I wonder, leaning in to Brian's touch.

"At David's cabin in the country...cleared by the good doctor first, of course..."

"...Of course," I smile. "Does Debbie know they're back?"

"Yeah, Ben called her after speaking with Mikey...Where's Daphne?" Brian asks this while glancing around the apartment.

"Out."

"She has the right idea. Get your ass up...it's time to celebrate," Brian leers at me. "Tomorrow I go back to work."

~ ~ ~

Brian

I head over to the diner after work and almost do a double take. There sitting at a booth is Ted...and Blake.

"So, Theodore, they finally dried you out?" I smirk, sitting down in the booth uninvited.

"Nice to see you too, Bri," he deadpans, eyes looking everywhere but at me. He seems ready to bolt at any moment.

"It's okay," Blake says, squeezing Ted's hand.

"Where," I question, pointing directly at Blake, "did you find him?"

"Blake's a counselor at the clinic, Brian." Ted is still avoiding meeting my eyes.

I nod. "Em know about this?"

"Emmett was the first person I went to see," Ted answers grimly.

"So, you two are a couple...again?" I snicker. Ted nods his head, while apparently Blake has been rendered speechless.

"Look, Brian, I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am. I realize that you've done a lot for me...finding me a job, keeping me out of jail, among a few other things, and to steal from your son is inexcusable. I just want to say that..."

"You're right, it is inexcusable," I interrupt... "so don't offer me any more. Just leave it for now, okay." I rise, getting up to leave at the same moment Mikey walks through the door. He spots us and walks over, embracing Ted in a tight hug. I notice Mikey silently taking in the fact that Blake is there...Ted can explain it to him.

"See ya boys." I kiss Mikey on the cheek and exit. I'd talked to him earlier for a long time when he returned my car. We discussed Hunter's mom signing over custody of Hunter and the preparations Mikey and Ben needed to make.

~ ~ ~

Justin

I walk into the apartment and spot Daphne on the couch...with some guy. I assumed that's whom she'd been going out with the last couple of months, but had never met.

"Hey, Justin," she gushes, rising from her seat to make introductions. "This is Tony...Tony this is my best friend, Justin." He extends out his hand and I shake it.

"Guys," Daphne offers, "I'm going to head to the store; need me to bring anything back?"

"Nothing for me," I say.

"Me neither," Tony adds, watching as she heads out the door, leaving us alone.

Tony turns, once she leaves, scrutinizing me. "Know what sport I love?" he asks, seemingly out of nowhere.

"W-w-hat?" I stammer, surprised at the question.

"Baseball." He makes this announcement with a slight smirk on his face. "I love the feeling I get from swinging a bat and connecting with the ball." My blood turns cold, a cold sweat pouring down my back.

"Of course, I like football also. Nothing like running with the ball tucked safely under your arm," he crows. I feel heat returning to my bloodstream and a little foolish for overreacting.

"You know..." he continues, looking me dead in the eye, "...a bat swung in the right angle at someone's head can kill them in a split second!" He has a weird, glazed over look to his eyes.

"What the fuck does that mean," I demand, anger overtaking my fear.

"You'd have to ask my father...he always warned me of that every time I played a game."

I glare at him, hard. He looks back at me with a questioning look on his face.

"Just fuck it!" I stomp off to my bedroom.

~ ~ ~

"So...you think it was just a coincidence?" It's a few days later and I'm at the loft, Brian and I munching on takeout food.

Brian looks thoughtful before answering. "Daphne trusts him, so he's probably okay, but it'd be smart to keep an eye on him."

"Yeah," I concede, deciding to let it go for now.

~ ~ ~

Brian

My house has been occupied for five months when the hammer falls. Apparently, there was infighting between the tenants and they're all moving out. Fortunately, the lease is paid up, Jennifer informs me.

"I'll put it back on the market," she brokers and I agree, before hanging up. The phone is barely in its cradle, before once again, ringing.

"Melanie...hospital...baby coming..." \*click\*. I stare at the phone for a second or two before realizing what just happened. Melanie is ready to have the baby. I call Justin, telling him to be ready and waiting for me.

Justin is subdued the entire ride to the hospital, but he won't tell me what's wrong. As we round the corner I see Ben pacing and Hunter sitting off to the side.

"Where's Mikey" I demand causing Ben's pacing to come to an abrupt halt. He's in the room with Melanie and Lindsay."

"Deb... where is she?" Justin asks.

"At home with Gus," Hunter replies.

Justin nods his head. "How long," he asks.

"About fourteen hours...she refused to come to the hospital before now, saying the first baby always takes time coming," Ben answers, restarting his pacing.

Twenty more minutes pass then we see Mikey and Lindsay coming our way, both with tears in their eyes. There are soon hugs all around.

"She's beautiful," Mikey says, wiping away his tears.

Lindsay agrees, dabbing at her own eyes. "A perfect angel."

"Congratulations!" Justin embraces Lindsay once again, while Mikey and Ben hold each other close. "What's her name?"

Michael beams, answering... "we decided on Melissa."

"When can we see her? How's Mel?" Ben rapid fires questions. Lindsay laughs, holding her hand up. "Mel is great, and..." she gestures for us to follow her down the hall, where we find ourselves standing in front of a window to the nursery. She taps lightly and a nurse smiles gently before holding Melissa up for us to see. She has soft brown hair and looks even tinier than Gus did when he was born.

We hang around for another hour or so...Deb, Emmett, Ted and Blake all show up within that time.

"I'll get Gus..." I inform Lindsay, "...keep him for the next couple of days. Give you guys a chance to get home and settled in." She smiles, kissing my cheek.

Justin

I stay with Brian the next couple of days while he has Gus. When I finally get ready to go home, it's with dread. Tony has pretty much moved in with Daph and I...I hate him. He's always making homophobic remarks and then pretending they're innocent statements. Funny, these things never come out of his mouth when Daphne's around. She loves him and knows I don't care for him.

"Well, I hated Ethan"...Daphne had reminded me during a conversation we had a couple of days ago. "So I guess I can't be too mad if you don't like my boyfriend. I just hope that one day you two can be friends," she spoke sincerely.

"That'll be the day when I become friends with that homophobic bastard," I'd snorted.

"Justin!"

"I forgot..." I sneered, "...he's only that way when you're not around."

"Justin, you know I would never be with someone like that. I think I love him, of course, not as much as I love you...I'll talk to him okay." I sigh, thinking back on that conversation. I want Daphne to be happy. If she ends her relationship because of me, it may cause resentment...

"Hey!" Brian interrupts my musings. "Spill...you've been moping around here for days. What's going on? I decide to tell him everything, then wait for his mockery. I'm a little put off when all he does is stare at me intensely for a couple of minutes. Finally, I can't take anymore..."

"What?" I cry out.

"You could move into the house," he says breezily, "...until someone decides on renting it."

I sit there, stunned. "You're house...all by myself?"

"Scared?" he smirks, eyebrows raised.

"No...it's just damn." I absorb what he's just nonchalantly announced. Before...if he'd offered me something like this I would have turned him down flat. Saying I needed to be my own man and not take handouts or things of that nature. But I've grown up since then and know we are now partners. And that means when one of us falls the other is

there to pick up the pieces. When one of us needs help the other is there to help and there's no shame in that there's only love...besides, a man needs to know when to ask for help...

"Remember, it's only until it gets rented. It could be two weeks; could be two months..."

"...When can I move in?" I ask excitedly, jumping into Brian's arms. He smiles and we share a kiss.

"You can move in right away, the cleaning company did it's job and it looks good as new."

"Cool," I murmur, kissing him over and over.

~ ~ ~

We're at the apartment gathering my things and I'm also studiously ignoring the look on Daphne's face.

"Thanks for the notice," Daphne jokes, punching me in the arm.

"I'm sorry Daph," I start, but she holds up her hand silencing me.

"I'm not mad Justin...I just hope it's not because of Tony," she speaks softly, eyes downcast.

"That's only part of the reason. Daphne, listen...the house may get rented at anytime and then I'll probably end up right back here again." I grin as she grabs me into a hug. We hold each other tightly then I return to gathering my things and loading up the jeep.

We drop my stuff off at the house then go to the grocery store so I can stock up.

"Which room you gonna take?" Brian and I are putting the groceries away and I stop what I'm doing to answer him.

"I dunno...probably not the master bedroom though...it's too big."

"Suit yourself." Brian shrugs his shoulders.

We wander from room to room and I finally decide on the last one. We haul my belongings in and quietly put them away. When done, I push Brian onto the bed, fully intent on christening the house.

"Thank you Brian," I breathe, kissing all over his face.

"Mmm, mmm. How about I stay here with you...tonight."

I chuckle and start removing my clothes. "I don't have a problem with that."

~ ~ ~

As soon as Mom finds out I'm staying at the house alone, she immediately launches into mothering mode and goes grocery shopping, buying enough food to feed an army. Never mind Brian and I already got a lot of stuff.

"I can feed myself, Mom," I insist.

"I know honey..." she smiles, "...but this way I won't have to worry myself to death."

After she leaves, I settle down to watch TV. Ten minutes later the doorbell rings and I open the door coming face-to-face with Brian.

"Hey," he saunters in.

"Hey," I counter, my hand grazing his thigh as he walks by.

"Well...looks like the Munchers may be headed for splitsville...again. Hell, things are worse now then they were after Gus was born. He shakes his head in disgust. Mel has postpartum depression that's fucking wreaking havoc on their relationship. Plus, it doesn't help that Deb's there, 24/7 bossing them around and telling them how to handle her grandbaby."

I snort at that and ruffle Brian's hair. "How's Gus?" I know how parents fighting can affect children.

"I told them they better get some fucking help because I don't want that shit around my kid!"

I'd laugh at the absurdity of Brian suggesting counseling, but this is no laughing matter. Instead, I take a safer track. "What did they say to that?"

"Lindsay assured me they were going to seek counseling."

"Deb going too?" I joke, trying to coax a smile out of him. It works and he leans over, nuzzling my neck.

"So...what is Mikey saying about all this?"

"You mean besides begging Debbie to stay away and give the girls some space?"

"Yeah..." I guffaw, "...good luck with that!" Brian laughs before sucking my bottom lip into his mouth.

~ ~ ~

Brian

I'm flipping through my mail when I notice an official looking envelope postmarked from Virginia, specifically, Kelville. I open it up and it's a summons...to take a paternity test. What the fuck! I call the number listed on the paper and some woman tiredly answers the phone.

"Listen, I received a letter regarding a paternity test and I think you have the wrong guy." I'm completely belligerent with this woman.

"Your social security number?" the lady sighs. I'm sure she gets tons of men calling in claiming not to be the father of this child or that, but fuck that. I know for a fact that I haven't fathered any children...well, uh, other than Gus. I give her my information and she's silent for a few seconds before answering.

"Nope...it's you all right."

"No, it's not." I'm fast losing patience. "That's fu...I mean... impossible."

"Do you know a Shelly Rye?" she asks.

Shelly Rye? Rye? She was the first girl I ever... Oh shit! "Look, I'll be there." I slam the phone down and head over to the mini-bar pouring an inch of my finest.

Shelly Rye...the first girl I ever had sex with. I'd just turned fifteen and didn't use protection. Didn't think to. I didn't enjoy it one bit and never did her again. Now, all these years later she's saying I got her pregnant? The bitch obviously has crawled from out of some woodwork, wanting money. Suddenly I can't wait to go to Virginia, just so I can face her.

I was still pondering the fact that I'd maybe been a father for longer than Gus had been around, when Justin came through the door.

"What's wrong?" he immediately asked sensing my mood. I tell him the whole damn story.

"Well, Brian...was she pregnant? Did you ever see her pregnant?"

"No, she left school soon after that and I never saw her again."

He arches an eyebrow at me. "What exactly was the story?"

"The rumor was that she'd gone to stay with her grandparents. Why she was pulled out of school like that no one knows," and just saying it aloud I realize...the number one reason she was probably pulled out of school like that was because she was pregnant.

"When do you leave?"

"Next week," I answer, feeling gloomier by the second.

"Then we go...together." He grabs my hand and squeezes it for support.

~ ~ ~

We arrive in Virginia, barely enough time to check into the hotel and dash to the lab for the scheduled testing.

Once they're done, I start out the room before turning back.

"How long before we know the results?" I question the lab technician.

"Usually it takes a few weeks, but we've been told to put a rush on this so it should just be a day or so. Hopefully we'll have the results as early as tomorrow afternoon," she smiles.

"Why is there a rush on it?" I ask and watch as her smile fades.

~ ~ ~

Justin and I walk into a hospital room where a much older, paler, and quite obviously sicker version of the Shelly that I used to know is lying.

"Brian..." she whispers, "...you came."

"I'm going to go get some coffee..." Justin backs out the door, giving Shelly and I a chance to talk, "...want some?" We both nod no in answer.

"I know you must hate me," she says, once Justin has left the room, quietly closing the door behind him.

"I don't hate you, Shelly." I sigh, adding, "I just don't understand."

"Well...you were the only guy I had been with. I tried to hide it from my parents, but had morning sickness so bad they knew right away something was wrong." She stops talking and coughs, a fucking horrible sound, for a moment.

"How come you never told me?" I need some kind of answer to my being here.

"My dad demanded to know who the father was, but I refused to tell him. He threatened to send me to live with my grandparents if I didn't name the father. I couldn't tell them, Brian...he would have killed you! At least that's what I thought at the time." She sighs deeply.

"So you went away and never told me," I state matter-of-factly. Perfect...just fucking perfect.



"I tried to do it on my own after my father disowned me. My grandparents, along with my mother, died three years after I came to live with them. It was a car accident. The ironic thing is they were returning from the funeral of my grandmother's sister and...and, all of a sudden, they're all gone. And, Brian...I never made up with my mom," she chokes out, a tear rolling down her face, before continuing. "My grandparents weren't rich; they rented the apartment they lived in and had nothing to leave, so I was pretty much out on the streets."

"Where's your dad now?" Surely he'd step in and help; especially with his daughter being seriously ill.

"After my mom's funeral he just disappeared. No one has heard from or seen him since.

I guess I shouldn't be surprised, but his own damn grandchildren...

"Did you ever marry or have more children?"

"No...I didn't. Brian, I'm dying. I look at her in disbelief.

"My parents abandoned me and I don't want the same thing happening with me. That's why I decided to try and get in contact with you. Please tell me that you're going to make sure that doesn't happen." Her eyes are huge with plead. What can I say? She's asking me to take in her child...a child I know nothing about. Who am I fooling? If the child is mine, I'll take care of it...I just can't walk away.

"I'll do everything I can," I assure her, glancing around awkwardly. "So...how long you been sick?"

"A couple of months...it's cancer and it's terminal."

The door opens then and I turn around coming face to face with a teenage boy and girl. I'm not blind...the boy looks exactly like me. In fact...they both do. I look questioningly at Shelly trying to mask my shock.

"Twins...you had twins?" She tries nodding her head yes, with a weak up and down motion.

From the way they're gazing at me I realize they have an idea who I am. The boy has on a t-shirt about two sizes too small, torn and stained. His jeans also look too small and are worn thin from overwear. His shoes look so bad, I can't even discuss it. I turn my gaze onto the girl and she's in pretty much the same shape as him. They're both also unkempt and their hair is dirty and limp. I feel shame wash over me as I sit there in my custom-tailored Armani suit, \$300 Prada shoes, and perfectly coiffed hair. These are my kids...of that I have no doubt. For the first time ever I feel out of place and uncomfortable with the clothes I have on.

"What's up, Pops?" the girl smirks; the boy just stares at me with quiet contempt. I'm about to open my mouth and say something harsh, when Justin comes through the door. I can see a question mark form over Shelly's head when she sees him. I watch as Justin takes in the twins' appearance. He knows. He strides purposefully across the room and I take his hand.

"This is Justin...my boyfriend," I offer. I don't have time for that non-conventional, undefined bullshit right now. Shelly looks shocked, but covers it well. The boy snorts and that causes laughter to erupt from his sister.

"This is Brianna and James," Shelly points to the two by the door. "It's nice to meet you Justin," Shelly holds out her hand and Justin shakes it. Brianna walks over and gives her mom a kiss on the cheek. James follows suit, doing the same. They both pull up a chair beside her and begin talking. That's our cue to leave, I think, rising and heading for the door.

"Brian...don't go yet. I was thinking maybe you and the kids could go out somewhere together. Get to know each other a little better." I lock eyes with the twins and chuckle. They look as if the last place they want to is to go somewhere with Justin and I, but they obey their mother's wish and follow us out the door.

Brianna looks between Justin and I before announcing, "...so how does it feel to take it up the ass?" We are walking out of the hospital and towards the rental car.

"None of your fucking business," I sneer.

"She is definitely your daughter..." Justin states, "...bold, blunt, rude...HEY!" I pop his ass good.

"Nice wheels." James is walking around, admiring the car.

"It's a rental." It'll do.

"Why don't we go by our house so you can see where we live," Brianna smirks. I agree and set off with the directions she gives us. We drive down a long, winding dirt road with no signs of civilization other than a little shack; consisting of dry rotting wood and from all appearances likely to fall down at anytime.

Brianna smiles, getting out of the car. "Home sweet home."

"You live here?" I look around at the muddy yard and at the porch that is sagging and has big holes in it.

"What? Were you expecting a palace?" Brianna says, arms crossed defiantly across her chest. I can see she's set on giving me a hard time.

"Watch your step," James warns as we walk into the house. I look at Justin; he shakes his head, shrugging his shoulders. If we thought the outside of the house was bad the inside is ten times worse. The floor in there is falling in and the entire house seems to consist of only two rooms. A living area and a kitchen. A quick glance around notes a mattress and a couple of bags with clothes in it.

"Our dresser and closet," Brianna reads my mind, pointing to the heap of clothes piled high in the corner. Then she points to the mattress.

"This is our bed...well, Mom's and I, anyway. It's also our couch and recliner," she adds dryly.

A look through the tiny kitchen reveals a small bathroom off to the side. They have a refrigerator and stove that look circa 1950.

"The man we rent this place from took pity on us and gave us the 'frig and stove. Said it was just sitting in his basement not being used."

"If he took pity on you then he should have fixed the floor and put some heat in here...it's fucking freezing." I glance at a window and see it's cracked and a small piece of material is in it trying to keep the cold air out.

"Who the fuck are you to judge us?" Brianna spits at me.

"Brianna...look he didn't mean it like that." Justin tries reasoning with her.

"Where the fuck were you?" she continues. "Sitting back in your fancy suit and expensive car. This is reality. Real life. This is how we live. We have rats and roaches; hell, we can barely sleep because of them running around all the time. Half the time we don't even have electricity. Sometimes when school is out we go three days before we eat anything. When we do have school James and I both pocket half of our free lunch we get from school to bring it home so mom can have something to eat," she's crying now and starting to shake. James walks up behind her and wraps his arms around her waist, whispering into her ear. I side glance Justin and he's fighting his own emotions. Christ, I didn't know they even existed for seventeen years, but still, I feel guilty. Like I should have been able to do something. Like some how all of this is my fault. Justin pulls me into a fierce hug. God, I needed that.

"It's not your fault," he whispers into my ear before turning to face James and Brianna, both of whom are now crying.

"I can't begin to understand what you're going through, I won't even try. But you have to know that if Brian knew you existed he would have been here for you and your Mother. It's not his fault that he's just found out about you both and it's not fair to lash out at him for things he had no control over."

"We know that," James reasons, rocking his sister back and forth. "It's just that we have nothing and you...you seem to have everything." Brianna pulls out of her brothers' embrace, taking a deep breath.

"I'm sorry, okay" she snivels, "but this is hard. They're saying Mom's not going to make it; you showing up here after all this time we thought you were dead and I'm worried sick about my Mother!" She starts to cry again. I pull her into my arms; what else can I do? She's going to lose her mother and she's lashing out. I feel Justin's hands on my back, rubbing back and forth, trying to make things just a little bit better. I pull back, lifting Brianna's head up.

"Where have you all been staying since your mom got sick?"

"Where else would we stay...right here." James answers. Justin stares at him, trying not to gape.

"How do you get to the hospital then?"

James shrugs his shoulders. "We walk...how else," he states matter-of-factly.

"I'm going to get you an hotel room and-"

"No!" Brianna explodes. "This is our home! If by some miracle, Mom comes home she's going to want to come here, not some hotel room." I could argue, but decide to leave it alone.

Justin suggests getting something to eat and we walk out of the house and back to the car.

"What's the best place to eat around here?" I've got the key in the ignition, ready to pull out.

Brianna sneers. "Do we look like we know?"

"The kids at school are always talking about a place called Ryan's. Say it has really nice buffet," James offers.

"Know how to get there?" Justin inquires and James nods that he does.

We walk into Ryan's. It's a steakhouse, but has a buffet with a wide selection. We take our seats proffered by the waitress and I order a medium rare rib eye with a side order of fries. Justin, James and Brianna go for the buffet. They return, plates piled high with every type of food imaginably.

"So...Dad...is it okay if we call you that?" Brianna snickers, a wicked smile on her face causing me to choke on my water.

"Of course he doesn't mind," Justin smirks at me, little fucker.

"Hey," James pokes his sister in the ribs, talking around a forkful of mashed potatoes, "did you notice that red Corvette parked beside us?"

"James, listen...I've told you I don't give a damn about your obsession with cars. The only time you've ever driven one was in Drivers Ed for God's sake." She spears a tomato and pops it in her mouth.

"You love cars, huh?" I direct this question at James and my stomach flips when his face lights up. He starts to talk about different models and styles, gesturing wildly.

"James, would you please just shut the hell up...that shit is boring as hell!" Brianna demands.

"Fuck you, Brianna." She rolls her eyes in response.

"So...what do you guys do?" James asks, looking directly at me.

"I'm in adverting and Justin is an art student."

"Advertising, hmm...I guess you've probably got a nice car then," James decides and I laugh.

"Nice enough...I drive a black Jeep and vintage 'vette." He lets out a low whistle and playfully ducks his head.

"I'm going to build my own car one day," he adds dreamily. "In fact, I'm going to start a whole new line of cars."

"Tucker...a man and his dream," Justin jokes, earning him a frown from both Brianna and James.

"Sorry," he mumbles.

"You know...Brianna always wanted to go into advertising," James says, earning him a poke in the ribs from his sister.

"Really?" Justin smiles widely at me. I roll my eyes to the ceiling.

"Well, I want to work in animation one day," Justin continues. He's getting a kick out of this.

"So..." James clears his throat, "...today is Thursday and you all are going to be here until Sunday. Must be cool to run things.

"Well, being that I've made partner again I can adjust my schedule if need be. Justin, who has gone back to school after a long suspension, insisted on coming with me." He leans over, brushing a kiss against my cheek.

"Suspended?" James is incredulous. "What the hell could you have possibly done to get suspended?"

"Wasn't my first suspension," Justin replies, a little on the defensive.

"Yeah, so fess up, what did you do?" James is raptly staring at Justin.

"Hold up!" Brianna interrupts her brother. "What do you mean made partner again." She's looking at me pointedly.

"I mean...I made partner...got fired...then was begged to come back as full partner.

She considers my answer, while twirling the fork in her hand. "What the hell did you do?" I look at Justin for help.

"Well...it's the same reason I was suspended from school, but really...it's a long boring story."

"I want to hear it," Brian's daughter insists. "What about you James...don't you want to hear it too?" The boy nods his head enthusiastically.

"Okay." Justin places his fork down; clearing his throat to speak.

"The Police Chief, Jim Stockwell, was running for Mayor and Brian...your father here, was in charge of his ad campaign. In the meantime, I accepted an internship and started using the agency resources to create defaced posters and other propaganda against this guy. He was a homophobic prick who turned his back on hate crimes against gays. Anyway, one night I was reproducing posters mocking the Chief, that I was going to hang around the city, when your Father caught me."

"Hold up...you mean to tell me that you made copies of the defaced posters of the man at the same agency he was paying to get him elected? Man...that takes balls!" James looks at Justin with a new found respect.

"Well, when Brian found out he ordered me to stop."

"Ordered you?" Brianna shoots a look at me, indicating how crazy she thinks I am.

"Yeah, I said the same thing, but kept hanging the posters, anyway. Then one night he joined me in my nefarious activities and the rest they say is history."

"So then what happened?" James asks, looking at Justin to continue.

"Then a press conference was held at the Gay and Lesbian Center and we confronted Stockwell regarding crimes committed against gays and the fact that the police force didn't even bother trying to solve the cases."

"What...did you just come right out and ask him?"

"No. We had help from friends and family. I'd call out a name and one of them would stand up with a poster of the person and tell their story. The last name I called was my own. My mom stood with a poster of me..." Justin goes quiet and Brianna and James exchange looks of confusion.

I squeeze Justin's shoulder and he reaches with his other hand to squeeze back before continuing. "I was a victim of a gay bashing at my senior prom. Your father saved my life." I wish he never would have brought the bashing up as I feel my stomach muscles clench.

"You were there?" Brianna's face registers shock.

"Yeah," I admit, hoping they'll talk about something else.

"As his date." I hear the unbelievability in James' voice.

"Yes. As his date." Brianna nods her head in approval while gazing at me.

"Good for you," she intones.

"Anyway," Justin says steering the conversation away from the bashing. "After the conference at the Center, Stockwell and your Father's business partner, Gardner Vance came to the loft. Uh...that's where Brian lives. At any rate, Brian opens the door in his birthday suit and I was in a like situation, lying on the floor; the defaced posters strewn about everywhere. Needless to say, he was fired from the campaign and, ultimately, his job. I was fired from my internship and suspended from school, because I refused to apologize to Stockwell. That is until Mr. Vance found out the number of clients ready to walk out the door with Brian, then he begged Brian to come back and gave me back my internship. The only negative is my suspension from school held up so, I had a lot of make-up work to do."

"Man..." James speaks slowly, fully engrossed in the story. "Did the guy become mayor?"

"No, seems that he'd helped cover up the murder, of a young gay man, that his ex-partner committed. Your father went \$100,000 in debt bringing all of that to light by airing TV ads during the campaign period. Due to Brian's efforts, Stockwell lost the election." Justin looks at me, practically bursting with pride.

"100,000 dollars," James whistles "Why the hell did it take so much money?"

"Because that's how much air time costs, dummy." Brianna sighs, pursing her lips. Smart girl.

"Rage'll do whatever it takes to protect the citizens of Gayopolis," Justin laughs and I shake my head.

"Okay...so who is Rage?" Brianna asks.

"Me. I'm the inspiration behind it. My best friend Mikey and Justin have their own comic book and the main character is a superhero named Rage," I inform them.

"That still doesn't tell us who Rage is," James turns to Justin, seeking an explanation and he obliges.

"Rage is Brian. Zephyr is Rage's side-kick," Justin leans in conspiratorially, "Zephyr is based on Michael Novotny, Brian's best friend. Lastly, there's a character named J.T., who is me by the way, who Rage rescued from a gay bashing. They've become lovers while J.T. works on thawing out Rage's cold heart." I grown inwardly at Justin's description, but feel instantly warmed by James' next words...

"That's fucking amazing...how many issues do you have? Do you have any with you. Can we see one?" James is tossing out questions barely taking time to breath.

Justin laughs. I don't have any with me and besides...we've only done three so far...but I'd be happy to get those three to you as soon as I can."

"Thanks," James beams at Justin. We talk for a while longer before leaving the restaurant. I try talking the kids into letting me get them a motel room, but they won't hear it. They do agree, however, to let us pick them up in the morning. So that's something.

"We'll come early...what time do you have to be at school?" I shout out the window as they head up to their house.

"We don't have school tomorrow," Brianna announces.

"Why not?" I inquire. James and Brianna share a sly look, then laugh and go on into the house. "Guess it's fair to assume they haven't been to school much since their mother fell ill."

Justin looks pensive. "Wonder how they're eating?" We pull away from the house, heading for the hotel.

"They said when school is in they get free lunch and that's how they eat," I remind him.

Once we're safely ensconced in the hotel room, we immediately get in bed and I let out a big breath.

"You know..." I roll over to face Justin, "...with Gus, I loved him from the beginning. Wanted to see him happy and healthy. I would never want to see him end up like them." Justin sits up in bed, resting his back against the headboard. I do the same.

"It's not your fault, Brian. You didn't turn your back on them. You didn't force their Mother to keep you and them in the dark all this time."

"I don't like it Justin. I don't like it one bit. No one should have to live like that...especially no child of mind! I mean...fuck! Did you see that damn house? They don't even have decent clothes or shoes, for Christ sake!" I jump out of bed suddenly. I can't sit still and start pacing back and forth. Justin gets up, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"So, now that you know what Kelville held...the question is...what are you prepared to do about it?" I exhale a puff of air, slumping beside Justin on the bed.

"I do want them safe; I want them taken care of. Believe it or not, I care what happens to them. Now, if the DNA test proves they are not mine...will I still feel that way? I don't know." Justin chuckles at this revelation.

"What's so damn funny?"

"I think we're way past the point where we have to question whether they're yours or not. In case you hadn't noticed..." Justin snickers, "...they look just like you. Everything about Brianna is you, and James...well, now I have a good idea how you must have looked when you were seventeen," Justin surmises. "Can't wait to see the gang's reaction when they meet the kids."

"Yeah, they'll think I've somehow found a way to stay forever young. Listen, Justin...I don't want anyone to know about this now. Not a word; understand me? "

"Yeah, Brian, but..."

"You know it's fucking freezing outside," I cut him off. "How are they staying warm?" I can't get the image of them huddled together attempting to stay warm, out of my head.

"James did mention that when it's real cold they turn on the oven and leave the door open."

"Fuck!" That's no way to stay warm. Plus, it's dangerous to have the oven on all night. Damn! Where do they get off being so proud and not asking for help. The least I could do is get them a nice heater or blanket or...something to stay warm."

"Wal-Mart stays open all night, Brian. We could pick up a few items and..."

"Wal-Mart! Please tell me you're joking?" Justin snickers at me then starts pulling his clothes on.

~ ~ ~

"We exit Wal-Mart, blankets, socks, coats, and shoes in tow.

"You know...I would never shop here for Gus," I say snidely.

"Yeah well, tomorrow you can go out and buy them all the expensive things that you want, but right now we have to be practical and this is the only place open this late," Justin reasons. "Besides, they need the blankets to get through the night and socks, shoes and coats for tomorrow. Also, I'm not too sure how well Brianna would take it if you just dropped a bunch of expensive items on them." We get the shit in the car and take off for Shelly's home.

~ ~ ~

We're on the front porch of the house and I note the door is slightly ajar. I enter first, with my thousand bags, and see both Brianna and James lying on the mattress facing each other, drawn up tight because of the cold. I have a hard time looking at them and turn my head away. Justin enters and immediately starts pulling blankets out of the bags and covering them. It's dark inside and we can just barely make out where their clothes are lying and that's where we place their new things.

Once back in the hotel I try sleeping, but something else is nagging at me.

"Justin...did you say they have no electricity?"

"Yeah," he answers in a sleepy voice. "That's what he mentioned."

"So...what are they doing for hot water?" I wonder aloud.

"Tomorrow Brian, okay? Tomorrow. Now go to sleep." Justin yawns.

"Yes dear."

~ ~ ~

We pull up in front of their house at eight the next morning. They hear our arrival and come bounding out of the house, new coats and shoes on. They hop in the car and don't say anything about them...neither do we.

"Good morning!" Justin and I say in unison.

"Morning," James replies. "Yeah...morning," Brianna mumbles.

"You guys hungry?" How about we stop at a pancake house I noticed on the way over. Everyone nods their approval and off we go.

~ ~ ~

"I can picture Gus now; syrup everywhere. He makes the biggest mess when he eats pancakes," Justin laughs.

"Who's Gus?" James looks from me to Justin. Justin and I exchange a look. They don't know about Gus. I'm not sure why we didn't mention it to them yesterday.

"Gus is my son." They look at me wide-eyed.

"You have a son?" James questions. "I thought you were gay!"

Brianna is scowling and fires a question of her own. "He seems young if he can't eat pancakes without making a mess...how old is he anyway?"

"He's three years old and I am gay. Gus lives with his mothers. Lesbians. Friends of mine, well one of them anyway...they wanted a baby and I donated the sperm."

"So...he's like our brother or something." James ponders this for a moment. "Do you have a picture of him?"

I flip open my wallet removing a picture of Gus and hand it over.

"He's cute," James coos.

"He looks just like you," Brianna says, handing the picture back.

"Do your parents know you're gay?" She's good at this out of the blue shit. I stiffen. We're on my least favorite subject.

"My Dad is dead, but I told him I was gay before he died. My Mom knows, reluctantly, and I also have a sister who has known for some time. As a matter of fact, my Mom is probably at Mass now praying for my wretched soul."

"But you'd never turn your back on a child of yours if you found out they were gay...would you?" Brianna questions. I stare at her and for the first time since meeting her, she seems vulnerable. I look at James, but he looks away, unable to meet my eyes. So that's why it was so easy for them to accept my homosexuality. Shit, James must be gay himself.

"No...I would never do that," I assure them both.

"What about you, Justin." James raises his eyes to meet Justin's face. "You're so young; do your parents know?" Justin clears his throat.

"Yes. I came out when I was seventeen after meeting your Father. My Mom is okay with it and we're still pretty close, but my Dad gave me hell. In fact, we rarely speak and he's practically disowned me. He even refused to pay for my education unless I majored in business and attended his alma mater, Dartmouth, instead of doing what I really want to do...be an artist. I also have a sister, but she's a lot younger than me and a little removed from it all. She seems okay with it for now though."

We talk a little more, telling them all about the gang. We even tell them about doctor Dave and Blake, laughing and joking, enjoying each other's company. Daphne's name comes up, and they ask to see a picture of her. Justin whips one out taken not too long ago.



"Wow, she's hot!" James exclaims staring at Daphne's face. Whoa...guess he's not gay.

We wipe James off the floor and get up to leave. A woman striding by us when we go out, causes James to turn his head and then look at his sister, raising his eyebrows in appreciation.

"Did you get a good look at that, sis?"

"Hell yeah, I did! Damn she has a phat ass! Shit the things I could do to her," she shakes her head. I stop short and turn around to look at them.

"You're a lesbian?" I ask needlessly.

"Gotta problem with that?" James demands, stepping in front of his sister, which makes me laugh. They take care of each other; look out for each other. I like that.

"Why the fuck would I have a problem with it?" James steps back.

"So, have you ever...you know?" Justin questions as we get into the car. I notice a group of teenagers getting out of a car parked near us.

"Does anyone around here ever go to school?"

"Duh...it's a teacher work day." Brianna rolls her eyes.

Brianna places a hand on Justin's arm. "To answer your question...no...I've never. And neither has James," she laughs totally embarrassing the boy.

We arrive at the hospital and Shelly smiles when all four of us enter her room together. She takes note of the new coats and shoes also. Justin and I leave the room allowing them private to talk with their Mother. We're waiting outside for about twenty minutes when Brianna taps me on the shoulder, telling me her "Mom would like to see me...alone."

I quietly enter the room and sit down on the chair beside the bed, taking Shelly's hand in mine.

"Thank you," she whispers.

"For what?" I ask

"For being there with them and for looking after them. They told me all about what you did. It means a lot to them that you are trying," she adds.

I squeeze her hand lightly. "They're good kids."

"Brianna seems strong-willed...I know, but James is the stronger of the two. Remember that."

"I will," I assure her.

"I don't have long, Brian. I can feel it. Day by day I slip further and further to the other side. The kids know I'm dying, Brian. They've had time for it to sink in. I believe James has accepted it a little better than his sister, but they both realize I've only got at best, a few more days." She starts coughing and I stand to ring for the nurse.

"Do you want me to call a nurse?"

"No...no. I'll be fine. It gets a lot worse than this sometimes, believe me."

"What about you?" I ask her. "Have you accepted it?"

"Brian...I made peace with it a long time ago." She looks tired.

A nurse comes in and tells me she has to rest, but we can come back later that afternoon. I walk out to find Justin and the twins talking and laughing. They look up when I approach.

"The nurse said that she has to rest now, but we can come back later.

"Okay." James and Brianna look a little down so I decide we should take in their little town. The kids agree and suggest visiting the local video arcade joint.

~ ~ ~

"Look who it is ya'll, pure White trash, having the damn nerve to show their ugly faces around town."

We've just exited the video arcade and have run into a group of teenagers hanging around, laughing at and making fun of the twins. Before I can say anything, Brianna has sucker punched the girl who's now lying on the ground. Next thing I know, it's an all out brawl. I grab Brianna, who's wildly throwing punches left and right and Justin gets James who had some guy on the ground stomping the shit out of him. We hustle them into the car, sounds of profanity being yelled at us.

"What the hell was that?" I'm inhaling deeply and turn around to glare at the two of them.

"They started it! I know you saw that or...are you going to take their side, since they are more your kind of people!" Brianna explodes. I try to keep my anger in check, but can't, exploding as well.

"Do you know how many people told me I was nothing when I was growing up?" I yell at them.

"Brian please, calm down," Justin demands putting his hand on my arm, trying to center me. I ignore him.

"Do you know how many times I had to hear that I would never be anything, that I would be just like my father or worse? Do you think I used my fist every time? No! You know what I did? I became something. Somebody. I proved them wrong and that's what you're going to do. Fuck 'em. Those kids' heads are in their collective asses anyway. You two already know how hard, unfair and unforgiving this world can be. And you're still here, still standing. They've yet to learn that and when they do it'll probably break them."

After riding around in an attempt to calm our nerves, we decide to eat lunch and find a diner, go inside and place our orders.

"You gonna tell me who those kids were?"

"We go to school with them," Brianna states tonelessly. "They always make fun of us."

"Yeah, I know how that is," Justin gloomily says.

"We ignore them most times, there are times when we can't ignore them and let them have it," James adds between bites.

I look at both of them pointedly. "Well, remember what I said."

We finish lunch and decide to head back to the hospital. When I get there I'm informed that the test results are in. I hold the envelope in my hand while everyone waits for me to open it. I take a deep breath, and tear it open. I'm not surprised by what I see. I think we're all past the point of doubt. But still I feel something I can't explain. I pass the paper over so that everyone else can have a look at it. Justin's hand rests on my shoulder for support and I allow it. The kids go in to see their Mother.

"Are you alright?" Justin asks me.

"I'm fine," I lie.

"Sure you are," he says rubbing my back, but not pushing the issue any more.

"All of you can't fit in the loft, Brian. I think you better call my mom and tell her to take your house off the market."

"I've already done that," I sheepishly admit.

"When?" Surprise is clearly written all over his countenance.

"Come on, Justin. You didn't really think I was going to let someone else come up in there, rent the place and put you out on the street, did you?" He leans over and gives me a quick kiss on the jaw.

It's some time later when the twins come out of Shelly's room.

"She has to rest...she'll see us tomorrow." Brianna seems a little dejected.

"Would you like to go with us to the hotel for a little while," Justin asks them.

"Yeah sure," James replies, speaking for both himself and his sister.

Justin

At the hotel Brian begins making work-related phone calls and I place a call to my mom letting her know I'm okay and with Brian. She assumed we'd been holed up at the loft all this time, just not answering the phone or the door so I continue to let her think that.

"Oh...this is the movie that a lot of the kids have been talking about at school. It's supposed to be real good." James and Brianna settle down to watch the movie and I kick my shoes off and curl up in bed. Brian is still on the phone with Vanguard. This time yesterday I was thinking no way could Brian have another child, and now he has three. Fucking amazing.

I'm not really sure how Brian is doing with all this. I think it's hard for him to see the kind of life they've led so far. I know he's been thinking a lot about Gus. This all has been a wake up call for Brian. He never thought he could love Gus, but now he loves that little boy more than anything else in his life. He doesn't really know Brianna and James, but it's clear to see how much he cares about them already. They're his kids, his seed...a part of him. He feels kinship to them and he should.

I wonder if Tony has moved in with Daphne. I sure hope not. I'd hate to go back there with him still hanging around. I don't want to cause Daphne any pain and I don't want to come between them, but I just can't pretend.

Speaking of Daphne...God she's going to flip when she finds out. And Lindsay, who knows how she's going to take the news. She always prided herself on being the first and only one to give Brian a son. Wonder how she'll react when he gives her the news.

~ ~ ~

I wake up to a bunch of laughter.

"I told you the smell of food would wake him," Brian jokes, grinning at me. He's sitting in a chair and Brianna and James are on the floor in front of the TV eating Chinese food. I roll my eyes, get up and help myself to something to eat. My eyes start glazing over with boredom at the movie they're watching and I decide to draw retrieving my

sketchpad out of my bag. I rummaging around in there and come across the copies of Rage I stored. I take them out, passing them over to the twins.

"This is Rage...your comic book?" James takes the comic from me and passes one to his sister.

"Yeah, Michael and mine," I respond. They bury their heads in the comics and I walk over to the chair where Brian is and sit in his lap, wrapping my arms around him.

"Did you call your Mother?" We share a kiss.

"Mmmm...mmm. I told her you'd kidnapped me and I had no idea where I was." That earns me a pinch in my side from him.

"How are things at work? They holding up okay without you there?"

"Just barely. I've got some work done while you slept and still have a little more to do," he tells me. I side glance Brianna and James.

"Well, I think between the comics and TV, they'll be occupied for the rest of the evening."

"You think they'll spend the night." Brian looks at them, a mask of doubt clouding his face

"Just leave them alone and don't say anything about going home. Don't ask 'em if they're gonna stay...just let the evening flow naturally."

"What about you...what are you going to do?"

"I have a picture that I want to sketch." I stretch arching my back.

"Of what...my cock?" Brian teases.

"No, asshole...my cock. Brian, look why don't we let them take the bed. We can always get a roll away brought in after they go to sleep,"

"Whatever." He shrugs his shoulders and I kiss the tip of his nose.

"Hey," I call to the twins, "I'm ready to do a little drawing and Brian has some work to do. Why don't you two take the bed?"

"We're fine right here," Brianna announces.

"I want to sketch you both...on the bed watching television, if that's okay with you," I say.

"Come on Brianna." James gathers the comic books and takes them to the bed. Brianna follows suit, so I guess that's settled.

I move over to the chair. I really do want to sketch them and Brian. So I allow my self to get lost in my work. I don't look up again until James is telling me how cool the comic book is.

"Thanks," I blush.

"Can you image seeing a Rage cartoon show? Or even a Rage movie, sorta like Superman, or...or, even the X-Men!" Brianna falsely gushes, causing Brian to snort and me to laugh.

"It's been a secret wish of mine for awhile now," I admit, before turning my attention back to the drawing. The picture is of all four of us. Brianna and James at the arcade while Brian and I watch from the side. By the time I look up again Brianna and James are fast asleep with Brian back at work.

I place the call for the roll away bed and it's brought right up. Brian stops working and helps me fold it out.

"Let's go to bed." He takes my hand and pulls me down on top of him. I turn over and snuggle close to him and that's how we sleep the rest of the night.

~ ~ ~

Saturday morning I wake up to an empty bed and a still sleeping James and Brianna. A quick glance at the clock shows me that it's after 11:00. I get up, take a shower and put my clothes on. It's 11:45 when Brian finally comes through the door. He has bags and more bags of clothes with him.

"I don't need to ask who that's for." I point to the many bags in his hands. Brian rolls his lips into his mouth, then ducks his head shyly.

"It's just something for them to wear."

"Well let's go find something to eat, while they get dressed." I know Brian. Oohing and aahing over this sentiment would probably piss him off; so I leave it alone and lead us out the room intent on finding something to eat.

When we get back they are up and dressed.

"Thanks for the clothes, blanket...hell, thanks for everything. We really appreciate it," James punctuates that by giving Brian an awkward hug.

"No problem," Brian says and we all sit down to eat.

~ ~ ~

When we go back to the hospital Brian goes in to talk to Shelly alone, and we wait outside.

"What time do you leave tomorrow?" Brianna asks me.

"Early...like six in the morning," I respond.

"How will we get in touch with you?" James inquires.

"You have access to a computer at school, don't you?"

"Yeah, at the library." James is fidgeting in his seat, intent on seeing his Mother.

"Do you have an email account?" They say they do, so we exchange email addys just as Brian is coming out of their Mom's room. The twins jump up and hurry into Shelly's room as I hand their addresses to Brian.

"How is she, Brian?"

"She's looks a lot worse than she did the first time we came," he sighs. We end up staying most of the day at the hospital and don't leave until well after 9:00.

~ ~ ~

"You said you took Drivers Ed?" We're at the hotel after stopping for a quick bite to eat, preparing for our return to Pittsburgh when Brian addresses the kids.

"Yeah, why," James asks.

"Do either of you have a license?"

"We both do!"

"Well, good. You can take us to the airport in the morning and we'll add you both on the lease so you can keep the car and return it on Monday. You can also stay in this hotel room until 11:00, Monday morning."

"Cool," James says and Brianna just shrugs her shoulders.

We say our goodbyes at the airport. I watched Brian count out \$500 earlier and slip it into James hands. "For you and your sister...use it wisely"

We board the plane and head towards home.

~ ~ ~

"It's about time you two assholes finally decided to show your faces. No shows for three damn days...what gives?" Deb carries on as soon as we walk in the diner. We go to our usual table and sit down with Michael, Ben and Hunter. Hunter immediately starts making eyes at Brian. He's still not over his crush with Brian, but he has toned it down some.

"Hey guys," Michael enthuses, "you'll never believe what you missed...Em and Blake got into it!"

"Do you mean fight? Like in...fist fight?" I can't believe it. Michael nods his head yes.

"Over Theodore?" Brian asks, in disbelief. "Theodore Schmidt?"

"They both love him," Ben states.

"So, where were they? I know neither Ted nor Blake hang out at Woody's or Babylon anymore..." I say. "...so where'd they fight?"

"Right here!" Michael screeches, "Ben and I had to break them up and Ma almost had a heart attack."

"Where the hell was Ted?" Brian blinks, looking around.

"Not here," Hunter answers.

"Who won?" I ask, unable to just let it go.

"It was hard to tell...they both got in some pretty good licks," Ben answers, right before Emmett walks through the door.

"So...anyone up for Babylon?" Em singsongs.

"Not me. I'm going home, I'm pretty beat." I get up and Brian follows.

"I guess I better start packing, huh?" I question as soon as we exit the diner.

"Packing?" Brian searches my face, a confused look passing over his. "Where you going?"

"I guess to Daph's...don't you need the house for the kids," I surmise.

"So you think I'm going to just put you out on the street?" I put my hands in my pockets and shrug my shoulders as an answer.

"Justin, the house is big enough for all of us. We'll make it work."

"So...I can stay?"

"What do you think?"

"Even if I spend more time in the master bedroom than in mine?" I bat my lashes, playing innocent.

"Especially, if you spend more time in mine," he grunts, grabbing me by the hair and kissing me soundly.

Brian

Monday, after work, I begin moving my clothes and other personal items out of the loft and into the house. I don't plan on taking any furniture, since the house is already furnished and I intend on maintaining the loft...especially when I feel the need to be alone. I also had Cyn go online and purchase some items for the twins to use; bed linens, computers, desks, some lava lamps and that stuff has all been delivered to the house. By the time everything is arranged to my satisfaction, I'm exhausted and lie down...waiting for Justin.

~ ~ ~

Everyone seemed surprised when I moved into the house. They all thought Justin and were trying to make another go of living together again. We didn't bother to correct them.

I keep in touch with the twins through email and phone calls. It's on a Wednesday that I get the call. I go alone because I don't want Justin to miss any more school.

When I arrive in Kelville she's already been moved to the funeral home. One of the first things I did when I got back to the Pitts was prearrange everything. She didn't have insurance, but there was no way I'd allow the Mother of my children to not be buried properly. I drive over to the house and Brianna and James are standing in the front yard, awaiting me. I slide out of the car and Brianna rushes to me, throwing herself into my arms. I hug her tightly and feel James' arms come around us as well. I'm not sure how long we stay like that, before I lead them to the car and we drive towards the hotel. They're emotionally spent and as soon as we hit the room they both immediately lie down. They sleep for a couple of hours and when they wake up they're ready to talk.

"You know for so long it's just been the three of us," James reminisces.

"We didn't have much, but Mom used to make a game out of everything so we didn't really notice," Brianna smiles in remembrance.

"How are you two holding up?"

"We knew it was coming. We're not shocked. That doesn't mean it doesn't hurt any less." Tears are rolling unchecked down James' cheeks.

"Member the time we stayed up all night rolling that ball into the cup?" Brianna laughs.

"Yeah, we even kept score. You kept losing and demanded rematches with me and Mom?" James chuckles. I'm glad they're having wonderful memories of their mother; that's how it should be.

"Can we see her tomorrow? Will she be ready for viewing?" Brianna suddenly asks, a stricken look on her face.

"We should be able to see her tomorrow," I inform them.

"You know what I hate, Dad?" I stop for just a second to focus on the fact that she just called me, Dad.

"What?" I gently ask.

"Her father...our Grandfather knows all about us. He knows that Mom was left alone, yet he never came by. He's never tried contacting us or even offering to help. One of the things Mom wanted more than anything else was to make up with him. She died with that in her heart. She died never given the chance to tell him that she still loved him.. Brianna says all this, tears streaming down her face. She tries to talk again, but gets choked up. James pulls her into his arms and holds her while she cries. That's how we spend the day, mostly talking and remembering things about their mother.

The next day is spent transferring their school records and shopping for the proper attire to wear to the funeral.

~ ~ ~

"She's beautiful," Brianna breathes, unable to take her eyes off her mother, who's being viewed today. She puts her arm around James shoulder and they stay that way for a while. I stand with them and James takes my hand in his.

When we leave the funeral home no one's in the mood to do anything so we get something light to eat, take it back to the hotel room and they drift off fitfully to sleep.

I call Justin catching him up on the day's event and he tells me what's going on in the Pitts...which really is nothing at all. When we get off the phone I don't feel like doing anything else so I join the twins in sleep.

~ ~ ~

They hold up pretty well doing the funeral. It's a small service, since they pretty much kept to themselves. Afterwards, we go to the house and they retrieve everything they need or can't stand to leave behind. We stay up all night talking about Shelly; what she was like in high school and how much they're going to miss her. We end up talking until it's almost time to leave for the airport.

We arrive in Pittsburgh around one in the afternoon. Justin has the jeep and I don't bother parking the 'vette in long-term, since it would be too small to haul us anyway. We hail a cab to the house, stopping first at the loft to retrieve a file I need. The twins follow me in.

"Wow...this place is awesome. Brianna is spinning around, soaking it all in. Is this where we'll live? Is there enough room for all us?" Brianna asks, stunned.

"Thanks...but we won't be living here. This is my loft, but I also own a house as well and that's where we'll be staying. I just came here to get a file," I let them know.

"Too bad," Brianna says as we exit the loft and head back towards the cab.

When we pull up to the house I get another round of wows from them both.

"This is where we'll live," I announce. We go inside and I give them a tour, showing them Gus' room and I tell James that he can have the room beside his brother. Brianna takes the room beside Justin and since he'll be sharing my room just about every night it's a pretty safe bet that she'll have her own bathroom.

"So...all of this is ours; the computers and everything?" I nod my head yes, at Brianna's question.

"Man, Mom would have loved this," James says, a tinge of sadness in his voice.

"Yeah, she would have," Brianna agrees.

"Thanks, Dad" Brianna says sincerely. James echoes her.



"Yeah, thanks Dad."

"I'll leave you two to get settled." I walk into my room, closing the door behind me. Its strange having two teenagers call me dad. It makes me feel a lot older then I am. But I realize that I'm all they have now.

When Justin gets home we decide to go grocery shopping and put some food in the house. I don't think I've ever had so many cookies, cakes, candy and chips in my presence.

We get home, put the groceries away and Justin decides to broil a couple of steaks for dinner.

"So, when can I meet my brother?" James asks me.

"How about we all go over there tomorrow?"

"Good," James says cutting into his steak. It's piled high with onions and green peppers, just like his sister's is.

"One more thing," I say causing all eyes to turn on me. "Justin uses the Jeep to get to school and work and I use the 'vette."

"So when can I see the corvette?" James interrupts his eyes shinning.

"How about after dinner?" I notice he starts eating a little faster.

"As I was saying," I continue. "You're going to need transportation, so I bought you each a Ford Focus.

"Really...a car each?" James drops his fork and jumps up from his seat at the table.

Dinner is soon forgotten as we rush to the garage to look at their new cars and also check out the Corvette. Brianna gazes intently at me then hugs me fiercely, her head buried in my chest.

"Thank you so much," she mumbles into my chest. "You're the best!" She releases me, a smirk crossing her face.

"I want the Black one." James is so busy gushing over the Corvette it takes a moment for it to register.

"Uh...okay. I wanted the red one, anyway." His eyes are still on my car.

"Dad?" he asks, a pleading look on his face.

"Hell no! It's not even up for discussion. Your car," I say pointing to the Ford. "My car. I lean against the Corvette.

"I'll wear you down sooner or later," he grins, finally going to look at his own car.

Justin and I go to my room and the twins settle down in the living room discussing their new cars.

"What?" I ask Justin after he's been staring at me for longer then a minute.

"You're a good father he simply states.

"Whatever." We lie down together, wrapping our arms around each other.

~ ~ ~

I wake in the middle of the night needing something to drink and notice, on my way to the kitchen, the twins are still in the living room, television blaring.

"Going to bed?" I ask them walking over and cutting the TV off. Their eyes are drooping heavily and they don't answer me.

"What's wrong?" I nudge James' foot.

"We've always slept in the same room," he mumbles. "Never alone."

"I'd suggest getting used to it," I speak out from the kitchen, glass of water in hand.

"Is it okay if we leave the door open and the lights on?"

"Do whatever makes you comfortable," I say, returning to my room.

"What took you so long?" I'm climbing back into bed and notice Justin's face is a little pale.

"Kids were still up...scared to sleep alone, so I had a little chat with them."

"Oh...they'll get use to it." Justin pulls me close and I relax, dropping off to sleep.

~ ~ ~

Sunday morning we get up and eat breakfast before hopping in the jeep to do more shopping. The twins huffed a little, because each wanted to drive, but I didn't have time for that shit. We hit a couple of malls and I maintained my cool long enough for them to get piles of clothes, shoes, coats, and God knows what else. I had enough foresight to call my hairstylist and inform him of the emergency that is my kids' hair and he agreed to open up his shop and help me out.

We head home so that the kids can put their new things away and change before we head over to see Gus. When they come out of their rooms with their new hair dos and clothes, it's like looking at two totally different kids.

"Damn...they look even more like you now if that's possible," Justin laughs. James has on a pair of blue jeans and shirt with Chinese logo on it. Brianna is wearing a very tight little dress and I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from telling her to change outfits.

We pull up at the munchers and I notice a funny look pass over Justin's face.

"Why don't we let James go in alone and see how they take it? Justin says a mischievous gleam in his eye.

"Man...hell no! I don't know these people. I'll sit right here the whole time," James announces.

"Oh come on you big baby," Brianna eggs him on, getting out the car.

I knock on the door and after a beat, Lindsay answers. I laugh out loud at the shocked \_expression on her face.

"Brian, what the...?" Lindsay steps aside and ushers us into the house.

"Where's Mel?" I demand, taking a seat.

"She and the kids went out...Brian what's going on?" Lindsay's unable to keep her eyes off of Brianna and James.

"Linds, I'd like you to met my children...James and Brianna."

"Your what?" Lindsay places a hand over her heart and breathes shallowly. Between the four us, we tell her the entire story. By the time we finish she's in tears.

"Welcome to the family," she says to them standing up and holding her arms out. They look at me and I shrug my shoulders and watch while they give her a hug.

We hear a key being inserted into the front and a baby's cries. Lindsay immediately jumps up.

"I'm going to head Mel off," she says. She returns a second later with Gus and Melissa. Justin takes Melissa into his arms and Gus looks from me to James, before deciding to toddle over to me.

"Dada?" he questions.

"Yeah, it's me Sonny boy." I pick him up, helping him remove his coat and hat.

"Gus, that's Brianna and James," I point. Brianna holds her arms out to him and he gazes at me, eyes round with confusion. I reassure him it's okay before he baby steps over to her.

"Hey, little man...I'm your sister," she coos, placing a gentle kiss on his neck. "I've been waiting to meet you for a while now." Gus regards her with the innocence of the young and offers her some of his juice, which she pretends to drink. He then goes over to James and climbs up in his lap, patting his face for a minute before speaking.

"Like Dada," he coos and we all laugh.

"Yeah, like Dada. I'm James...your brother." He ruffles Gus's hair a little bit.

Melanie, after consulting with Lindsay I assume, enters the room and surprisingly maintains a cool façade.

"Oh my, God..." she smirks, "just what the world needs...another Brian Kinney. Actually, make that two more Brian Kinney's." She feigns disgust and watches as James blushes furiously.

"You're very pretty, ma'am," he tells her. Her face softens, slightly.

"Thank you," Melanie stands, hands on hips, "but don't call me ma'am."

"I...I'm sorry, it's just that, um...I'm sorry," he says, looking away.

"It's okay, honey," Melanie soothes. "You're sweet, nothing at all like your father." She shoots me a smug look. "So, I presume..." Mel turns to the other twin, "...you must be Brianna."

"That's right and I'm not nearly as sweet as my brother or my father," she grins Lindsay laughs at that.

"Okay-y-y." Mel rolls her eyes and takes a sleeping Melissa out of Justin's arms.

"When are you guys going to introduce them to the rest of the family?" Melanie questions Justin and I while rocking Melissa.

I shrug my shoulders noncommittally. "I thought we'd just stroll into the diner and shock their asses..."

"Brian!" Lindsay exclaims. "Your language," she nods her head in the direction of the children.

"God! I'd love to be a fly on the wall at the look on their faces," Mel laughs.

"I'll draw a picture," Justin laughs with her. I watch as Brianna pulls Lindsay off to the side and walk in that general direction pretending to do something while I shamelessly listen in on their conversation.

"Is it okay if I come by sometime? I'd love to get to know Gus better; you know...do some things with him. James and I both would like, and, of course, Melissa."

"Sweetie, you can come by here anytime you want. You're Gus' family, so that means you're always welcome. Both of you."

"Thanks," she smiles shyly at Lindsay.

~ ~ ~

Between Justin and myself we call everyone up, arranging to meet at the diner. We're no sooner in the door when the questioning starts, one after the other, everyone talking at once and a mile a minute.

"Hold it!" I yell. "Everyone sit down, shut the fuck up and allow us to explain." Which they allow us to do. However, before I can get the last sentence out my mouth, Deb has pulled them both into her bosom, squeezing tightly.

"Don't you worry, we're going to take good care of you here. All of us here...we're a family, we take care of each other." She dabs her eyes with the hem of her vest and Em swoops in grabbing them as well.

"Oh, you poor babies. If you need anything, anything at all...just let your Auntie Em know."

"Em, they're not fucking two-year olds," I chastise him.

"Hey...I'm Michael, this is my boyfriend, Ben and our surrogate son, Hunter. I knew your Mom in high school and I'm sorry for your loss." He hugs them both.

"Nice to meet you," Ben says shaking each of their hands. Hunter shakes hands with Brianna then shakes James' hand, pulling him close.

"It's very nice to meet you," Hunter gives James the once over, letting him know he's interested.

"Down boy," I command to Hunter.

"You mean he's not...?" he asks me

"No," I answer.

"Well, it's your loss," Hunter states letting his hand drop.

"I'm Jennifer...Justin's mother." Jennifer extends her hand and they shake it. "It's nice to meet you both. Oh...here comes Daphne," Jennifer says, pointing to the front door. Justin waves her over, grinning, while I notice my eldest son appears to be mesmerized. Since she wasn't here during the "reenactment", Justin quickly brings her up to date.

"I'm Daphne...Justin's best friend," she waves at the two. Brianna waves back. James throws his hand up fast brings it down then looks everywhere but at Daphne. She notices this and walks over to him.

"Are you shy," she asks him

"Well... I... you see it's," he turns and goes to another booth and sits down. She starts to follow him and I call her back.

"Leave him alone, Daph," Justin stage whispers, "...give him a chance to compose himself."

"Is he always so shy?" she asks Brianna.

"Only when he sees someone who's as hot and sexy as you are," Brianna answers, causing James to blush.

"Oh well, thanks...I think" Daphne counters.

"Hunter, you can show them around school and introduce them to some of your friends." Michael looks at Hunter expectantly.

"I'm not a senior," he says.

"What difference does that make? So what if you're not in the same class...you still go to the same school and you can show them around," Ben pronounces.

"No problem," Hunter says, rolling his eyes.

"You know...we've heard a lot about you all from Justin and Dad," Brianna turns to Michael. "You're Melissa's father, right?"

"Yes...she's my baby," he answers, proudly.

"And my grandbaby!" Deb yells.

"You're Uncle Vic and you're his boyfriend, Rodney?"

"In the flesh," Vic answers.

"So you two must be Ted and Blake," she says pointing to them.

"Nice to meet you," Ted says. "Sorry about your mom," Blake offers.

Brianna turns to Daphne. "And you have a boyfriend name Tony?" she asks her.

Daphne scrunches her nose and sighs. "Not anymore."

"When did you break up?" Justin asks, unable to keep the smile off his face.

"Wow...could you be any happier?" Daphne scolds him, hands on her hips.

"I'm sorry Daph, but it's not secret I didn't like him," Justin defends himself. "So why did you two break up anyway?"

"None of your business, Justin. Maybe if you weren't so happy about it I'd tell you."

I go sit at the table with James, Justin and Daphne's faux arguing trailing behind me.

"What gives? First you go all gaga over Mel and now Daphne."

"I don't know," he shrugs. "When I see beautiful women something inside of me shifts."

"Beautiful women? We're talking about Mel here...give me a break."

"She's beautiful, Dad and Daphne...damn! I don't even have words for how beautiful she is."

"So what the hell are you scared of? You're a fucking Kinney. Put yourself out there; the women will soon be throwing themselves at your feet," I add confidently.

"I don't want a lot of women, Dad...just one," he declares and I feel a headache coming on. "Wonder if someone like Daphne would be interested in someone like me."

"James, need I repeat, you look just like me. That's as close to perfection as you're going to get. Understand?"

"It's just all the new cloths and new hair do and all of that I feel kind of out of place," he confides in me.

"But you look good. Now I'm not sure if Daphne's the right woman for you, but you've got to be more outgoing like your sister...doesn't seem like she's scared of anything."

"I'm not her," he utters, fire in his eyes.

"Whoa...I didn't mean it like that. I just meant...ah fuck it! Do whatever you feel like," I tell him getting up and walking away. Just to think I have all of this to look forward to again when Gus gets older. Suddenly I feel the need to lie down.

"Hey let's go," I gather my flock. Of course, ten minutes is spent on good-byes before we are finally able to make it out the door.

None of us ate at the diner so Justin and Brianna decide to fix diner. After we eat the kids go into the living room, settling down to watch some television, while Justin heads towards his bedroom.

"What are you doing?" My tone is harsher than I mean it to be.

"I'm tired, Brian. The only thing I want to do is sleep," he stifles a yawn.

"Then we'll sleep." I grab his hands, pulling him down the hall and into my room with me.

"James seems to have a little crush on Daphne," Justin says, pulling off his clothes then sliding into bed beside me.

"He's fucking love sick?" I correct.

"Huh?" Justin sits straight up in bed, shock evident on his face.

"What?" I ask. "Hell she could do a lot worse."

"Daphne likes older men, Brian..." he says shaking his head at me, "...at least that's one thing we have in common." He smirks, poking me in the ribs. I bite his ear and tug his nipple ring making him gasp. We share a long kiss and soon Justin is not as tired as he thought.

~ ~ ~

Monday I take the day off to get the twins registered in school and after we finish there, we go to the DMV and update their driver's licenses. Once that's done, I relinquish their keys to them with a short sermon.

"Be careful," I tell them. "Never try to race, never drink and drive, and never pick up strangers. Understood?"

"Understood," they both cry at once.

"One last thing. They're your cars. You're responsible for them. Now, I don't have many rules. As long as you take your ass to school everyday, do your homework, do your chores, be home by eleven, and stay out of trouble, you're free to do what you like.

Brianna

Things are moving so fast for James and me. Dad is trying his best to make us feel at home. The car, the clothes, and the money are all very nice. But it wouldn't mean anything if he didn't take the time that he does to spend with us. He's not just throwing money at us. He's making us feel wanted and that makes a difference.

I just wish Mom were here. I think about her all the time. Things I want to tell her, things I want to show her. I know that James feels the same way. I feel it.

We start school tomorrow and I guess Hunter will take us under his wing. Everyone was really nice when we met them at the diner. They seem like a very close group. I know my Dad and Justin told us a lot of what they've been through. Some of it is hard to imagine, but I've not had the chance to get to know them yet so I can't judge.

I pull up to the gallery where Lindsay works and peek through the window, spotting her instantly. I've never seen a more beautiful woman in my life. She glides toward me, a smile on her face.

"Brianna! What brings you here?" she walks up and gives me a big hug.

"Dad told me. I'd like to take you out to lunch...sorta get to know you better."

"We'll, I did bring a peanut butter sandwich to eat..."

"Ha...ha. For you or Gus," I joke. "Come on...I really want to take you out." I look her dead in the eye so she'll get my meaning.

"Just let me grab my purse." She's as sexy from behind as she is in the front.

We go to a small cafe near her job. I order a burger and fries and she gets the same.

"So...I hope your settling in okay?"

"So far everything is fine," I say. Our food arrives and we dig in. I pick up a fry, dipping it in ketchup before dangling it in front of her mouth.

"Mmmm," she says, slurping the fry into her mouth. "Thank you Bri." Bri? Ah...a nickname. I like it.

"You look so much like your father...it's amazing."

"I know. Can you imagine James and me not knowing who he is and running across him somewhere? Talk about scary!" I snort.

"Oh my, God. I can see Brian's face now. That would be hilarious," she laughs and then she reaches over with her napkin and wiping some ketchup off the side of my mouth.

"Last year Gus was an only child," Lindsay states. "Now he's got two sisters and a brother...amazing." She bites into her burger and I can't help watching the way her mouth moves.

"So Bri, school starts tomorrow...you nervous?"

"Well, I guess Hunter will show us around so..."

"That's not what I asked you. I asked were you nervous?"

"I guess I am a little," I reluctantly admit.

"Well don't be. You're beautiful, smart, funny. All the girls will want to be your friend and the guys will be practically throwing themselves at you. They won't be able to resist you," she says, moving some hair off of my face and letting her hand linger on my face.

"What about you? Can you resist?" I stroke her hand and turn it over to kiss her exposed palm. To her credit, she doesn't jerk away, but allows the small gesture.

"I'm a married woman, you know."

"I know, how could I ever forget it," I fret.

"You look just like your father when you pout," Lindsay laughs grabbing my face between her hands. I lean in and touch my lips with hers. I can't help myself.

"Bri," she whispers when we pull away. I let her catch her breath and then I crush my lips to hers again. I pull away this time and she reaches for me.

~ ~ ~

I arrive home having spent the evening going to a movie and hanging out with Lindsay.

"Hey..." I nod at James who's engrossed in some video game, "...where are Dad and Justin?"

"I just got here myself," he doesn't look up from his game. They left a note...went out.

Brian

I get home first, barely beating Justin. No one else is home so we grab a quickie and sit back, attempting to watch TV, but both of us are restless. Finally I can't take it anymore.

"Let's go out. Woody's, Babylon...something."

"Cool," is Justin's reply.

We shoot a few games of pool at Woody's and then head on over to Babylon. It's jumping tonight. Justin and I dance nonstop for three hours, before taking a break...it seems like forever since we've been out.

"Hey, there's Michael and Ben...let's go say hi." Justin leads me to the bar Mikey is leaning against.

"So I guess we all have teenagers going to high school tomorrow...how the hell did that happen," Ben teases. Great...just what I wanted to hear. I order a double Beam and sway to the music.

~ ~ ~

"What's Lindsay doing here?" It's 4 a.m. and we're just pulling into the driveway, when Justin notices Lindsay's car.

"Fuck if I know. I hope nothing wrong with Gus. We fly into the house and are greeted by a very hysterical Brianna.

"Where the fuck have you been?" she shouts, tears are rolling down her face and Lindsay is hugging her from behind trying to calm her. James is off to the side and he's very upset as well. I feel sick. Something must be wrong with Gus.

"I tried calling you, Brian...why in the hell was your cell turned off?" Lindsay looks at my accusatorially.

"Lindsay, where's Gus? What's going on? Did something happen to Gus?"

"Gus is at home and fine!" Lindsay explodes at me. Okay...if Gus is fine, then what the hell is this all about?

I scrub fingers through my hair and sigh. "Lindsay, what the hell is going on?"

"Follow me," she says heading in the direction of my bedroom.

"Do you realize that these kids just lost their mother?" she speaks, tone low.



"Are you kidding?" Like I wasn't there. I'm getting annoyed.

"No. I'm not kidding, Brian. You left a note saying you were going out. Period. No explanation, nothing. When it got late and you hadn't come home...they panicked, thought something bad had happened to you. They repeatedly called your cell phone and got no answer. Then they called me, hysterical and I came right over. I tried telling them where you probably were, but they wouldn't believe me. They thought you were dead! All kinds of thoughts have been going through their minds. They were scared to death! How could you do this?"

"How is this my fault? How was I supposed to know? They're not kids, Lindsay. Besides, I'm not used to having to explain myself...EVER."

"Well...then you need to get used to it," she says and storms out.

I pause for a bit, straighten my back and go face the music. Things have calmed down considerably, but I guess I do owe them an explanation.

"Listen...Justin and I go out...a lot. Sometimes we don't come home until four or five in the morning. Now you know that. Also I know you don't have to be in till 11:00, but we didn't leave until close to 10:30 and neither of you were home. Care to tell me where you both were all day?"

"I was with Lindsay!" Brianna shouts at me.

"All day?" I accuse.

"I was showing her around the gallery and we had lunch, Brian."

"What about you James? Where've you been all day?"

"I was at work," he says not bothering to elaborate.

"Work?! Justin shouts. "When did you get a job?"

"Today. I passed by a garage today decide to stop in and got to talking to the guy who owns the shop. Seems he was looking for an assistant and since I took some mechanic classes in my high school back home, he asked me to do a few things and I basically got hired on the spot. He told me I can work everyday after school." He's rather proud of his accomplishment.

"Good for you, James. I know how much you love cars," Justin tells him.

"Well, if everything is settled I'm going to bed," I turn and walk away.

"Justin...you coming?" I yell back over my shoulder. He's right on my heels as we enter my room, shut the door and begin silently undressing.

"You alright, Brian?" He rubs my back, soothing my frayed nerves.

"Yeah. What have you been up to?" I ask, looking at him. He seems confused.

"Everything's been about me lately, what's going on with you?"

"Everything is fine Brian. School is going great again, there's not much going on."

"You know when Daphne told you she was no longer with Tony, I assumed you would move back in with her."

"Is that what you wanted?" He stops caressing my back, a questioning look on his face.

"No, it's just what I...forget it...okay." I close my eyes, willing myself to sleep. Justin weaves his fingers in my hair.

"Brian...I understand what you're trying to tell me." He snuggles closer, kissing the nape of my neck.

James

Hunter does a decent job of showing us around school. Brianna and I have three classes together, which is cool. There's also been a couple of girls vying for my attention; one in particular...Heather, I think is her name, catches my eye. But as soon as I let my mind wander, Daphne pops into my head, effectively quashing thoughts of any other girl.

I must admit, last night, I was scared. Scared that my Dad and Justin had been in a car accident or something. I just couldn't see what they could possibly be doing to stay out so long. When Lindsay told us where they were, I calmed down some even though Brianna still seemed upset. I can tell Brianna is head over heels in love with Lindsay. I called her on it and told her she should be ashamed of herself. Lindsay is married with two kids; one of which is our baby brother. Of course I was told to shut up and mind my own fucking business.

I just don't want to see her get hurt. I don't know what she's thinking; it's not like she and Lindsay can ever have a future together. She retorted by throwing my love of Daphne back in my face, saying she'd never give me the time of day. Maybe she's right and I should ask Heather out.

~ ~ ~

I'm in the shop working when who of all people should bring their car in but...Daphne.

She tries talking to me, but I'm a complete mss. Finally she pulls me to the side and makes me sit down.

"Listen, James. I know you think you have a crush on me and that's sweet, but...the truth is I like my guys older."

"I'm very mature," I manage to get out.

"I'm sure you are, but I don't know...it's just not right. Your Brian's son and Justin is Brian's boyfriend. I think that qualifies as some type of weird incest...it's a step I'm just not willing to take."

"I understand," I say feeling dejected.

"Look...I want us to be friends, but anything more it's just not going to happen. I'm sorry," she says gently.

"It's okay," I assure her.

"We'll, I'm going to go see what's wrong with my car. Hope we can be friends," she reiterates, standing up.

"I'd like that," I say. I watch Daphne walk away and allow my mind to drift to Heather. Maybe I'll call after all.

Brianna

James and I are in his bedroom playing X-Box when we hear my Father return home from the club and he's not alone. Justin is in his own room sleep. My father went out alone, but it's obvious he's brought someone or someones home with him. We crack the door open in time to see Dad and two guys going at it before he stops them, dragging them down the hallway to his bedroom. What the hell was that about?

"Why is he bringing other men here with Justin sleeping in the next room?" James asks me.

"How the fuck should I know? He's a man." James rolls his eyes.

"How does he know Justin won't wake up and catch him?"

I can't believe my brother is such a pussy. "I guess he doesn't give a fuck," I say, venom in my voice.

"Oh come on Brianna...it's plain to see how much in love he and Justin are with each other."

"Yeah...about as 'in love' as Lindsay and Melanie purport to be," I snark.

"As much as you may hate to admit it, Lindsay and Melanie are in love," he practically swoons at the thought.

"Fuck you James," I shout, getting angry.

"Don't take your anger out on me, she's a married woman, you should just leave it the fuck alone," he invades my personal space.

"Maybe, you need to just leave me the hell alone and stay the fuck out of my business!"

"Whatever," he plops down on the bed, conversation over.

~ ~ ~

"Looks like you had some night," Justin chuckles, "how many were they?" James and I roll our eyes to the ceiling.

"So...it's okay for him to bring other men here..." I'm incredulous, "...to fu-"

"You brought them here?" Justin chokes out. "Boy you must have really been fucked up. Why didn't you take them to the loft?" James clears his throat and I glare at my Father.

"First, young lady," my dad speaks to me, "I don't need to explain myself to anyone, including you. And Justin...do you know the last time I had a trick, much less brought them home? Hell, I musta forgotten I even owned the loft." That's some fucked up logic in my book, but Justin doesn't seem to mind, if his mouth curving into a smile is any indication.

"Getting too old, huh? I knew it would catch up with you some day," Justin smirks.

"More like worn out from a certain blond twink." Brian pulls Justin onto his lap.

"Uh...impressionable kids here," I remind them, rubbing my forehead vigorously.

"Brianna, your dad and I came to an agreement the last time we got back together," Justin states, then adds, "I know my place in his life and he knows his place in mine, leaving no room for doubt."

"So...your agreement is, it's okay to screw around?"

"Loosely stated...yes. Well, most of the time. Anyway, by the time I'm done with him, he has no need for anyone else," Justin surmises.

"Don't flatter yourself, Sunshine" Brian admonishes.

"Hey, the truth hurts." That earns him a slap on the rump. I shake my head. James is right...they are in love in some unconventional way. I also realize that their relationship is unique and their own. What they have seems to make both of them happy and really...that's all that matters.

~ ~ ~

I'm in love. For the first time in my life I'm truly in love. Lindsay and I have been seeing each other almost every day for the last four months. We made love for the first time about a week after I found out about my Brian and Justin's arrangement.

James has been getting hot and heavy with a fellow student named Heather. She's always either at our house and James is at hers. My father won't allow her anywhere near the bedrooms and she has to be gone by ten each night she visits. He said something along the lines of 'too young to be a grandfather...don't even want to think about that day...not ready to take care of anymore babies.' Still, he keeps James supplied with a huge bowl full of condoms, by his bed. I can picture a girl going in his room and seeing that. She'd swear the boy was a stud.

Another thing I'm happy about is Gus really getting to know James and me and spending time with us. Even baby Melissa smiles every time one of us comes around. Every Friday we take Gus for the whole weekend. Saturday is his day; he does what ever he wants and goes wherever he wants. It's amazing how he has everyone in our house wrapped around his little finger. Lindsay says on Friday he's waiting by the door for us.

~ ~ ~

I'm returning from the stockroom at Torso -- where Emmett helped me get a job about two months ago -- when I see Melanie standing in the aisle. I know instantly she's here to see me and I can tell she knows.

"Excuse me," I say, trying to step around her. She doesn't budge. Just stands there and stares me down, fire in her eyes.

"Get the fuck out of my way," my voice is low as I warn her.

"You're just like your father, aren't you? Think when you say move, all of us lesser folk should just step aside. Think you can just come on in and take what you want?"

"I said get the fuck out of my way." I'm getting pissed. I knew from the start I was wrong. Yet I can't bring myself to think along those lines with Melanie staring me dead in the face.

"You don't know Lindsay. You don't know shit about her," she tells me.

"I know more than you think I know," I assure her.

"Oh yeah? Tell me this...did you know your father has been dead smack in the middle of our relationship from the start? Did you know that Lindsay always put your father before me and how much she loves him? Sometimes I think even more than she loves me. Did you also know that your Brian and Lindsay had a short fling in college? Ha...I can tell from the look on your face you didn't know that. So I guess you also don't know that Lindsay's parents instilled in her that she should live a happy hetero life. That deep inside one day, she thought she and Brian would live that life, together. Only, Lindsay is a dyke and try as she might she could never be with a man. That's where you come in. Does she close her eyes and call you Bri when she's fucking you?"

I feel as if I've been punched in the stomach. Could this be truth? Could the only thing Lindsay liked about me was the fact I'm a female version of my Brian Kinney. Geez. That's so damn fucked!

"Stay.the.fuck.away.from.my.WIFE!" Melanie warns, interrupting my thoughts, before turning away stalking out the door.

I remain in shocked silence, rooted to the floor before rushing out of Torso, jumping in my car and peeling the hell out of there.

Brian

I hear the screaming before I even cross the threshold. Brianna is in a rage, crying hysterically and tearing her room apart. James and Justin are standing off to the side looking helpless.

"Everytime she called me 'Bri' I thought it meant something! I thought I was special! I thought she loved me. She sinks to the floor and I go to her, placing my arms around her. She allows the comfort until she realizes who's holding her. She then jerks away and looks at me with contempt before once again falling into my arms.

"Why daddy...why couldn't she love me? Why does it have to be about you? Why couldn't she just love me like I love her?" Have to be about me? Who in the hell has broken my daughter's heart?

I hook a finger under her chin, raising her face to meet my eyes. "Who are you talking about?"

"Lindsay," she sniffs. "Lindsay, Lindsay, Lindsay," she repeats the mantra over and over, hysteria overtaking her once again.

"Shh...shh its okay," I rock her in my arms, trying to calm her. She finally slips into a fitful sleep and I pick her up, placing her on the bed.

I step quietly out into the hallway and motion for Justin and James to follow me outside.

"How long has Lindsay been fucking Brianna!" It's not fair of me to confront James in this manner, but if anyone knows...it's him.

"Four months," he admits in a quiet voice. At that moment a myria of emotions flash across his face and appears to be fighting back tears. I guess it must be tearing him up inside to see his sister in so much pain. I can't fucking believe Lindsay. Screwing around with a seventeen year old. The irony is completely lost on me.

"Did you have any idea?" I demand of Justin.

"Not even a clue, Brian." He laces his fingers with mine. "What are we going to do? Brianna's such a mess and Lindsay should know better. I mean it's so soon after...after," he goes quiet, then continues. "I've been there, Brian. Know the feeling. It hurts more than anything I can make you understand." I study his features, knowing the reason he went through similar pain was inflicted by me. I bring his hand to my lips and brush a kiss across each of his fingers.

"First thing I'm going to do is talk with Lindsay."

Lindsay

Melanie tells me what happened between she and Brianna and I stare at her, horrified.

"You told her that? That she was just a replacement for Brian?"

"You're damn straight I did," Melanie glares.

"Mel, look I'm sorry. I never knew you felt like that. You really think I love Brian more than you? That deep down inside I've always wanted him? Nothing could be farther from the truth. I love you. You, Gus and Melissa are my life," I say and she looks at me like I'm crazy. "God! I can't believe you told her that. Do you have any idea how much you must have hurt her? She's not Brian, Melanie how could you?!"

"How could I?" she spits out at me. "How could she? How could you?"

"I can't explain it, but I know one thing...I never stopped loving you Mel, never! It's just that things haven't been...I don't know...things between us have been...shit, Mel. You know what's been going on!"

"I know things haven't been the same since Melissa was born. It's just like after you had Gus, Lindsay. Is this some kind of punishment for what happened then? For when I cheated on you after Gus was born? Is that what's going on?"

"Mel, no...it's just...hell, I don't know!" I exclaim.

"Do you love her?"

"Not like I love you. I could never love anyone as much as I love you,"

"But you do love her? Lindsay for God sakes, she's Gus' sister!" Mel yells at me, fury evident in her tone of voice.

"I know and like I said...I can't explain it, but I promise I won't see her again. I'll go talk to her and tell her it's over. Please tell me you're willing to forgive me and give us another shot," I beg.

"We can try Lindsay. We have a family and I do still love you. All I can promise is that I'll try. Go talk to her," She walks upstairs and leaves me standing alone in the living room. I collapse onto the chair and let the tears flow. How the hell did things get so fucked up? I told myself I could keep things with Bri in check. But every time she smiled that smile at me I grew weak in the knees. No matter what, she's not worth me losing Mel or the children over. I get up, grab my keys and make my way to Brian's so I can break it off with her.

Brian

I'm ready to jump in the car and go confront Lindsay when she pulls up in the yard. I turn back to look at James and Justin and see them scurry into the house so we can have some privacy.

"Where's Bri?" She gets straight to the point as she walks up the porch stairs. Her face is flushed and I can tell she's been crying recently.

"Lindsay, sit the fuck down. Don't worry about Brianna. First, you are going to tell me everything." She does as I say and fills me in on what's been going on. I feel my blood pressure rising with each word she speaks.

"Mel...that fucking bitch!" I spit out when she's finish.

"Brian, don't. Mel is hurting. Just as much as Bri. So don't you dare curse her! She has the right to do whatever it takes to keep our family together."

"Including breaking the heart of a seventeen year old kid!" I say feeling the heat side on my neck.

"As if you never did," she snorts at me.

"Lindsay, trust me...you don't want to go there with me. And this is not about Justin, it's about you. Do you know how long she sat on the damn floor crying? Do you have any idea how hurt she is? My daughter ,Lindsay You fucked my goddamn daughter! Your son's sister? Christ! What the hell is wrong with you?" I yell at her.

"Don't you dare preach to me, Brian Kinney? First of all Briana is no child! She's not innocent in all of this you know. She came on to me! Second , do you know how many times I've held Justin in my arms while he cried over you? Do you know how many times his heart broke over you?"

"Shut the fuck up Lindsay! You don't know shit about Justin and me! No one does! Stop trying to shift the blame and take responsibility for what you did!" I'm shouting now, loud enough for Justin, James and Brianna to come rushing out the house.

"What's going on?" Brianna demands, looking from me to Lindsay.

"Can we go somewhere and talk...quietly," Lindsay asks. James and Justin reutrn inside the house but I remain outside.

"Brian, we'd like to talk alone," Lindsay says.

"No!" I say in a voice that leaves no room for argument. I know I'm not being fair to Lindsay, I know from what Lindsay said Brianna holds a lot of the Blame in this, she knew Lindsay was married with a family but I'm not allowing myself to go to far down those lines just yet.

"I know what Melanie said to you and it's not true," Lindsay starts. "You mean a lot to me. I do care about you. But Mel and I have a history...a family and I can't give that up. I also can't continue hurting Mel," I look at Brianna. A hard look passes her face, but just for a fleeting moment. She dons a mask of indifference and gazes at Lindsay.

"It's over...I get it. It was fun and now it's run its course."

"I hope one day we can be friends. I want you and James to still spend time with Gus."

"Sure. Whatever you say Lindsay," Brianna cuts her off and stomps into the house, the door slamming behind her.

I shift my feet, unsure how to proceed. "Can we keep this between us? The last thing she needs is for Deb and everyone else to find out."

"Sure Bri," she says solemnly, walking away.

Justin

The last couple of weeks have gone by in a tailspin. After Brianna and Lindsay ended, she began seeing a different girl every night, sneaking them into her room. We knew what she was doing, but didn't mention anything. Finally, she slowed down and just stuck with one girl. They're a couple now. James still has Heather and Lindsay and Melanie are slowly rebuilding what they once had.

Emmett, Ted and Blake are able to be in the same room together now and Vic and Rodney are still going strong. Deb and Horvath are back together, for right now anyway. And Brian and me...we're perfect. All the drama swirling around us and the one thing that's constant is us. He and I. Who would have thought that?

The End

# Life Without Brian

How Would life be if Brian was never born? (Brain's POV)

Brian

I sit and think about everything that has happened. Everything is fucked up. I'm out of a job and Justin's suspended from school, Mikey and Hunter are on the run, Ted's in rehab, Emmett is walking around heart-broken, Ben is a fucking mess without Michael, Deb is a fucking mess missing Mikey, Vic is beside himself trying to deal with Deb plus his own worry about Mikey, Lindsay and Melanie are walking on eggshells scared to scream hard for fear that Mel will lose the baby.

Damn this fucking shit. I feel guilty: that's right, me, Brian Kinney. I feel guilty for all of it and I'm not sure why, but I do. Sometimes I think things would be better if I had never been born. I take a long swig out of my bottle of Jim Beam and think about it. I think about how much better everyone's lives would be if I were never born: Mikey, Lindsay, my mom, my sister, Justin, hell, especially Justin. Damn, I can almost picture their lives if I were never a part of them, how much better off they all would be.

I hold my head in my hands for a minute and when I look up I see someone staring at me. "Who the fuck are you and where the hell did you come from?" I ask him. I jump up and make a move for the phone. I don't know who this motherfucker is or how he got in, but fuck this shit.

"So you think everyone's life would be better without you? You think that everyone would be happier if you were never born?" Now I start to feel something that I've not felt in a long time and that's fear.

"How the fuck do you..."

"How do fuck do I know this? Because I'm your watcher, your own personal watcher, it's my job to take care of you. Oh, and my name is Gary."

I sit back down and look at this joker standing in front of me. "Well, you're certainly not doing a good job," I spit at him.

"It's not my job to make your life perfect, Brian. You have the freedom of free will, but every now and then you may need someone to step in and help."

"Why the fuck are you here?" I sneer. I get up and stand in front of his face.



“You need to stop moping around feeling sorry for yourself and get your ass out there and get a job. That’s what I was hoping you would do, anyway, but since now all of a sudden you seem to think that everyone would be better off you were never born, I’m going to show you what their lives would be like or I could tell you?” He looks at me, expecting me to engage in this ridiculous conversation with him. I turn to walk away, but as soon as I turn, he’s standing in front of me, demanding an answer. When he realizes that I’m not going to play his game, he decides to speak.

“They are all dead.”

I look at him, wondering for the first time if I’m dealing with a psycho. “You have to be fucking kidding me,” I say.

“No, I’m not. If you don’t believe me, let me show you. They are all dead. Come, let me show you.” Before I can say yea or nay, we are in my childhood home. My parents are younger and there is a young Claire, about 13 years old. She is covered with bruises and she’s lying in a bloody heap. My mom is kneeling beside her crying. My dad is standing off to the side looking surprised.

“She’s dead, oh my God, she’s dead,” my mom is screaming over and over again. I have to look away, this is hitting too close to home. No, my sister and I don’t get along, but she’s still my sister and even if I don’t like her, I still love her.

“What happened to her?” I choke out. I look at Gary to explain it to me.

“Do you remember when your father died and you and Michael were at your mom’s house picking out a suit for him to be buried in?” I nod my head at that memory.

“Okay, do you remember you told him that your father hated Claire?” I nod my head again.

“Well, you were right. Your father was a brutal man, he abused you and he abused Claire. But Claire was your big sister, and at one time you looked up to her, you loved her more than anyone; she was your older sister.” I remember that it seems like a life time ago.

“Your father went for Claire first, always, and do you know what you used to do? You couldn’t stand to see your sister get hit, you hated it more than anything else in your life, so you always got his attention on you. You would yell, curse, knock, over a chair, break something; you would do anything to take the attention away from your sister and put it on you. But if you were not there to do that, then what would have happened to Claire?”

I look over at the scene before me and I see that my mom has called 911 and they are zipping my sister up in a black bag. I turn my back, my stomach clenches up, I can't watch this.

"You saved her life, Brian. You helped her cope as much as she helped you cope. At one time you were close. At one time you were the only person each of you had. You have no idea how many times you saved her life. If you were never born, your sister would have never made it passed the age of 13 and your father would have gone to jail and two weeks in he would have gotten a knife in the back which brought him to an early grave. Your mom, feelings as if she has nothing left, turns to drinking a lot more than she has before and finally wraps her car around a tree, six months after they put your sister in the ground."

I look at him and wonder why his words sting so much. Does he have to be so blunt? "Yes, Brian, I do, because that's the only way that you are going to get it."

"Get out of my fucking head!" I demand.

"Oh boy, please, I'm always in your head you just don't know it. I know all of your thoughts, your feelings, but don't worry I'm on your side," he smiles.

I turn back to the scene with my sister but it's been replaced by something else. "What the fuck?" I ask, looking around. We are in my high school. I see a young Mikey being picked on by Tommy Gray and Trenton Walker. They used to pick on him all the time, until I caught them one by one and beat the fucking shit out of them. I watch as they chase him. He's running fast and he's not looking where he's going. He's just trying to get away. He runs into the road and I see a big truck coming his way.

"MIKEY, LOOK OUT!!" I scream. But it's too late. The truck rolls over him and his bloody body falls to the street. I feel my mouth get watery and then I feel my stomach clench and I begin to bring up whatever it is that I ate. I can't fucking breathe.

"WHY?" I shout, looking at Gary. "Fucking tell me WHY!!"

"Because you were never born! Because you were not there to fight them off, make them leave him alone, teach them what it feels like to be scared to walk down the street," he answers me.

I close my eyes and when I open them I'm on an airplane. "What the hell?" I ask. He points in front of me and I see Deb in one of the seats, crying.

“After Michael died, she decide to leave Pittsburgh and go to New York to be near her brother Vic.” Suddenly the plane starts to shake and takes a nosedive. Everyone is screaming and the flight attendants are trying to keep everyone calm. Then we are in a field watching the plane hit the ground and blow up. I look at him, begging him to tell me that Deb is all right.

“There were no survivors. You see, Brian, if you had been born then you would have fought the bullies off for Mikey and he would have not being running for his life, and if he would have lived, then Deb would have never left Pittsburgh. She would have brought Vic to her house to live and she would have never been on that plane.

This is too much for me to take in at one time, and I feel like my brain is spinning. I hold my head down and when I lift it up we are watching as a fire begins to burn a building. Then I’m inside the building and I see that Vic is trapped inside his apartment. I watch as the flames engulf him and silence his screams forever. This is too much.

“This is a year after Debbie and Michael died. Now had Mikey never died, Deb would have stayed in Pittsburgh and never been on that plane, and Vic would be living with them and never been in this fire.

“So all this is my fault?” I ask.

Gary shakes his head sadly. “You wished you were never born. This is the reality of what would be if you were never born. That’s all I’m showing you,” he assures me.

Next we are looking in on Lindsay. She’s getting married to some WASP man. I raise my eyebrow and look at Gary.

“Lindsay came out in college and you were there every step of the way. Teaching her to be proud of who she was, you taught her to be true to herself. You told her it was okay to be gay. When she was scared to tell her parents, you told her that you would love her regardless, that she would never be alone, that you would always be there for her. If her parents couldn’t accept her for who she was, then fuck them because it was their problem and not hers. And that, Brian, is the only reason she came out, that is the only reason she stayed true to herself. It was because you gave her the confidence, and you let her know that if she lost everyone else she still had you. Without you around, she never came out. She tried to suppress and deny who she was, so that she could make her parents happy. So she’s marrying this man.” He snaps his fingers and we are on some slopes. “This is her honeymoon,” he lets me know. I watch as Lindsay goes down the slope, she’s doing fine at first but then she tumbles and falls down. She goes head first and twists around. Her head hangs at an odd angle and I look away.

“Her neck is broken, Brian, she’s dead. I’m sorry. Now if you had been there, she would have come out and she would have never married this guy and she would never have ended up here.”

I nod my head and he touches my hand. I look again, and see that we are watching Melanie and Leda at some house, and they are fighting. Melanie storms out, not taking the time to put her helmet on. Given that she's upset, she's not being careful and she goes too fast and her bike flips over three times. The sound her skull makes when hitting the pavement is very disturbing and I don't have to ask, I know that she is dead. "What does this have to do with me?" I ask.

"Well, by now Lindsay and Melanie would have been together three years, but without Lindsay, Melanie and Leda got back together and well you see how that ended. I don't even have to tell you that with no Lindsay and with no you, then there is no Gus," he informs me.

I don't even want to go down that train of thought, so I walk a little way and then I see Emmett collect money for services rendered.

"What the hell is Emmett doing hustling?"

"When his building burned down, he moved in with Michael, remember? With Mikey not there, he really had no one else willing to take him in. He didn't have anywhere to go, so he did what he had to do to make money and survive." We watch as he picks up another trick and I can tell by the look of this guy that he's bad news. I watch in horror as he rapes Emmett and then slits his throat.

"This can't be real," I say.

"Oh, it's very real," Gary says, shaking his head.

I look back down at Emmett, but he's no longer there. Now I see Ted lying in his bed, jacking off.

"He'd just lost his job for whacking off, remember that? You, Michael, and Emmett helped him through that and you found him a job, which gave him the confidence to strike out on his own. But none of you are alive, so he has no help and he has no friends." I watch as Ted writes a goodbye note and then he takes a handful of pills and lays down to sleep never to wake up again.

"He was at his wits end and he had tried everything. Without anyone there, he felt as if he had nothing to live for. So he finally ended the pain he was in. Of course, if you had been there, you would have gotten him a job. But you were never born, remember?" he asks me.

I roll my eyes. And I see Hunter; he's lying in the hospital, fighting for his life.

“What happened to him?” I ask.

“With no one around to help him, to take him off the street, how long do you think he would last? He’s not going to make it.” As soon as he says it, Hunter flatlines and a bunch of people rush into the room.

I turn to the side and then I see Ben-- he’s at the White Party. I watch as he goes off with some guy. Then I watch as he takes some drugs and overdoses. He’s pronounced dead two hours later.

“You see, this is the White Party you met him at. He left with you. You two spent a lot of time together, but without you there, he went with someone else and it cost him his life.”

Okay, Justin: all that’s left is Justin and I don’t think I can stand it. I can’t relive the prom; I can’t see Justin hurt -- I just can’t. I know that Gary can read my thoughts, and he places a sympathetic hand on my shoulder. Then he takes me to Justin. He’s leaving the prom with Daphne, and Chris Hobbs is walking behind him with the bat.

“JUSTIN! WATCH OUT! JUSTIN, FOR GOD’S SAKE RUN!” I scream, but I can’t do anything. The bat connects with Justin first, and then Daphne. With no one there to stop him, Chris keep swinging the bat over and over again. I try to lunge at him, but of course I can’t. The whole time I’m yelling and I’m crying and I can’t help it. I want to kill that motherfucker. I want to kill him, but I can’t touch him. And I can’t look at Justin lying there on the cold cement, I just can’t.

“He never woke up, and neither did Daphne,” Gray whispers and I feel an ache in my chest. I feel woozy and I just want to go to sleep and never wake up.

“You blamed yourself for Justin’s bashing, but as you can see it would have happened whether you were there or not. The only difference is when you were there, he lived. He lived because of you, Brian.”

I nod my head and I get it. Now I finally get it.

“Do you really get it, Brian? Really?” Gary asks me. “Do you know how many companies you’ve saved from going under with your advertising campaigns? Some of those men would have committed suicide when their company went under. If not them, maybe their wives, or maybe their wives would have left them and maybe dies as a result, or maybe the kids got caught in the middle. Maybe some never made it to college because there just was no money and no desire and more. Maybe Ryder went down without you there to pull his ass out of the fire. Maybe Vance

went down without you their to guide him. Then other lives of potential clients are affected. Do you get it now? Do you see how many people's lives that you've touched? Do you see how much you mean to so many people?"

"Yeah," I whisper. And I mean it. I get it now. I finally fucking get it. As soon as those thoughts enter my mind I'm back in the loft and Gary is gone.

I get on the phone, and the Internet and start to make calls.

Its two weeks later that I land a job at a consulting agency. The pay is pretty good and I'm getting my life back on track.

It's two months later and the whole gang is in the diner. Ted and Mikey are both back home and Mikey and Ben have custody of Hunter. Justin is sitting in my lap, and I place a few soft kisses on his neck. I don't understand it, but things have been even better between us since my little visit to the other world. Ted and Melanie are busting my balls about something and I'm tired of hearing them ragging on me.

"Yeah, well without me, I'm pretty sure none of you would even be here," I smirk. I'm only playing. I don't even want to think about just how true that statement is. I hear a bunch of yelling at once:

"Get over yourself asshole!"

"Yeah I can only dream about how bad our lives would be without you here mucking things up."

"None of us would be here? That's even conceit for you, Brian."

On and on they go, and I grab Justin and we leave the diner. Justin takes my hand in his and gives me a kiss on the lips. Then he says: "I don't even want to think about my life without you in it."

I bite my tongue to keep from telling him that I feel the same way. Instead I just put my arms around him and kiss the fuck out of him before we head home to the loft.

The End

# Blood in my eyes

Brian

Tonight Justin has some of his stuff up in the student art gallery so everyone is there.

“Justin, these are great, especially this one of your sister,” Jennifer says to Justin, talking about a picture Justin drew of Molly having a birthday party.

“Thanks mom,” he says smiling all over himself.

“These are great Justin; I haven’t had the chance to look at your work in a long time. I forgot how good you were,” Lindsay tells him. They all get caught up in talking and I think back on the last few weeks. Ted is still in rehab, Michael and Ben won custody of Hunter, Melanie is still pregnant, and I’m still unemployed.

I watch as Justin glides from Lindsay and Melanie over to Vic, Rodney, and Debbie, to his mom, over to Daphne, then to Michael, Ben, and Hunter. He’s happy and I’m happy for him. Everyone is here tonight for him, to support him and that means a lot to both of us.

We all walk outside at the same time and we’re listening to Deb and Jennifer gush over how brilliant Justin is when we hear a loud bang and a bullet flies two inches from my face and busts a window. Everyone ducks down. Another shot goes an inch from where I’m at on the ground and I realize that it’s me who’s being shot at.

We all stay down until we hear the sound of sirens. Everyone starts talking at once. I look for Justin to make sure he’s okay. I see him hug his mom and then he runs to me and jumps into my arms.

“I’m okay; I’m okay what about you?” I ask him taking his face between my hands.

“I’m fine,” he says.

“What the fuck was that about?” Debbie shouts out to no one in particular.

“Are you alright, mom?” Mikey ask, rushing up to her.

“I’m okay, baby, I’m fine what about Hunter, is he okay?” she asks looking at the boy who is standing by Ben

“He’s fine, Mom,” Mikey says. He looks around until he spots Mel.

“Is everything okay?” he asks touching her stomach.

“I’m sure everything is fine, but we’ll go to the doctor tomorrow just to be on the safe side,” Lindsay tells him. Justin leaves from me and goes to Daphne; she has blood on her knee.

“Daph, are you okay?” he ask

“I just scraped my knee when I hit the sidewalk,” she assures him.

“Wow, who do you think did it?” Emmett asks and everyone start pitching in their little theories and I tune them out.

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Justin and I walk into the loft. The police kept us for a couple of hours asking us questions and getting everyone's stories, but it seems no one saw anything. We walk inside and I notice right away the white envelope lying on the chair.

"How the fuck did this get in here?" I ask Justin.

"I don't know, it's not mine. Open it and find out what it is." I open it up and what I read confirms what I already knew. Someone is out to get me. Justin takes in my reaction and takes the note from me. He reads it aloud:

Brian, sorry I missed you, guess I'm not as good a shot as I thought I was. Don't worry, the next time I promise I won't miss. The next time I'll aim dead between the eyes and if I'm off just a little bit then so what, what's the worse that could happen? I'm sure to hit you somewhere,"

"What the fuck? Brian this person was here! They might still be here!" Justin runs to the phone and calls Carl.

"Best thing I can do for now is to let someone keep an eye on the building. Whoever it is, they're mighty bold to just walk right in here like that. Maybe you and Justin should go somewhere else tonight," Carl says when he arrives.

"Fuck that! I'm not leaving my home, no one is driving me out of my home," I say and I begin to take my clothes off just to show how serious I am about staying at home.

"Well, just stay away from the windows and keep the door locked, someone will be watching the place. I'll make sure of that," Horvath says before he leaves.

I look at Justin and he's shaking. I pull him into my arms, "It's okay if you don't want to stay, maybe you shouldn't, I want you safe," I whisper in his ear.

"I'm not going to leave you, are you crazy?" he ask squeezing me tighter.

We go to bed and I spoon up behind him.

"Just hold me," he says and I pull him closer to me.

The next morning at the diner everyone's talking about what happened. I tell them what happened when we got home so that they will all know that it was not an accident and they need to be careful.

"Mmm... now why would someone want to kill Brian?" Mel asks, sarcasm lining every inch of her voice and causing Lindsay to give her a scowl.

"I knew one day you dick would get you in trouble. It's probably one of your discarded tricks," Deb says. I roll my eyes. I'm not in the mood for their shit.

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The next few weeks pass with no incident and I'm starting to breathe again. We all are. Justin has been at my house every night since the shooting, seems he's scared to leave me alone.

I've been talking back and forth with Vance for the last few days and I think that we've come to some sort of understanding. I have an appointment with him at Vanguard.

"Good morning, boss," Cynthia says when I walk in the door. "I'm glad you asked me to sit in on this meeting," she tells me as we walk to Vance's office.

"Brian, Cynthia, come on in and sit down," he tells us. We start to go over the fine points of me coming back when I hear a loud noise and see a bullet fly by. It hits the wall. We all hit the floor. Shit! I was leaning over; if I'd eased



back in my chair, the bullet would have hit me dead in the head. As high up as we are the bullet had to come from one of the other office buildings. I see Vance reach for the phone and a few second later the room is filled with people.

“The police are on the way,” one of the security officers says.

The police arrive and we go through all the questioning again like the night at the art gallery. When I’m free to leave, I call Justin and tell him to get everyone at my loft now! When I get there, everyone has arrived. I don’t waste time; I tell them exactly what happened.

“Brian, I don’t think you should stay here anymore,” Mikey says.

“Brian, I’ve got to agree with Michael, I don’t think it’s safe,” Lindsay says.

“I’m not leaving my home!” I say hoping they will just drop it.

“And what about Justin? It’s not safe for him to be here, or don’t you care?” Melanie asks.

“That’s my choice,” Justin answers. He’s off to the side trying to calm his mom down. I think she’s trying to make him come home or go back to Daphne’s.

“I’m not leaving Brian, so everyone just leave me the hell alone,” Justin finally explodes.

“I think it would be wise to have someone to guard you at all times,” Ben suggests.

“That sounds like a good idea,” Justin says and everyone agrees.

“If you want, I can try to find you a quick place to stay just until this is over,” Jennifer offers. I know she’s concerned for Justin’s safety. And if I thought he was in danger I’d be gone in a second, but it’s me that this person wants.

“I’m fine just where I am,” I tell her.

“You know I could move in with a friend and you guys could have the apartment,” Daphne says. Apparently she didn’t hear me the last ten times I said that I was not leaving my home. I shake my head and go get a drink.

“Okay everyone out, time for you to go, I’ll call you if I know something,”

After everyone leaves Justin falls into my arms.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” he asks me.

“Yeah, come on,” I tell him. We go to the bedroom and that’s when I see the white envelope I don’t touch it. I go straight to the phone and call Carl so he can handle it and dust it for prints.

“I’m going to be okay,” I tell Justin, hugging him from behind.

“I know,” he says but I feel him tremble against me.

Carl opens the letter and reads it.

“Seems you’re lucky for now, but remember, Mr. Kinney, everyone’s luck runs out.”

“I know I asked you before, but do you have any enemies? Anyone at all who would like to see you dead?”

“You mean besides your boss?” I ask him.

“Yeah besides my boss, can we please be serious?” he asks.

“Who’s playing?” I ask him.

“Well, anyway we did find out a few things. The person who shot at you at the gallery was shooting from an abandoned building. They left a cigarette butt and the DNA belongs to a Kip Thomas .He sued you for sexual harassment two years ago. He was arrested on charges of Grand Larceny not too long after that, but it didn’t stick,” Carl says.

“Why the fuck would Kip try to kill me?” I ask. It doesn’t add up. Kip is a punk, suing someone is a long way from murder. Something’s not right about this.

“Well, we don’t think he’s working alone,” Carl looks at Justin. “Those bullets that rang out today came from the same building where your father has his office,” he tells Justin.

“NO! My father may be a lot of things, but he would never!” Justin says.

“It’s not like he hasn’t before, or are you forgetting how he damn near broke my ribs? What about when he rammed his car into my jeep and gave me a concussion?” I ask him.

“He did all that? I asked you if you have any enemies. Craig Taylor is defiantly someone we will be questioning,” Carl says.

“Instead of wasting your time on my father, maybe you should focus on Kip,” Justin says.

“They may be working together,” Carl says.

“My father does not know Kip Thomas!” Justin says and Carl shakes his head.

“Well, we’ll dust this one, but like the last envelope, doubt we’re going to get lucky we’re not going to get lucky with any prints. But you never know, we may find something,”

“Yeah, thanks,” I say to him.

“I’ll call you if I hear anything,” he says closing the door behind him.

“Justin,” I start.

“Brian do you really think my father would do this? Why? What reason would he have?” I could tell him the same reason Craig had the other two times he attacked me, but I can see how much this is bothering Justin and so I just leave it alone. Plus if I’m really honest, I’ll have to say that it does seem a little strange. Why would Craig all of a sudden start to act up without reason?

“Let’s just go to bed, Justin, the last person I want to fight with is you.” We climb into bed and it’s not long till I hear his soft sobs into the pillow. I kiss his neck then I pull him into my arms and hold him there all night.

Its a few days later when I’m coming out of the grocery store and I’m shot at again. Carl’s not on duty yet and I’m questioned and released. I call everyone over to tell them this and everything else we know. There’s a white envelope on the counter and no one touches it until Carl finally arrives. He reads it again.

“Seem like you’re too good at dodging bullets. Looks like we’re going to have to try a more direct approach. Yes, I said we as in three. Don’t worry all will be revealed soon.”

“Three, you have three people trying to kill you, Brian. I’m scared,” Lindsay says.

“Well, we know who all three of them are,” Carl says getting everyone’s attention.

“Seems like I was right about Kip Thomas and Craig Taylor. The only one we didn’t count on was Stockwell. We’ve seen them on two different occasions together. We’re following Craig and Kip, but not Stockwell, so it’s a safe bet that he’s the one who shot at you tonight.” Something is defiantly not right about this. I don’t know what it is, but something seems off.

“Craig? Are you sure?” Jennifer asks, “I really don’t think Craig would do that.”

“Well, it looks like he did,” Debbie’s says.

“So how are they getting in here? Each time?” I ask, but Carl has no answer for that.

“But now that we know exactly who we’re dealing with, we’ll catch them for sure,” Carl says.

“Well, I hope so,” I say before I put everyone out. Maybe they are the ones trying to kill me, who the hell knows.

“Brian, I’m so sorry,” Justin says when it’s only him and I in the loft.

“Justin, it’s not your fault that your father is crazy,” I tell him, but that only makes him frown even more. He sits down on the chair and I sit beside him.

“I don’t understand why he would do this, Brian. I just don’t understand,” he cries.

“It has nothing to do with you, okay? Maybe he’s sick, but that’s not your fault,” I tell him. A small doubt still in the back of my mind. We spend all night on the couch.

The next day I’m coming out of the diner. I’ve just finished talking to Carl who told me how the investigation was going. He assured me that Stockwell knows nothing about the case since he’s been Chief in name only because he’s already under investigation for Jason Kemp’s murder.

I get my keys out of my pocket, look up, and there they are. Kip, Craig, and Stockwell. Stockwell makes a move for me and suddenly there are police everywhere. They take the three in for questioning. So it was them. What the fuck were they thinking? And what the hell did they have planned for me just now? Were they going to grab me and stick me in a car? They did say they were going to use a more direct approach.

“I guess I can breath easier now, come on let’s go to the loft,” I tell Justin. “I can’t. I’m babysitting Molly I’ll probably just see you tomorrow,” he tells me.

I go to the loft and get completely naked; I take a shower and settle myself into bed. I dose off and I don’t wake until I hear movement in the loft. I sit up straight in bed. All of a sudden, I see three figures towering over top of me. I try to move, but I’m tied to the bed. They must have did that while I was asleep.

“I told you we were going to try a more direct approach,” Daphne laughs.

“My, my, boss, if you could see the look on your face now,” Cynthia laughs.

“I bet you I can get a good price for the loft after you die,” Jennifer says looking around and smiling. What the fuck is going on? Did I just step into the twilight zone?

“You’re trying to kill me? How the fuck? Daphne, Jennifer you were there at the Gallery,” I say, trying to piece everything together. What the fuck is happening here? These are the last three I would expect.

“But I wasn’t,” Cynthia smirks.

"But you were right in the office," I say remembering how I looked for her as soon as I fell to make sure she was okay. I knew I'd never forgive myself if something happened to her.

"Yeah, that was my work," Jennifer says, a smug look on her face. "I went to Craig's building to help set him up even more. They are so busy there it was easy for me to slip up and do what I had to do. Of cause Cynthia told me all about the meeting. She also found out where Kip was by putting the word out that Vanguard was considering him for a job. She followed him to a bar one night and took one of his cigarette butts to plant it in the building. As for Stockwell, well, he was Daphne's idea," Jennifer says.

"Yeah, you see Stockwell, Craig, and Kip all got a note telling them to meet a 'Kent Webster' who has some information about you. Of cause there is no 'Kent' and the only people they met were each other and just as we hoped they talked for a while to share in the hate of you. They got a second letter to meet a second time because 'Kent' had been called away on business at the last minute. Smart men they are, they all went again," Daphne laughs.

"But why? And what were they doing at the diner," I ask still not fully understanding everything. Why the hell would these three plot to kill me? Did all three of them lose their fucking mind at the same time? I try to get loose, causing all of them to share a good laugh at my expense.

"They got an urgent message from you to meet them there. They were told by you that you knew they were suspects and you had proved who the real murdered was, but no one will believe you and if they want to clear their names they damn well better help you," Daphne laughs.

"Told by me how? What the fuck are you talking about?" I demand.

"Well, they got a little white envelope of course," Jennifer smiles. Crazy bitch.

"So, why the fuck do you want to kill me?" I ask.

Jennifer goes first. "Do you really need to ask me that question? You've destroyed my son's life. He almost died because of you," she spits and I see the anger in her eyes. "Now, he's out of school because of you. His whole future is in trouble and all because of you! I thought when he left with Ethan that he finally had a chance to be really happy, but noooo... as soon as I start to exhale, he's right back with you again. It has to end before you destroyed him for good. Before you drag him all the way down into the gutter with you."

"You're crazy!" I yell at her.

"No, I'm a mother!" she yells right back at me.

"Is that your reason as well Daphne? Do you think I'm going to destroy Justin too?"

"No, that's not why I'm here, you fucking asshole! You just fuck whoever and you don't care who you hurt. You know you really should keep your door locked. Even after you found out about the letters, Jennifer and I were still able to slip in and leave them with out anyone's knowledge. You know, I was in love, I found someone who made me feel better than I've ever felt in my life. For the first time in my life, I began to consider marriage. Then I came here one day looking for Justin. Walked right in and saw you fucking him. You fucked my man, you piece of shit!" she yells at me. Then she takes a second to calm down before she goes on. "I slipped right back out and went home and cried my self to sleep. I confronted him later and he thought he was in love with you. He said you were the best fuck ever. So, I told him about Justin. I showed him pictures of you and Justin and I told him that Justin was the only one you loved; he left that night and never talked to me again. All because of you. I hate you, Brian Kinney, and I'm going to make sure that you never hurt anyone else," she shouts. I have no idea who the fuck she's talking about. I never knew Daphne was so unstable or that she hated me so much. I thought we always got along fine. I look at these women and think back to the little song and dance that they've been doing lately, pretending to be so concerned. Fucking bitches!

“You know, boss, I met up with Jennifer in a restaurant and we remembered each other from the trip she paid to your office before. We got to talking and we exchanged numbers. When you fucked Daphne’s boyfriend, she cried to Jennifer and we all began to plot,” Cynthia says.

“What the fuck have I ever done to you, Cynthia? Why do you hate me?” I ask.

“I don’t hate you, Brian, I love you. I’m in love with you, but you’re gay and you’ve never noticed me. My house is full of pictures of you. I sleep with a picture of you on my pillow. Come on, Brian, what did Justin do to make you love him? I can do it too,” she says and she starts to take her clothes off. “Come on, Brian, I’ll let you cum while you’re in my pussy, then I’ll suck the cum off and let you shove it up my ass. After that I’ll stick my tongue up your ass, squeezes your balls and let your cum drip into my mouth. I’ll stick my hand in my mouth, wet my fingers with your cum, spread it around in my pussy, and finger myself while I call out your name. What do you say? Come on, Brian, fuck me, please, just fuck me one time.” Cynthia reaches to the floor and come back up with a gun. I look at Daphne and Jennifer and they have a gun as well.

I close my eyes and brace myself when I hear Carl holler, “Drop it!” I look around and the loft is swarming with policemen. Justin is with them.

“Where’s Molly?” Jennifer asks. “You’re suppose to be with her”

“She’s with Deb. Carl called my cell after he couldn’t reach Brian and told me about the letters that my dad, Stockwell, and Kip got. They showed him a letter from Brian and I told him that was bullshit! Someone was fucking around with us. He said he had to let them go. I came right over here.” I don’t remember my phone ringing. I look over at it and see that it’s off the hook; my cell is nowhere to be seen.

“I started to think the more I talked to Stockwell and them, the more it all seemed too neat, it screamed of a setup. When I couldn’t get you on the phone, I got together a team and rushed right over.

“Mom, why? Why would you do this?” Justin asks.

“I did it for you, baby,” she says. And he turns away crying.

“Daphne, why? Why would you want Brian dead?” Justin asks, tears rolling down his face. She won’t answer him. They cuff them all and take them away.

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To say that everyone was shocked to find out who was really trying to kill me is an understatement. Justin’s having a very hard time with this, but he’s in counseling and he’s slowly coming to term with things.

Jennifer, Daphne, and Cynthia were let out on bail and no one has seen them since. Craig has custody of Molly. I don’t think they will be back, but today when I came home, I did notice a white envelope.

THE END.

# IN THE NOW

A Ben/Justin Fic

Justin

Brian and I lasted another six months after Stockwell's defeat. After awhile it seemed like every little thing he did began to get on my nerves. The tricking, the drinking, the drugs...it all seemed so...childish. So ridiculous. Stuff that at one time seemed glamorous to me now appeared just sad. I knew he wouldn't stop; didn't expect him to. This is who he was and that was fine, but I didn't have to be with him if I didn't like it. So I walked, not because of some other guy or because of some words he wouldn't say, but because it was time. It was time to move on and so I did.

I'd never moved back into the loft so I didn't have to move out again. I remember the breakup like it was yesterday. Brian, as usual, getting ready to go to Babylon and me working up the nerve to say what I'd wanted to say for weeks.

"Brian...we need to talk," I'd said. He walked past me on his way to the bathroom.

"So talk," he'd answered. I'd followed him into the bathroom, watching as he brushed his teeth. I couldn't seem to make myself talk, couldn't seem to get the words to leave my mouth. I had this big speech all planned out but for some reason I couldn't recall a word of it. Brian finished brushing his teeth and picked up a comb, but not before giving me a stern look that finally forced me to speak.

"I'm sorry, Brian...but I can't do this anymore."

"Do what?" he replied absentmindedly. He'd been paying more attention to getting his hair just right.

"Us. I can't do us anymore. I think we should end it now." I'd looked at his reflection in the mirror, prepared to stand my ground, prepared to stand by my decisions. He'd dropped the comb, turned around to look at me.

"What the fuck are you talking about Justin?" Brian had demanded. I'd walked out of the bathroom and flopped onto the bed, deciding the bathroom had not been the best place for a break-up.

"I think we should call it quits...should just be friends. It's just how I feel."

"Anyone I know?" he had smirked. I had glanced over at him and seen the look of betrayal in his eyes. The same look he'd had during the whole Ethan thing. That's always his first reaction; assume it's another man. He had thought I'd leave him for another man.

"It's no one, Brian...there's no one else."

"Then what? What's your problem?...I didn't miss your birthday, did I?" Brian had then ducked his head trying to hide his emotions.

"No, Brian...it's nothing like that. I just think it's time to move on. While I still love you...I'm just not in love with you anymore," I'd said, rising from the bed and walking away. I couldn't bear to see the look on his face, so I walked right out of the loft and his life...that was a year ago.

I guess everyone had varying reactions, but I really didn't care. I know that sounds cold but that's how I'd felt at the time. I had needed to live for me not them and definitely not Brian. So I did what I needed to do to get my life back in order.

I never left the family though, still stayed in the fold. I wasn't going to avoid them and act ashamed of my decisions. I thought maybe this time Deb would be mad with me but she said I had to do what made me happy, that I had to live my own life.

So it was three months after Brian and I broke up that Ben and Michael imploded. It was really sad, as I'd assumed they'd stay together forever, plus they had just been awarded custody of Hunter, who now had to alternate between two households.

Two months after that, I ran into Ben at the Big Q. I'd just moved out of Daphne's and into my own place that I'd been saving to get for a while by working at an upscale restaurant. It paid way more than the diner so I'd quit that job some time ago. I had just started fixing the place up and still needed a few more things so that's what was on my mind when Ben and I damn near ran into each other.

"Sorry," I had said, pulling my basket back and taking note of the smile that broke out on Ben's face.

"It's okay," he'd replied. "I guess we both should watch where we're going." I'd looked in his basket and seen a bunch of stuff I would never eat. He'd noticed the look on my face and then peeked into my basket.

"I don't think I could stomach any of that," he'd said, making me laugh.

"So...how have you been doing?" he'd asked. I'd put a few more things in my basket before answering him. I'd actually taken the time to think about the question. I'd never lived on my own and it felt good...liberating even. The only person I depended on...was me. I'd finally been able to get a loan for school and had taken responsibility for my entire life. Something I'd always wanted to do.

"I've been fine Ben," I'd replied. "Can't complain, what about you? How are things going for you?"

"I'm good...you know how it is. I'm going over to Mellon tonight for a play that a few of my students are in... maybe you and Daphne would like to come if you're not doing anything else." He'd headed towards the checkout and I'd done the same, thinking I'd join him and see what the play was about.

I couldn't convince Daphne to join me so I went alone. I spotted Ben instantly. He was sitting towards the back and was all alone. I slipped into the seat beside him.

"Hey stranger," I'd cooed causing him to turn around and smile at me. There were a few programs in the seat on the other side of him and he'd handed me one.

"I see you made it, where is Daphne?"

"At home...she wouldn't come, guess she had better things to do."

"I guess it's just the two of us then," he'd said around a laugh. The lights went low and the play began. We ended up having a great time together and afterwards decided to get coffee.

"It was a good play...I'm glad you told me about it. Kind of a surprise ending you know. I mean it is kind of a cliché for the butler to be the one to do it, don't you think?" I'd asked. The play was a murder mystery and in this case, the butler did do it.

"I think that was the point," Ben said taking a sip of his coffee. I'd watched as he brought the hot mug to his lips, blowing on it a little and taking a small sip.

"You know, Justin...I never told you how proud I was of you."

"Proud of me? What for?" I'd taken a bite of the doughnut I was having trying to figure out what I'd done to make Ben proud.

"The whole Stockwell thing," he'd replied. I took another bite of my doughnut. It was just a plain little doughnut, but for some reason it was the best one that I'd tasted in a while.

"Oh that..." I'd tsked... "that was mostly Brian."

"Don't sell yourself short, Justin. I know how big of a part you played in it. You stood up to Brian and you stood up for what you believed in no matter the consequences. That took real guts. I stood back and watched from afar and never told you how proud I was." He'd taken another sip of his coffee then leaned back in his chair looking at me.

"Thanks, Ben," I'd said, blushing furiously and not even trying to hide it.

"Am I embarrassing you?" Ben had asked, chuckling. And I'd shaken my head no. We'd stayed in that little diner and talked for hours when finally, with much reluctance on both of our parts, we decided to call it a night. Plans were made to meet the next day and that's how it started. We began seeing each other on a regular basis. Enjoyed spending time together and I found myself feeling my best when I was with Ben. It started slow. Holding hands as we walked down the street or as we sat in a movie theater. Kissing each other hello and goodbye, then just kissing each other for the hell of it, because it felt good...because we couldn't resist.

The first night we made love Ben must have asked me 100 times if I was sure I wanted to take this step with him, if I was sure the HIV was something that I could handle. I assured him at least 200 times that there was nothing I wanted more than to be one with him.

I guess we both pulled away from the gang some though it was not intentional. I don't think any of them knew about Ben and me. My mom knew and how she kept from telling Deb is beyond me. We went through a lot with her because of Ben's HIV status and also because of the age difference (guess some things don't change). Finally, she had to admit that she'd never seen me happier and also that I was no longer some starry-eyed kid with rose colored glasses on and was a grown man who knew what he wanted. That's when she started accepting Ben and also realizing he was a part of my life.

With Ethan I did learn that words mean nothing. Words are just that...words. And I thought I'd wrote romance and all of those things Brian considered "lesbian" off. But with Ben it's not like it was with Ethan. With Ben I know he means it when he tells me he loves me. I still get all giddy inside when he comes through the door with a single red rose in his hand not for any other reason than he loves me. We spend lazy evenings by the fire with glasses of wine just laughing and talking. There is no place I'd rather be than with Ben.

I use to feel that way about Brian, but with Ben it's different. With Brian I allowed him to become my whole life, my whole being and looking back I realize just how unhealthy that was. Being with Ben is more enriching. We spend most of our time together, but still make time for friends and other things.

So it's seven months Ben and I have been together and a year after I left Brian, that Lindsay and Mel decide to throw a joint birthday party for Ben and me. We still haven't told the gang about us, and I'm sure the girls have high hopes of getting Ben and Michael and Brian and I back together. Ben and I did have plans for our birthday but decided to attend this first. We were only going to fix our favorite dinner, sit by the fire sipping champagne and exchange gifts. I guess we could do that just as well after the party.

I arrive before Ben; he had a few things to do at school so we didn't come together. After much discussion, we decided we weren't going to hide our relationship anymore. We're together and love each other and there is no way we are going to sit through everyone trying to hook us up with someone else.

"Happy Birthday, Justin...come on in and get a plate!" Lindsay grabs my hand and ushers me towards a buffet style table. I get a plate and start piling food on it.

"See you still have your appetite," I hear a voice say. I turn around and look into the eyes of Brian. He's smiling at me while a toothpick is hanging out of his mouth. Funny...what used to make me drool now has no affect on me at all.



"I didn't eat before I came here; figured there would be plenty of food. Deb did cook...didn't she?" I laugh which causes him to do the same.

"Yeah...you have a point." He plucks the toothpick out of his mouth and I take a seat at the table ready to dig into my food.

"Why don't you come by the loft later...maybe I can give you a special birthday present," Brian leans taking a seat beside me. I chuckle a little because it feels damn good not to be even remotely tempted by Brian Kinney. I don't even hesitate with my answer.

"No. I have plans," I tell him.

"Happy Birthday sweetie!" I stand up and give my mom a hug. She looks between Brian and I and folds her lips back. She's wondering what's going on, but way too polite to ask. I almost laugh out loud at her.

"Sunshine! Happy Birthday!" Deb screeches, crushing me in a hug. For the next few minutes I'm swept away in a bunch of hugs, well wishes and happy Birthdays.

I notice Mikey keeps glancing at the door, looking kind of hopeful and...nervous.

"Would you stop all that feigning Michael, he's coming, okay? Just relax. He said he'd be here and he will. Now the rest is up to you," Debbie says, wagging a finger in Mikey's face. She then pats him on the back and he lets out a big sigh.

"Okay...it's just that it's been a long time you know." I feel my stomach start to tighten up. I don't know if I can do this. I look over at Hunter, but he's talking with some other kid...I guess a friend of his from school. Ben and I had sat him down the day before and told him about us. He acted as if he didn't care, but truthfully, I think he's bothered by it. Ben says to just give him time and see how he handles it. So far Hunter has said nothing to anyone here about it. I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

I see a hand on my plate and look up to see that Brian has stolen a little piece of food off my plate and popped it into his mouth just as Ben comes in.

Ben

Walking in I see Brian sitting beside Justin. Brian smiling at Justin. Brian eating food off of Justin's plate. I try not to let it bother me but can't help it. Not that I think Brian has a chance in hell. Justin's not paying him any attention at all. He's eating his food and that seems to be taking up most of his interest. I look across from him and notice a big smile on Michael's face when he sees me. I walk over to Justin and he stands up. I lean into him, kissing him hello on his lips. The hush is deafening. I pull Justin close to me and he responds by winding an arm tightly around my waist. Everything is going to be alright.

"So...are you two..." Mel stammers looking between Justin and me.

"Seven months," I state proudly. There is a lot of mumbling and everyone talking at the same time. Finally, Lindsay's voice breaks through the noise.

"Well...happy birthday to you both!" She's trying to break the tension and I guess it works a little. Justin and I sit down and the others look around wide-eyed trying to figure out who knew what. The party resumes and things begin relaxing a little. Soon, Justin and I find ourselves on opposite sides of the room.

"You know Michael was hoping that you two could talk tonight. He's really disappointed." Deb has walked up to me and handed me a glass of punch. I take it from her and sip slowly giving me time to formulate a response.

"I'm not responsible for that, Deb. You know I would never hurt Michael, but I've never give him any hope that we'd get back together." She nods her head in understanding and then looks over at Justin who is being grilled by Emmett.

"So you and Sunshine, huh? I never would have thought it; guess you're both happy though?" she questions.

"Very happy," I assure her. She smiles at me and walks away. I look behind her and am confronted with Michael staring at me.

"You and the boy wonder?! I just can't see it...I just can't." He walks away, mumbling to himself and shaking his head. I guess some of them don't understand, but that's okay as long as Justin and I understand it.

I side glance Justin as he's talking to his mom. He's laughing and has that sparkle in his eye that I love. He'd cut his hair, but its growing back and keeps falling over his face and he does this thing with the back of his hand to brush it back. I love the way his hand moves when he does that...never seen anything more beautiful in my life.

"You look like you love him." Brian is standing in front of me blocking my view and interrupting my musings.

"I do," I simply reply.

He looks between Justin and me and then saunters off. I move over to Justin.

"We have to go to my mom's house for dinner on Saturday," he announces. I wrap my arms around him and he leans back into them. I place a small kiss on his neck and he smiles up at me.

We stay at the party for another hour or so before making our way home.

"I had a good time tonight." Justin has come up to me pulling my head down for a kiss. "It was great being with the gang again and, more importantly, telling everybody about us."

"Happy birthday baby," he beams.

"Same to you," I tell him.

"I guess we can forget the dinner we had planned," he says over his back headed towards the bedroom to probably get my gift. I take the opportunity to set out two flutes, champagne chilling in a bucket and his present. I haul it all over by the fireplace and sit down, scattering pillows about. He returns and smiles that beautiful smile at me as he realizes what I've done. He eases down next to me and I fill both our glasses so we can make a toast.

"To us," I say, looking deeply into his eyes.

"To us," he repeats, returning my heated gaze. We share a kiss before sipping. Justin looks at me for a beat, then hands me a box.

"I love you, Ben. Before you I never knew it could be like this. I hope you love what I got you."

"I love you too, Justin. You're the best thing that has ever happened to me." We share another kiss, because we can and I open up the present from him. It's a gold necklace with a charm on it that says 'number 1'. I finger the number one and Justin emits a soft chuckle.

"You are number one, Ben...the number one teacher in all of Pittsburgh!" he jokingly teases, before get a solemn \_expression on his face.

"Ben...you are number one..." He takes my hand and places it over his heart..."here." I get a little choked up before leaning over and planting another kiss on those sweet lips.

“Here's mine,” I say. He takes it from me and opens it up

“Ben, thank you,” he gushes. “I love it.” He takes the bracelet out and looks at it. It’s gold with his name on it. There is also a gold locket in the shape of a heart with our picture in it. He looks at it then jumps into my arms and before long I get lost in the passion that is Justin. This is how it is for us, this is how we love. Yeah we fight sometimes, all couples do. It’s healthy to get certain feelings out, to not hold them in until they turn into something a lot worse. Still, as I hold Justin in my arms this is how I hope it always will be.

The End