

# **The Kondo Series**

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**"This is my December. This is my time of the year. This is my December. This is all so clear.**

**This is my December. These are my snow-covered dreams. This is me pretending, this is all I need.  
And I just wish that I didn't feel like there was something I missed....."**

## **Chapter 1**

"You don't have to go right NOW." I hear him say as I drop another duffle bag full of my things next to the door. "At least stay till after Christmas."

I turn around to find him leaning against the kitchen counter, looking defeated.

"Yes I do Calvin. I should have left a long time ago." I head back toward the bedroom and begin to pack another bag. I had made the decision a while ago, but it had taken me almost 2 months to get up enough courage to tell him I was leaving. I had had enough.

Enough of New York. Enough of the scene. Enough of painting in a city that I hated. Enough of not being proud of my own work. Enough of being in a relationship that I had never really committed myself to.

Calvin was young. Really young. 10 years younger than me. He was in his prime. And an aspiring artist. He reminded me a lot of myself at 22. Devoted, talented, rebellious, and his whole life ahead of him. We had been together almost 4 years now and I never got comfortable.

I met Calvin like I met many of the guys I fucked during my 10 years here in New York. At a gallery opening. But this time, it was his gallery opening at MY gallery. I remember eyeing him across the crowded room. Baggy dark jeans, gray sweater, converse sneakers, and the most beautiful green eyes I had ever seen. I had to have him. I filled his head with praise of how wonderful his work was, brought him back to my apartment that night and fucked him. That was 4 years ago. He never left after that night.

So here I am, 2 weeks before Christmas, packing my bags and leaving. It was time. He walks slowly into the bedroom and stands at the foot of the bed.

"You can stay in the apartment. I'll turn the lease over to you." I tell him. I don't look at him. I can't.

"I can't believe your really going. What about your art? The gallery? This is your home Justin. It was our home. Will you even miss me?" His voice is shaky. Fuck.

I finally look up at him as I zip my suitcase closed.

"I can paint anywhere. That was the first mistake I made coming here. Thinking the only way I could be a successful artist was if I lived in New York. It's bullshit. This fucking city is bullshit. As for the gallery, Eddie will take over. It's his anyways. My heart was never really into it." I pick up my suitcase and carry it out of the room, brushing coldly past him.

"And me?" He asks following behind me.

I drop the suitcase next to the door and turn slowly to face him.

"I wont. I wont miss you. Once I walk out that door I don't plan on ever looking back. And you shouldn't either. You'll find someone your own age, some other twink artist and you guys will live happily ever after."

"I don't want some one my own age! I want you." I steps toward me and I put my hand up.

"No. Calvin, it's been over for a long time. Admit it. This is for the best."

He sighs. "Tell me something. Are you moving back to Pittsburgh because you don't want to be HERE? Or because HE isn't HERE?" His voice is harsh and strong. That one got me right in the gut.

"You don't know anything about him." I say softly. I open the closet to grab my collection of jackets.

"I know he is in every painting you do. I know you keep a picture of him in your sketchbook. I know every time your cell phone rings, you still jump, hoping it's him. I know he is the reason you have had one foot out the door this entire relationship." I freeze for a moment. He was right. I'd never admit it. But he was.

"You don't know a god damn thing about me." I say through gritted teeth.

"And whose fault is that? Not mine Justin. I wanted to know. I wanted to know everything. You just wouldn't let me in. You kept secrets. I don't know anything about your life before me. God we were together, living together, for 4 fucking years and I never even met your mother!"

I throw my coat on and walk over to him. I pull him into a hug. I cared about him. I did. But it was over. It had to be. I didn't belong here. I didn't belong with him.

"I love you, you know." He mumbles against my shoulder.

"I know." I pull back and kiss him one last time. It's passionate and sincere. I meant it. I really did care about him. But I didn't love him. And it wasn't fair to him for me to stay when my heart wasn't into it. It never has been. My heart has never been into anything since I moved here. And I knew it was time to go.

I pull my lips away from his and I see he is crying. "You're gonna be fine." I tell him and place my hand on his cheek. He nods. With one sharp move I pull away from him and scoop up my bags and open the door.

"I hope you get what you want." He yells to me as I walk out the door. I turn my head to the side and tell him, "You too Calvin."

I sprint down the stairs and hail the first cab I see.

I threw my bags in the trunk and slammed it shut. This was it.

"Where to sir?" The cab driver asked.

"LaGuardia please." I take one last look at the apartment building I had spent almost 10 years of my life in. 4 of those with someone I thought I could have been with forever. But forever doesn't last as long as it used to. I was doing the right thing. For once I had no doubts. No hesitations. I was moving back to Pittsburgh.

I was finally going home.

**"This new life I'm living, even though I'm getting used to it now  
But to my own selfishness, I think about you again"**

## Chapter 2

"Why does it just say what a great mom she was?" Gus asked, digging the toe of his far-too expensive sneaker (I should really stop spoiling him) into the ground.

I glanced at him and shrugged. "What else is there to say?"

"I dunno," Gus paused and give me a wicked grin that I take full credit for teaching him. "Biggest balls in Pittsburgh."

Now *that* was funny. I ruffled his hair (it was getting long again, I'd have to get him to cut it) and tried not to laugh. No need to encourage him. "I don't think Mikey would have wanted that on the tombstone, but he never said I couldn't get a plaque."

The grin on Gus' face faded, and he looked back at the grave we were standing in front of. "I miss her. She always made the best lasagna."

Shit. I wasn't going to cry. Not now. I was done with that. Mourning was bullshit. I tried it, and look where it got me. "Death is a part of life." I lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "Or some shit like that."

Gus gave me a sharp look and snatched the cigarette away. For a second I was worried he'd want to smoke it (my bad habits do not need to be his), but he just stubbed it out on the bottom of his shoe and handed it back to me. "At least don't smoke in front of grandma. She would have hit you."

I snorted in response and shoved the cigarette butt into my pocket. I wasn't going to litter around this grave. "Hear that, Deb? The child is going to nag me now that you can't."

"I'm not a *child*, I'm fifteen," Gus grumbled. He looked back at the grave, and I could tell he was fighting back tears.

"Don't worry about her. She's with Vic, wherever he is, and they're having a *fabulous* time, I'm sure. Probably rubbing elbows with all those old movie stars she loved so much, and dancing till dawn." A part of me even believed it, if only a little bit.

"I wish I remembered Uncle Vic better," Gus said. "He sounds like he was a lot of fun."

"They both were." God, now *I* was about to cry. Why the hell wasn't I in better control of myself? I'd cried in front of people at the funeral, which was bad enough, but after what happened with Mikey, well... let's just say I needed to control myself better. Funny, a long time ago that was the easiest thing in the world. A certain someone had changed that, carefully and methodically. Damn him.

"Can we go to the diner after this?" Now he was giving me those big, sad, watery eyes and I could feel my willpower weakening.

"I thought we'd get Thai," I mumbled. "It's too cold out for pancakes."

Gus gave me a look just like the ones Lindsay gave me whenever I said something completely fucking insane. I guess he was learning expressions from her, too. "What's that supposed to mean? Pancakes are always good."

"Then you can go. You're fifteen, that's old enough to hang out on Liberty Avenue by yourself. Hell, that's when I started. Just don't go home with any tall, dark, and handsome men." I raised an eyebrow at him. "Unless they're *extremely* handsome. Then it's worth the risk."

Now he was giving me the look Melanie gives me, when I've said something disgusting. "You're not much of a father sometimes."

I snorted again, and resisted pulling out another cigarette, because Deb really would have hit me for that. "I never said I would be." Still, I was secretly glad he wasn't a huge slut (like I was, according to certain people), because I would have worried.

"It's okay. Mom told all about grandpa, so--"

I cut him off. "What the fuck did Lindsay say to you?" I was scowling at him now, and wondering how I ever let myself jerk off into the cup 15 years ago. I wondered things like that every few hours whenever Gus was in town visiting. I supposed I'd never really understand it.

He gave me an innocent look and shrugged. "Stuff. She tells me all sorts of stuff about you."

Bitch. "How nice. Remind me to tell you about her college days."

Gus' eyes lit up. "Awesome."

I frowned and smacked the back of his head, just like Debbie would have. "Finish paying your respects, so we can go get some fucking pancakes."

"Right." Gus cleared his throat and crouched down in front of the grave, adjusting the bright yellow and red carnations we'd brought before speaking. "Hey Grandma. I hope you really are having a lot of fun up there. We all miss you a lot. Uncle Ben stopped Uncle Mikey from throwing away all your ugly little statues and stuff, so don't worry about that."

God, I hated it when people talked to graves. It was fucking depressing. I tightened my scarf around my neck and shoved my hands deep in my pockets. It was colder than it should have been for December. Or maybe I was just getting cold easier these days.

"Dad stopped dying the gray out of his hair," Gus said, and I raised an eyebrow at him.

"I never dyed my hair."

"Yeah, right," he replied without turning to look at me. "I think he stopped 'cause he thinks it makes him look more sophisticated or something, not that he has very much of it. It's not really fair, 'cause mom and ima really look like they're aging, but every guy on Liberty Avenue still goes after dad. It's a good thing I like girls too, or I'd never get a date with him around."

I snorted again. "He's got as big of a mouth as you, Deb." Shit. Now I was doing it, too.

Gus put another bouquet of flowers on Vic's grave, next to Deb's, and stood up. "Okay. We can go now."

We turned to go, and I gave Vic's grave one last long look. 'Seeya, Vic. I hope she's not driving you too crazy,' I thought. I wasn't going to say anything to them out loud. It was too fucking depressing.

The walk to the car was long. It didn't need to be, but Gus was walking really slowly, and I didn't feel like rushing him. It was quiet out here, even if it was fucking freezing, and I was feeling introspective. Vic was gone. Debbie was gone. Mikey wasn't speaking to me. The three people I'd relied on for an external conscience were gone, and I suddenly remembered all the things they'd said to me. None of them were fooled by my act. I looked like a wealthy, successful businessman, and hell – I was one. The problem was, I was also fucking lonely.

There. I admitted it. Lonely.

Well, at this point, I'd lost everyone that really mattered to me, except for Gus, and he was my kid (poor guy.) You can't rely on your son, it's supposed to be the other way around, and I wasn't going to be like my old man and make him take care of me.

So I was alone. Fine. It had been that way for ten years now, anyway, hadn't it? Ever since he left.

"Mom doesn't really tell me much about you," Gus said. I arched an eyebrow at him. "I try, but she doesn't give a lot away, so don't get pissed at her. It's a pain when you guys fight."

I smirked. "Sure."

"She did tell me grandpa was an asshole," he continued.

I didn't say anything. He didn't need to see me as pissed as I get when I talk about Jack.

"But she never tells me about how much drugs you did, or how many guys you boned," he said, giving me a challenging look.

I shrugged. I wasn't going to correct his language, that was the munchers' job.

"But I kinda know that stuff anyway... I did spend a few summers here."

"Well, at least you're observant, sonnyboy," I said. It was probably about time I gave him another 'use condoms and don't take drugs from people you don't trust' lecture, but he always rolled his eyes when I started, and told me that he wasn't *like* me. I was always relieved to hear it.

"And she won't tell me about that guy."



I stopped and frowned at him. "What guy?"

"That blond guy in those pictures that she puts away whenever you visit. I'm not supposed to ask you about him." He was grinning again, but this time he looked genuinely curious.

Shit. I couldn't even open my mouth. Why the hell was he asking about this *now*?

"Uncle Mikey has pictures of him, too. He told me it's none of my business when I asked. And Emmet told me I'd find out eventually, and Ted told me he didn't want to get fired. No one will tell me about him. He's the only person in any of the pictures at home that I don't know about."

Well, the kid had an eye for a mystery. Good for him. I dug a joint out of my pocket and lit it. Debbie wouldn't have smacked me for that, and anyway, we were too far from her grave for her opinion to matter.

"So?" Gus was giving me this eager look that made him look cute and innocent and about ten years old again. God, if my son turned out to be a bottom, I'd be so disappointed. It was bad enough that he liked pussy.

"So what?" I finally choked out, exhaling the smoke I'd been holding in my lungs.

"So who *is* he?!"

I started walking again towards the parking lot, ignoring him. Son or no son, it was none of his goddamn business. And damn Lindsay for not coming up with a good cover story. And damn him for asking.

"Brian," a voice that sounded oddly familiar and made my stomach clench said from my left.

I stopped and turned quickly, and spotted the blond, gorgeous creature standing only a few yards away from me. He was older. He looked more mature. His hair was long, and

his expression was vulnerable. I could feel my cock get hard, and my heart hammered in my chest.

Fuck.

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***"And now I don't know why, but I still try to smile when they talk at me like I'm just a child. Well, I'm not a child. No, I am much younger than that. And now I have read some books and have grown quite brave. If I could just speak up I think I would say that there is no truth. There is only you and what you make the truth."***

### Chapter 3

It was the first thing I decided to do as soon as I stepped off the plane.

I had to go see Deb.

I hadn't been able to make it back to the Pitts for the funeral. I had a huge gallery opening to prepare for and when I had spoken to Michael he had said Deb would have wanted it that way. To do what I loved. But the truth? I would have rather gone home.

That's what I really loved.

When I stepped out of the cab and scanned the long and winding rows of tombstones, I immediately got teary eyed. Shit. This was going to be harder than I thought. I lean down to the window and tell the driver, "I'll be back in a bit." I hand him a 20 and slowly head through the parking lot.

I took long deep breaths of the cold December air. I missed it. It felt good. New York was always so cold. I mean, hell so was Pittsburgh, but in a different way. I survived 22 years worth of winters here but never really noticed how cold it could get. In New York that's all I ever noticed. How god damn cold it always was.

I had no plan. I didn't even tell my mother I was coming home. I didn't want a big deal made. I didn't want a million questions asked. I just wanted to plant my feet back down on Pittsburgh soil and figure it out from there. But first things first. I needed to talk to Deb. She always knew what to do.

I walk through the maze of parked cars and spot an older man and a young boy standing by a car I knew I recognized. Is that? No. Can't be. I see the young boy smile and I feel myself get dizzy. I know that smile. I know those eyes. The older man turns his head as he exhales smoke from what seems to be a joint, and smirks. Their upturned lips mirror each other.

Holy fucking shit.

I step closer and I have to stop because my head is woozy and my knees are weak.

A green Corvette.

A young boy, 15 maybe.

An older man. Early 40's.

Same smile.

Same eyes.

I swallow hard and find my breath to speak.

"Brian...."

He whips around and as he lays his eyes upon me he gets white in the face. I don't blame him. He literally is seeing a ghost.

There is silence for what seems like an eternity.

I don't move.

Brian can't speak.

I feel dizzy.

And then Brian's clone breaks the silence.

"God enough drama. I'm assuming you two know each other. Just hug or duke it out or something. Stop being such QUEENS about it."

I smirk and the tension is broken. Brian clenches his jaw and glares at his son.

"I'm Gus." He steps toward me and holds out his hand.

"I know....I know who you are." I tell him as I shake his extended hand.

Gus looks at me puzzled and I see Brian's eyes close in disbelief.

"You do? How? Who are you?" He asks.

"Yea. I was there the night you were born. I even helped name you. I'm Justin. Justin Taylor. I'm...an old friend of Bri....your Dad's." My voice quivers and is hesitant. But I finally get all the words out.

Gus's mouth drops open a little and turns and stares at Brian.

"HE was there when I was BORN?? You NEVER told me that. You just said it was You, Mom, Ima, and Uncle Mikey."

Brian doesn't answer. He just brings his finger up to the bridge of his nose and squeezes.

Did Gus have any idea who I was? Never mind, how could he? He was only 5 when I left. But I am sure Mel and Linds must have told them something....

"Wait..Justin? Your name is Justin? You're the artist Mom and Ima talk about all the time. Their friend that lives in New York. Ok...I know who you are now." He smacks Brian on the arm. "And you should have TOLD me he was there when I was born."

Brian finally opens his eyes and drops his hand down to his side.

"Guess I forgot." He says in his 'I'm lying but I hope you believe me anyway' voice.

"Bullshit." Gus and I both chime in unison.

Brian looks down at the ground, and tries to hide his smirk. A smirk I hadn't seen in nearly 10 years. A smirk that still made my stomach do flip flops.

"Have you come to see Grandma?" Gus asks.

"Yea...It's been a long time." I look at Brian and he glances up and our eyes meet. Electricity soars through my body. The fire was still there. It was faint, almost out, but I could still feel it.

"Well it was really good to see you...both again.." I start to walk away backwards, heading towards the grave sites.

"Do you wanna come have pancakes with us at the diner???" Gus asks excitedly. "I want to know what New York is like!"

Brian winces and closes his eyes again.

"No Gus it's ok. My cab is here and I have to go check into my hotel..." I begin to say.

"Here for a visit?" Brian asks, his voice stern but I can still hear faintly in the thunder of his voice, the same softness I had heard the first night he ever spoke to me 15 years ago.

"Um..no. Actually, I'm moving back." He raises his eye brow at me.

"It's a long story."

"Well you can tell us ALL about it over pancakes. Right Dad? He said you guys were friends right?" Gus looks at his father for an answer.

Brian's eyes meet mine again. "We were. A long time ago." I could cry right then. I could have jumped into his arms and showed him he was right. It was only time.

"Gus thank you but I still need to visit Deb."

"We'll wait." Brian says softly as he kicks the rocks with his perfectly shined Prada shoes.

I don't fight anymore and nod as I turn and walk into the sea of grave sites.

I knew her grave right away. It was the only one with glitter sprinkled around it.

I trace my fingers over the engraved letters and choked back the tears.

"Hey Deb..." I begin. Shit this was hard. How do I do this?

"I...I'm sorry I'm late. It took me forever to get here." Tears fall freely now down my cheeks. I kneel down onto the moist ground lay my palms over her name on the stone.

"I wanted to come. So many times. When Michael told me you were sick...god why am I still such a child? Why couldn't I have just swallowed my fucking pride? I'm so sorry Deb. I'm so sorry." I am sobbing uncontrollably now. I can barely even breathe.

"What do I do? Tell me. What do I do now?" I rest my forehead against the cold stone and cry. It felt good to cry. I hadn't cried in a long time. I needed this release. And leave it to Deb to get it out of me.

I feel a hand on my shoulder and a wave of warmth soothes my body.

"You ok?" His voice is barely a whisper. I nod against the stone.

"Come on." He lifts me up slowly and tenderly. When I finally get on my feet I am inches from him. My body is buzzing.

He rubs his chin with his gloved hand and exhales heavily. "Let's get you something to eat. And Gus. If he doesn't get his pancakes soon he may have a nervous breakdown."

I graze my fingers one last time over Deb's resting place and whisper "I love you."

I see Brian smile and I follow him back to the parking lot. He nods at me as I get back into my cab.

"Where to now sir?" The driver asks me.

"Liberty Diner."

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**I turned to look but it was gone.  
I cannot put my finger on it now.  
The child is grown, the dream is gone.  
I have become comfortably numb.**

## **Chapter 4**

Sunshine was back, and all I could do was stare. Suddenly I felt too warm to be wearing the huge coat I had on, and I felt like getting out my sunglasses. He was bright and warm and he still glowed. Time had treated him well. My whole body ached to grab him by the front of his shirt and kiss him, deep and hungry, and maybe grab his ass, and maybe –

But Gus was there, and suddenly they were shaking hands and talking, and that sort of ruined the mood. Well, that's probably for the best. Those days were long past. It figured that he finally decided to visit only after it was far too late to fix things between us.

"Here for a visit?" I asked, and his answer shook me completely.

"Um... no. Actually, I'm moving back."

Shit.

My head spun, and I felt somewhat sick to my stomach. What the fuck was he doing, coming back here?! He'd made it in New York, I knew he had. Hell, I'd kept up on his career as closely as I could, even to this day.

"It's a long story."



Yeah, I bet it was. Damnit. Damn, damn, damn.

"Well you can tell us ALL about it over pancakes. Right Dad? He said you guys were friends right?" Gus was asking me, and I could barely find the words. Damn this situation, and damn Gus for being such a people-person.

"We were. A long time ago," I said, and I finally looked him in the eye. God, but he was gorgeous. I felt the old wound in me tear open again, and the pain that I'd carefully set aside and buried was suddenly back. Fuck. I sounded like a goddamn lesbian.

"Gus thank you but I still need to visit Deb," Justin said, and I could tell he was as uncomfortable as I was.

This was fucking stupid.

"We'll wait," I said. He looked surprised, and a little scared, and I couldn't see that, so I stared down at my shoe and kicked a pebble. How was it that this boy always managed to make me feel like a fucking child? Of course, he wasn't a *boy* any longer. He was a man.

He turned to walk to Deb's grave, and I sighed heavily and ran a hand through my hair, leaning back against the 'vette. Gus arched an eyebrow at me.

"So?"

"So, what?" I asked, and lifted the last little stub of the joint I'd been holding to my mouth. Fuck, most of it had burned away already.

"Who is he, really?"

"Get in the car," I said, and I opened the passenger door for him. "Wait here."

"Dad," Gus said, reaching out to grab my arm.

I turned to look at him, exhaling more smoke, and slowly feeling the pot take effect. I was starting to feel numb again. Good. "What?"

"N-nothing," Gus said, and he ducked back into the car. Poor kid. He could tell something was up. Ah, well. I'm sure he'd figure it out eventually, and then I'd have to put up with the pitying looks I got from everyone else from him, too. Great.

I shut the door and walked back to Debbie's gravestone. He was there, crouched before it and hunched over. His shoulders were shaking. He wasn't just crying, he was sobbing.

Fuck.

I should really have turned back around and waited at the car. I should really have not given a damn, or rolled my eyes, or felt annoyed.

Instead, all I could do was walk over and put a hand on his shoulder. "You ok?" Shit, what a stupid question. Of course he wasn't ok.

But he nodded, and I couldn't keep my hands off him. I put my hands on his arms and helped him stand back up, as gently as I could. He was so fucking close to me, and all I could do was breathe deeply and *smell* him. For just a second, I thought I'd lose my control, and we'd end up fucking right there, on Debbie's grave. I wanted to *taste* him now that I could smell him.

Then the feeling was gone. I rubbed my chin, trying to think of something to say. "Let's get you something to eat. And Gus. If he doesn't get his pancakes soon he may have a nervous breakdown."

Justin nodded, and he brushed his fingers over Debbie's headstone. "I love you," he said softly.

I grinned. I didn't know why I was grinning. Hearing him say that only brought back more memories; memories I'd rather have forgotten.

We walked back to the car in silence, and he got into his cab. I drove Gus and myself to the diner, the whole time trying to ignore the inquisitive looks Gus kept giving me. Despite having aged, despite having grown up finally, I was still Brian Fucking Kinney, and I didn't talk about my feelings.

The diner was crowded and loud and sparkling. Debbie's absence didn't seem to have changed all that much. Except of course, our portions seemed to have gotten smaller, and she wasn't *there*. It had taken a couple of months to get used to. For a while I wouldn't eat here at all, but that felt wrong. So I came, and I ate, and I always left a huge tip.

We'd only just slid into the booth when Justin walked in the door. I'd made sure to sit next to Gus, instead of across from him. I wasn't ready to sit next to Justin. I would have put my arm around his shoulders, like I always did, and if I did that, well... like I said, my self control wasn't very strong.

"Hey," Justin said, and he slid in across from us.

Shit, this was weird.

"So how come you left New York?" Gus asked. "It must be really cool!"

Justin smiled, and I felt my chest ache, and my cock twitch. I must be a glutton for punishment.

"I missed... being here," Justin said, and he glanced at me.

I wanted to scream and punch something.

Gus frowned and glanced back and forth between the two of us. "So... you guys were... friends?"

Justin nodded, and I didn't say anything. Sure. Friends.

"Were you friends like dad and Uncle Mikey are friends?" Gus asked Justin, and I could see an evil glimmer in his eye.

Justin looked confused for a second. "Well, Michael and... your dad... they're best friends, so-"

"Not anymore," Gus said.

Justin looked at me again, and this time he looked worried.

Shit. "It's nothing," I said. Gus needed to shut his fucking mouth.

"They had-" Gus began, but I cut him off by elbowing him in the ribs really hard. "OW!"

I tried to look innocent. "So. Pancakes?" I waved a waitress over.

"Dick," Gus mumbled under his breath. Stupid brat. He needed to learn to keep his goddamn mouth shut.

We ordered, because the waitress didn't know exactly what we wanted like Debbie would have, and she didn't even make any cock jokes. I missed Debbie. She would have made a crack at my expense, and then we would have laughed, and things wouldn't have been so fucking awkward.

"Grandma said you'd been in love once," Gus said after the waitress was gone.

"Grandma said a lot of fucking stupid shit," I growled, and gave him a look that threatened a slow and painful death.

Justin looked amused. Asshole.

"Was it with him?" Gus pointed at Justin, as if he wasn't *right there*, and gave me a 'don't shit me' look.

I pursed my lips and looked away. I didn't have anything to say to that. Normally I'd come up with some smartass thing to say, but I couldn't think of a damn thing.

Justin cleared his throat. "I've been gone ten years, Gus."

As if that changed a fucking thing.

"So?" Gus asked.

Yeah, I thought. So?

"So how are things here? How are Michael and Ben? Is JR visiting, too?"

Gus shrugged. "Nah, mom and ima say she's not old enough to spend the holidays away from them. And Uncle Mikey and Ben are fine, but I haven't gotten to see them much since I got here a few days ago. Usually we'd spend a lot of time with them, but..."

Justin was giving me a worried look again. "What happened?"

God, was he asking *me*? I just shrugged. "Losing Debbie's been hard on him."

Justin nodded, as if that explained everything.

"Like I *tried* to say, they-" Gus began again, but before I could elbow him again, the door opened, and guess who walked in.

Well, I guess I shouldn't be surprised. This was where Michael still spent a lot of his time, even if his mom wasn't here. I guess old habits die hard.

"Shit, is that Justin?" Michael asked, and he walked over, grinning. "Justin! What the hell are you doing here?"

Justin grinned and stood to give Michael a hug.

*I* hadn't gotten a hug.

"I'm moving back," he said.

"Seriously?!" Michael looked happier than I'd seen him in months.

Justin nodded, and then Michael glanced over and saw me, and his smile faded. "Where are you staying?" he asked Justin, but he was looking at me.

"Um, a hotel, I just got to town so I haven't found an apartment yet."

"No, you're staying with Ben and me," Michael said, looking back at Justin. "We've got a spare room."

"Oh, I couldn't," Justin tried to say, but I knew it was too late. Mikey wasn't one to give up.

"Hey, there's no reason to stay in a hotel when you've got family, right?" Michael hesitated for a moment, and then looked at me. It was the first time we'd *really* looked at each other since it happened. "Unless you already asked him."

Fuck you, Michael.

"Why would he stay with us?" Gus asked, giving us all an accusing look, as if we were hiding some huge secret. Well, I guess we actually were. "I'm already sleeping on the sofa bed, and it's not like the loft has a spare room."

I bit my lower lip and kept my gaze fixed across the room. Again, I didn't know what to say.

"I guess I thought..." Michael started, then he sighed. "Well then, you've got to stay with us."

Justin smiled weakly and shrugged. "You're not going to let me say no, are you?"

"Nope," Michael said, and he was smiling again. Good.

"Hey," Gus said, leaning across the table. "Somebody's gonna tell me what the fuck is going on around here!" He turned and gave me an irritated look. "I thought you were the parent that *didn't* hide shit and lie."

I rolled my eyes. "Don't be such a drama-princess."

His eyes narrowed. "Me?! You're the one that's-"

"We used to go out," Justin said.

I glanced at him and frowned. Oh, is *that* what he thought of it as? I tried to keep my face blank. I didn't want anyone to know that I suddenly felt like I'd been punched in the kidneys.

Gus nodded. "Right. And?"

"And it didn't work out. I had a career in New York, and Br- your dad had one here." Justin shrugged dismissively, and now I felt like I'd been punched *again*, but this time by someone much stronger. Was it normal to feel like the air's been knocked out of you over something someone's said?

Gus nodded, and he gave me a look that meant he'd suddenly put it together. He knew that a few times a year I holed up in my apartment with a bottle of Beam and wouldn't talk to anyone. He knew that I never dated, never fell in love, and scoffed at anyone who did. And he knew that no one had wanted to tell him who Justin was in all those photos. The kid was smart.

"So you're the one," he said, and frowned at Justin.

"So uh, do you wanna go? I just wanted to get some lemon bars to go, so..." Michael said, and Justin nodded gratefully.

"What about your food?" I asked, and bit my tongue as soon as I had. Why the fuck was I trying to get him to stay? He should go. He and Mikey should go, and have fun, and forget about me and all the bullshit drama that had happened between us all. Of course, if Justin was staying with Michael, it was guaranteed that I'd barely ever see him. But that was probably for the best.

"I'll get it to go," Justin said, and he wasn't making eye contact with me anymore.

All I could do was nod, and watch him get his food and leave. My whole body ached.

Gus pushed me out of the booth, and I moved to the other side. "I'm just gonna go tell Uncle Mikey something," he mumbled, and he ran after them.

The waitress brought our plates, and I sat there alone and didn't eat. I didn't feel hungry anymore.

.....



***"How do you feel? That is the question. But I forget you don't expect an easy answer. When something like a soul becomes initialized and folded up like paper dolls and little notes. You can't expect a bit of hope. So while you're outside looking in describing you see, remember what you're staring at is me..."***

## **Chapter 5**

When I stepped out into the bitter cold and onto the sidewalk I let the air escape my lungs and leaned against the side of the diner. Shit. Fuck. Dammit.

*"We used to go out."*

What a fucking stupid ass thing to say. How could I have dismissed our entire relationship like that? I saw the pain in Brian's eyes when I said it. It's funny how 5 simple words can destroy an entire past.

"You alright?" Michael asks. He looks saddened like he felt the same pain I did.

"Are you gonna tell me what the fuck happened?" I am leaned over, hands on my knees attempting to breath but glaring up at him.

He looks across the street to avoid eye contact with me. Jesus. This was gonna be bad.

"Things werereal hard after Ma died. Real bad. Brian seemed to be the only one who understood. The only one who could comfort me..." I knew where he was going with this. Jesus Christ. Don't tell me....

"...One night we were both pretty wasted. Drinking, smoking, and just laying around the loft. We were talking...about you... about Ben and me...and...." His voice got quivery and he shoved his hands in his pocket.

"You fucked." I finished for him. His head whipped to the side to look at me. He let out his breath into the cold air and nodded.

I stand up and stare at him blankly. Was I jealous? No. Was I mad? No. I felt bad for them. My heart went out to Michael. And Brian.

"Say something." Michael pleaded.

Where do you want me to begin?

"Say what?"

"Anything. Be mad. Be something." He fumbles to get his car keys out of his pocket.

"So? How was it? Everything you imagined?" Ok, so now I'm starting to get jealous. Did Brian have sex with him the way he had sex with me? Doubtful. Brian never fucked anyone the way he fucked me. I'd see him fuck other people. It was never like it was with me. God, I was getting hard just thinking about it. Fuck.

"It was... I don't know. Not what I expected. I freaked out and he acted like an asshole like he always does. I just stopped talking to him after that. I... I don't know, needed some space I guess." I nod. Michael finally got what he wanted. But like many things you wait almost your whole life for, they don't always turn out the way you thought they would.

"When it was over, when we were... done, I asked him who he was thinking of. He didn't answer. He didn't have to. I knew the answer. It was you. It didn't feel right. I don't know what I expected. But I guess when you don't love someone-

"He loves you, Michael." I cut him off.

He shakes his head. "Not like he loves you. You don't know what he's been like...you haven't seen him-" He is cut off again, this time by the diner door being shoved open.

"You!" Gus bellows as he points at me.

I blink a few times and stare at him.

He storms over to me.

"I know who you are." He stands in front of me, hands on his hips. Damn, this kid's got balls.

"We've established that. I'm Justin. And old friend..."

"Bullshit. I know who you really are. You're the one in all the pictures that Mom and Ima take down before Dad comes to visit. The one in the pictures that Dad keeps in a shoe box in his closet. The one who broke his heart."

I laugh at that and look at Michael. He isn't laughing.

"You think that's funny? Funny!!?? Is it funny that a few days a year Dad locks himself in the loft with endless bottles of liquor and doesn't talk to anyone? There's a day in February and a day a few days after his birthday when no one gets in and he doesn't come out. And what did you do to him the day I was born? Cause he won't even call me on my birthday. He calls me the day BEFORE or AFTER, but never ON my birthday. That's FUNNY to you??" He is yelling so loud it's echoing up Liberty Ave.

"I didn't do anything..." A day in February? What the fuck was in February...Oh, shit. I left in February.

And a few days after his birthday... May... OH.

Fuck me.

Prom.

"He won't date, or care about anyone. It's your fault, isn't it? You guys were serious, and you left. And he hasn't cared about anyone ever since." His eyes are glazing over. I can't imagine what it must be like to be Brian's son. It's hard enough just being a part of Brian's life, period. I could see the unconditional love Gus had for his father. If Brian hurt, Gus hurt. I used to know what that felt like, too.

I look at Michael. He nods his head as if to say everything Gus was telling me was true. I look at Gus.

"He told me to go... I had to go... I loved Bri... your dad. So much. But... I..." I can't finish my sentence. It's too hard.

"What did you come back for? I hope you weren't thinking you could just use your 'sunshine' smile and weasel your way back into his life." My eyes widen and my mouth falls open at Gus's words. Sunshine. No one has called me that in almost 10 years.

"Yeah, I know what they used to call you. Well, at least Grandma used to still call you that." His eyes sadden at his mention of Deb.

"It was just time for me to come home, Gus. It had nothing to do with Bri... your dad." I lied. I didn't tell him his dad was all I thought about. I didn't tell him how I couldn't make a relationship work because of it and instead of sticking around or doing things the grown up way, I decided to just run away. Run back to my past.

"Well, stay away from my dad. You've done enough damage. And now after today he'll probably lock himself in the loft and drink himself to death for the rest of my visit."

He turns to Michael. "And as for you. Suck it up and talk to him. The two of you are like high school drama queens. So you had sex with him. Who hasn't? Jeez." And with that, Gus turns on his heel and waltzes back into the diner.

I stare open mouthed at Michael, who shared the same expression.

"He's a fire cracker, huh?" Michael mumbled. "Come on."

He helps me get my luggage out of the cab and put it into his car.

"You sure you're ok with this?" I ask him. He looks at me and forces a smile.

"Yeah. We are kindred now. We both lost him and now we have to live with it."

I take one last look at the diner and see him arguing with Gus through the window. His face is twisted and Gus is throwing his hands in the air like he is telling him the most important thing he will ever hear. Brian's hands go to his face and he clutches his hair that now has soft speckles of gray through out it. He was still so beautiful.

He breaks free of his own grasp and our eyes meet through the glass. His face is expressionless. I try to force a smile but I can't. Gus was right. I had done enough damage. I climb into Michael's car and as he pulls away I make a vow. This was a brand new start. Just like New York was a brand new start.

And I'd be doing it the same way.

*Without Brian.*

"I'm looking at you through the glass, don't know how much time has passed. And all I know is that it feels like forever. When no one ever tells you that forever feels like home, sitting all alone inside your head."

\*\*\*

*How I wish, how I wish you were here.  
We're just two lost souls swimming in a fish bowl,  
year after year,  
running over the same old ground.*

*What have we found?  
The same old fears,  
wish you were here.*

## **Chapter 6**

"Dad, come on," Gus said, kicking my leg and frowning down at me.

"What is it, sonnyboy?"

He looked frustrated. "I thought we were going to a movie."

"I fucking hate theaters," I replied, and turned my head to reach for the bottle of Beam. My glass was empty already. Hadn't I just filled it?

"You do not! You said you used to go to movies all the time with Uncle Mikey!" Now he was getting pissed.

"We'd sit in the balcony and get stoned," I said, and chuckled. Good times, good times.

"Damnit, dad," Gus grumbled. He walked over to the stereo and turned the volume down.

"Hey!" I tried to sit up, but that made my head spin, so I laid back down on the fluffy white carpet and glared at him from there. "Don't touch my fucking stereo. It cost more than your tuition to that fucking preppie high school."

Gus winced. Shit. He was actually hurt. Sometimes I forgot that he was my *kid*, or a kid at all, and I treated him like I would any of my friends. Usually that 'sometimes' was when I was drunk or stoned. Right now I was probably both. He turned the music back up, but not as loud as it had been.

"Who the fuck blasts Pink Floyd, anyway?" he mumbled, giving me a look like I was pathetic.

"Go visit your Uncle Mikey," I said, rolling onto my stomach.

"You *a/ways* send me there when you're depressed. And you always drink liquor and smoke weed and listen to old music until you're passed out on the floor." He crouched down next to me and shook his head. "Mom's right. You do need to see a therapist."

"Fuck. You." I glared at him, lifting my head off the carpet just a bit.

He arched an eyebrow at me. "What, pissed that I'm right?"

"Pink Floyd isn't *old*," I grumbled, setting my head back down. Little bastard thought he knew everything.

Gus let out a noise of complete frustration and disgust. I was used to hearing sounds like that from people, so I just ignored it. "Dad-" he began, and I braced myself for more lecturing when the phone rang. We stared at each other for a moment before he sighed heavily and got up to answer it.

I reached into the baggie on the floor next to me and lit another joint. I kept them rolled ahead of time, in case of emergency. And oh, this was an emergency if there ever was one. I inhaled deeply, feeling that comforting burning sensation briefly in my lungs, before I exhaled and took a gulp from the glass in front of me. Thank the fucking gods for drugs and alcohol. I hadn't been this fucked up in years, and it was comforting and familiar. Sure, I'd had drinks, I'd gotten stoned, but not like this. Of course, today there was good reason for it.

"Hey," Gus said into the phone. I turned my head away from him and tried to concentrate on the music instead of the frustration in his voice.

"No, I'm fine. ... Yeah. ...Yeah, he's here. ... Well, he's listening to Wish You Were Here." Gus paused and laughed bitterly. "Yeah, I hate this fucking album, too."

I narrowed my eyes and frowned. How the hell could my prodigy have such bad taste in music? Maybe he wasn't mine, after all. Maybe there was a mix-up at the fertility clinic, and my jizz got left in a freezer somewhere, and Gus was some other poor jerk's kid. I considered taking the phone from him and telling Lindsay that myself (because it was obviously her), but that would mean getting up.

"Well, I don't know what to do. He won't listen to me. ... I know, but... yeah. Yeah, right. ... No, don't tell *him*. ... Well, it's none of his fucking business! ... Yeah, I figured *that* much out. ...So what if I told him off?! He deserved it!"

Lindsay had already heard about his little outburst at the diner? Word *does* travel fast. Mikey must have called her the minute he got home. Well, I hoped she ripped him a new one. I knew I was in trouble, but Gus should be, too. It was none of his goddamn business who Justin was, and he had to go stick his nose in, and... fuck. I took another swig of Beam and inhaled more of the joint.

"He's my *father*, of *course* it's my business!"

Good. Yell at your mother. Then maybe she'll forget to yell at me 'cause she'll be too pissed at you.

"*Fine*. You talk to him."

Suddenly the phone was shoved in my face. I squinted at it, wondering what *exactly* I was supposed to do with it, before I realized I was supposed to take it. "No, thanks," I mumbled.

"He wants to talk to you," Gus said, and dropped the phone in front of me.

He? I picked up the receiver and rolled onto my back again, holding the phone to my ear. "Either Lindsay grew a cock, or it's someone else's turn to nag me," I said. My voice sounded funny from the weed, and I chuckled.

"Oh, Brian," Ben's voice came from the receiver. "Pink Floyd again?"

I frowned. "What the fuck is everyone's problem with Pink Floyd?"

"Nothing. Except we all know it's what you listen to when you're moping," Ben replied.



Asshole. "Fuck you," I said. "What the fuck do you want? I thought no one in the Novotny-Bruckner clan was supposed to speak to me."

Ben sighed and I could hear the concern in his voice. Bastard. "Well, I'm breaking the rules a little."

I laughed before inhaling more of the joint in my hand. "Right," I choked out. "Mikey's gonna love that."

"Look, Brian-"

"Know what, professor? I don't need a lecture right now. So I boned your little wife, get over it. He wasn't that great, anyway."

Ben's voice grew tense, but he stayed calm. I was impressed. "Michael and I discussed that. It was a mistake. I know you were both in a bad situation, and... these things happen. We've worked it out. Now it's between you and him to work out your friendship."

"What, you actually want me in his life, still? You must be stupider than I thought." I reached for the Jim Beam, but Gus picked it up and held it out of my reach. I glared daggers at him.

"Fuck you, Brian. You don't know how much you fucking hurt him with what you did."

"What *I* did?" I asked, shutting my eyes. I knew. I knew I'd fucked up. I didn't *need* this right now.

Ben paused before continuing. "This isn't why I called. That's between you and him. Michael and I are fine. Your friendship is your problem, not mine."

"That's awfully admirable of you, professor," I said, holding my hand out for the bottle and giving Gus as threatening of a look as I could muster. He handed it back, but with a look of disappointment and disgust on his face.

Good.

"I'm calling because... well, we're worried about you, and Michael didn't think it was a good idea for him to be the one to do it."

I took a gulp from the bottle. Fuck using a glass. I was going to drink it all, anyway. "Oh," I said. He was wrong. If Michael called and asked me to stop drinking... well, I'd still drink, but less. "Why the fuck would anyone worry about me? I'm *dandy*."

"You're drunk and stoned," Ben said. "And you're listening to Pink Floyd. Basically, you're completely fucked up."

"I'll drink to that," I said, chuckling.

"Damnit, Brian, at least don't do this in front of Gus. It's really not good--"

"That's why I told him to go stay with the happy homemakers," I said. I didn't need to hear this, either.

Ben sighed again. "Fine. Tell him to come over. But Brian--"

"Yes, professor? Some further insight and wisdom for me?" My voice was hard now. I was fucking sick of this bullshit.

"This isn't going to make you feel better," he said.

"Well, when you find something that *will*, you let me know. Until then, I'll stick with the classics." I grinned bitterly and shoved the phone back at Gus, who was staring at me and looking so upset that I couldn't stand to look at him. I rolled onto my side, facing away from him.

"H-hey," he said into the phone. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess. ... You think he'll be okay? ... Yeah. I know. ... Okay. I'll be there soon."

I heard the phone being hung up, and Gus gathered some of his things before walking to the door. "Don't do anything stupid," he said. "I'm coming back in the morning."

"Sonnyboy," I began to say. I didn't know what to tell him when I was sober, so I really had no idea what to say now. After all, I don't apologize. Okay, maybe once in a great while, but not right now. If I did that, I'd completely fucking shatter.

"Yeah," he said. "I know. It's okay. It's not your fault."

Shit, that made me feel even worse. I tried to think of something else to say, but I heard the door to the loft slide open and shut again, and he was gone.

After a minute, I got up and walked over to the stereo to turn it back up and start the CD over, and then went to the small safe I kept in the bedroom. I dialed the combination lock and the door popped open. I shuffled aside some papers and pulled out a small black box and shut the safe again before going back to the living room and lying on the couch, bottle of Beam within reach.

Gus was going to Michael and Ben's place. They'd always been good surrogate fathers to him, so they'd make up for the damage I'd done.

Justin was there, too. I imagined how that would go. Gus might queen out at first, but he and Justin would get along after he got over his teenage shit-fit. Sunshine would be there, with the rest of my fucked up little... what did they like to call it? Family? They'd all sit down together and have a dinner that Ben lovingly cooked, and Michael and Gus would talk about comics and laugh, and Justin would *be there*, sitting at their table, talking to them, smiling...

I took another gulp of Beam before opening the box in my hand, revealing two rings. I really should put them back, in case I passed out here, and Gus found them in the morning. I didn't want to explain why I'd gotten them in the first place, let alone why I'd kept them. I really should put them back. But I passed out before I could make myself.

\*\*\*

**"Hey you, standing in the road always doing what you're told, Can you help me?**

**Hey you, out there beyond the wall, Breaking bottles in the hall, Can you help me?**

**Hey you, don't tell me there's no hope at all. Together we stand, divided we fall."**

## **Chapter 7**

I placed the last of my t-shirts into the drawer and closed it. I shoved my suitcase under the bed and sat down gently. I closed my eyes and let the words from the radio invade my head. I knew this song. I knew it well.

"How'd you sleep?" I hear Michael ask behind me. I turn my head and see him leaning against the doorframe. I smirk.

"Ok, I guess." That's a lie. I barely slept.

"You can't bullshit me. I've known you too long." He walks slowly into the room and stands in front of me. "You ok?"

I look down at my hands and shake my head. Ok? Ha, no. More like numb.

"Listen..." Michael begins. "I know we haven't talked much in like the past, oh um, 10 years but if you need to talk about anything...you know I'm here."

I look up at him and smile. Michael had always been a good friend, even through everything. We were older now, all the jealousy and angst we had gone through was long gone. He was right; we were family. Deb would have been proud to see us now, reaching out to each other in times of need. If only she could be here to bring Michael and Brian back together now.

"You wanna tell me what happened?" He asks as he sits down next to me.

I look at him with a curious expression.

"With you and Brian. All I know is one day he came back from seeing you in New York and he was fine. Happy, dare I say it. And then, POOF. Nothing ever again. He wouldn't talk about it. Then one day I noticed your pictures were down in the loft. I tried to get him to talk about it, but he never would."

I take a deep breath. Here goes nothing.

"Things were good for a while. The first 6 months were amazing. We talked everyday and he came to visit. A lot. But me and my stupid pride. He didn't like where I was living. He kept trying to give me money, get me a better place to stay. You know Brian."

Michael smirks and nods.

"I had found out he paid my rent on my apartment for a year. I freaked out. We got in this huge fight over the phone one day. I told him I didn't need or want his help anymore. I needed to do this on my own. That was the whole point of me going to New York. I hurt him. A lot. He was only trying to help. But with Brian and his pride, couldn't understand or accept what I was trying to tell him. So he told me to go live my life without him. Since I didn't 'want or need' him. And I agreed. That was 9 years ago. Yesterday was the first time I had seen or spoken to him since."

I run my fingers through my hair and groan. "I tried to have another relationship. His name was Calvin. I actually moved out my apartment and just left him there. We were together 4 years, but I never...I never got comfortable. I kept him at a distance."

"I didn't know you were dating anyone that serious." Michael chimed in quietly.

"No one did. He never even met my mother. The truth is I never let go of Brian. I couldn't. In my mind I always had these 'what if' doubts. So I just coasted through my life there. Opened a gallery, painted, but never loved anything I was doing. And Calvin was a good distraction. He loved me, god he did everything for me. But he was young and I knew he could do so much better than me. So one day I decided the only way to get my life back was to come back here. Start over. Again. Back to square one. Stupid?" I turn and look at Michael who had listened to every single word I had said. He was such a good friend.

He shakes his head. "No. Not at all. You have no idea how many times Ma tried to get Brian to call you or go see you. He couldn't. It was too hard for him. He never got over you either, Justin. He just...buried you away I guess. He continued to live his life. He has been a great father to Gus. Kinnetik is still going strong. Babylon is still the hottest place to go and Brian Kinney is still Brian Kinney."

I smile at him and bump his shoulder. "And you, Michael? You wanna tell me what happened now? Since we are sharing so well?" Michael looks up at the ceiling and begins.

"After we um... you know, I went to see him at Kinnetik a few days later. I needed to talk to him. Tell him, shit, tell him anything. We had been friends since we were kids. So I go there and tell him how he was the one thing I had always wanted. That I had waited almost my whole life to finally be THAT close to him. To know what it was like. But it wasn't everything I expected. And that it was a mistake. Because it wasn't love. It was just pain management, I guess. He was thinking about you when we were having sex. He didn't like that. I had brought you up and he freaked. He got in my face and told me how I loved it. That it was what I had always dreamed of and I was just mad because I knew he didn't feel the same way and he didn't want me."

"Jesus." I bring my hand to my face. Brian could be such an ass sometimes.

"Yeah. So I told him he was wrong, and that I didn't want to lose him. He screamed at me and told me we weren't even that good of friends anymore and maybe what happened was for the best. I got what I wanted, I finally got to have sex with him and we should just face the inevitable. The Brian and Mikey show was finally over. So I left and never looked back."

I put my arm around Michael and he lays his head on my shoulder.

"God we are pathetic." I say. We both laugh and it breaks the tension.

"Brian would be so proud." Michael jokes.

"Umm Michael?" We hear Ben say and lightly knock on the door.

We both turn and find him smiling and holding a cell phone in his hand.

"Ted just called. Um, he said Brian didn't show up to work today." He looked concerned. God what a great man Ben was. Michael had sex with Brian and he forgave him. Jeez, I don't even know if I forgive Michael.

"And? What am I supposed to do about it?" Michael stands up and walks to Ben. Ben hands him the cell phone.

"You know when no one can find Brian they call you. They always have. They always will." Ben touches Michael's face. I have never in my life seen such love. I was awestruck.

Michael shakes his head. "I'm not...I'm not going."

A surge of energy and courage washes over me.

"I'll go."

Michael spins around and looks at me wide eyed. "A-are you sure?"

I nod. I needed to do this. There were some things I needed to say, anyway. Things I had to tell him. So I could finally be at peace. So I could finally move on.

I smile at Michael and Ben as I move past them out of the bedroom. I run smack into Gus as I step into the hallway. He was standing right next to the door. His eyes are soft and pained. He looks up at me. He wants to say something. He has the look. The same look Brian used to give me when he had a million things on his mind, but no way to get the words out.

"Sorry." We both mumble as I brush past him and thunder down the stairs.

\*\*\*

I pull the loft door open and there is so much pain in my heart, I wasn't sure I was going to make it through this. Just the walk alone to the loft flooded me with so many memories and heartache; I almost turned back like 10 times.

I step inside and quietly slide the door closed. It still looked the same. Same furniture. Same cleanliness. Same white shag rug. Same over sized pillows thrown on the floor. I had been on every inch of this loft. And I was still in the air here. I could sense it. I felt myself here. I walk slowly further inside and take in all that's around me. I glance at the bedroom. Same bed. I sigh. God all I wanted to do was and lie there and fall asleep. I had never slept as well as I did in that bed.

I head toward the living room and notice a large painting on the wall opposite the couch. Fuck. It was one of my paintings. Dark blues swirled together with splatters of red and orange. It was one I had been the most proud of while being in New York. How the hell did he get it?? I shake my head away from the thought and hear a slight snore from the couch.

I turn and find Brian passed out on the couch. One arm tucked underneath his ass, the other across his chest. One of his legs is hanging over the side of the couch and his face is pushed into the back of the couch. His gray speckled hair is in wisps across his sweaty forehead.

I notice 2 empty bottles of Beam. One on the coffee table and the other turned over on the floor. Weed reminiscence scattered on the floor and coffee table as well. Jesus Christ.

I walk closer and stare down at the beautiful creature in front of me. 44 years old and god so fucking beautiful. The lines around his eyes were beyond noticeable now, which probably pissed him more than anyone would understand. I reached my hand out to brush his hair out of his eyes but quickly brought my hand back like I was about to touch fire. Shit.

"Brian?" I touch his shoulder ever so gently. He stirs and his hand falls off the couch and a loud thud echoes through the loft. I look down and find a box had fallen out of his clutched hand. I kneel down and pick it up. What the fuck.....

I open it slowly and I am immediately blinded by shiny platinum. They are, still to this day, the most beautiful pieces of jewelry I had even laid my eyes on. He had kept them....he had fucking kept them.



"Mmmm Good Morning Sunshine." I look down to see Brian slowly waking up. He had the biggest smile spread across his face.

\*\*\*

*I really miss your hair in my face  
And the way your innocence tastes  
And I think you should know this  
You deserve much better than me*

## Chapter 8

It was one of *those* dreams. Sun on my face, blond hair tangled in my fingers, his taste in my mouth, I was buried in him, and it wasn't rushed or passionate – just slow, aching need. I knew I was dreaming. I was near enough to waking up to know that. But I held onto the dream as tightly as I could, willing myself to stay asleep. I didn't have this dream very often anymore, and every time I did I just hoped I'd never wake up. It wouldn't be a bad way to go. Maybe there is an afterlife, and I can spend it with my cock buried in Justin's ass and my tongue in his mouth. I wouldn't mind that.

And now, just like always, I was waking up. The warmth was fading, and I was realizing that I didn't have a blanket covering me, because my feet were cold. But something was different. Usually when I woke up from that dream, there was this ache in my gut, and my dick would be hard, but no amount of masturbation would really fill the need. I'd invariably spend the whole day feeling unsatisfied and frustrated.

But this was different. The feeling of Justin's presence didn't fade completely. It was almost like I could *smell* him. I felt myself smile. It was an unfamiliar feeling. I opened my eyes, and there he was, and I wondered what kind of weird-ass dream *this* was. I sure as hell *felt* awake. "Good morning, sunshine," I said. I wanted to reach up and put my hand on the back of his neck, and kiss him, and *taste* him.

Then I noticed the worried look on his face, and my heart skipped a beat. Fuck. This wasn't a dream at all. He really *was* here. What the fuck was he doing here?! My mind raced as I stared at his face, and the previous day slowly came back to me.

"Shit," I mumbled, and I sat up, running a hand through my hair. "What the fuck are you doing here?" I couldn't look him in the eyes. He didn't say anything, and I felt awkward as fuck. My shirt was unbuttoned and my pants were still on, and I was on the sofa.

What- oh. Right. I looked down and saw the empty bottles and the remainders of weed on the carpet, and remembered. This was *not* how I'd wanted him to see me.

Finally, he responded. "Ted called."

I shut my eyes. Right. I was going to fire him. No, I was going to kill him, and then fire him.

"He was worried, since you didn't show up to work," Justin mumbled.

I couldn't let him see me vulnerable, so I stood up faster than my body wanted to, and tried to smirk. "Well, you missed a great party," I said. I walked over to the kitchen and poured myself a glass of water. I felt like shit, my head was spinning, and I was pretty sure I was going to puke any minute now. But I couldn't let it show.

Justin frowned, like he could see right through me. It made me feel naked, and not in a fun, sexy kind of way.

"So?" I raised my glass and arched an eyebrow at him. "Running errands for Theodore now?"

He sighed and folded his arms. "He called Michael, but..."

Oh. "And?" I leaned against the counter, trying to make it look like I wasn't about to pass out and vomit all over myself.

"Michael didn't want to come." He bit his lower lip before approaching me.

"And you've decided to pick up the torch, hm?" I sipped the water carefully, trying to ignore the churning in my stomach. "Sorry to tell you this, but I don't need a babysitter." Fuck. What the hell was I doing?

He wasn't impressed. "You should talk to Michael."

Okay, *really*? I felt my back tense, which just made my stomach ache more, but I was pissed. "Because you're such a good example of great communication." FUCK. Was I still drunk, or just stupid?!

But he still didn't back down. "Lindsay's gone. Gus barely ever gets to visit, right? You need Michael." He looked around. "At least he'd have kept you from doing *this*."

"Doing what?" I snapped. Now I really was angry. I was hung over, and it was because *he'd* shown back up in my life, and now he was *lecturing* me first thing in the fucking morning?!

"Drinking and smoking yourself into oblivion." He was still calm. I guess five years of putting up with me, despite all the time that had passed, had taught him all too well how to deal with my shit.

"Well-" I started, but I suddenly felt *really* dizzy, and I leaned heavily against the counter, swallowing hard and trying not to puke.

"Brian," he said quietly, and walked over to place a hand on my shoulder. "You're too old to be doing this shit to yourself."

I shut my eyes and laughed bitterly. "Thanks for the reminder."

I could hear the smile in his voice, I didn't need to open my eyes to see it. "If it's any comfort, you're still gorgeous."

Now *that* was more like it. I took a deep, long breath, and stood up straight again. "Of course I am."

He really was grinning, but he looked sad at the same time. "Of course you are."

There was a long pause where we just stared at each other, and I noticed just how much he'd changed, and how much he hadn't. Sure, he'd filled out, his shoulders were broader,

his jaw a little more square; but he probably still got carded half the time because of that golden fucking hair, and those blue fucking eyes, and those cherry fucking lips. Looking at him somehow made the nausea fade, and my chest tight.

"Michael is worried about you. He's just too hurt to tell you himself."

Back to *this*? "He's better off," I mumbled, breaking eye contact. I could only stare directly into the sun for so long, before it was all I could see, and I couldn't afford to go blind again. "Didn't he tell you? I'm an asshole."

"Yes, he did, and no, he's not. He's a mess." Justin gave me a look that might have been amusement, and might have been pity. "Not as much of a mess as you, but..."

"What the fuck am I supposed to say? Sorry that I fucked you just like you wanted? Be careful what you wish for?" I sounded tired. I *was* tired. How the *fuck* did I get into these situations?

Justin shook his head. "Just hug him, and tell him you were an asshole. You don't even have to apologize, he'll know you meant it."

"Funny, I seem to remember being lectured on not saying what I mean," I mumbled, pulling one last joint out of my pocket. I needed *something*, and if I drank more I'd probably end up in the hospital for alcohol poisoning.

Now he looked hurt. Shit. "He loves you."

"I know," I said, lighting the joint. Before I could smoke it, Justin took it, lifting it to his lips, and inhaling deeply.

Fuck, he was hot. Maybe even hotter than before.

He handed it back to me and exhaled slowly before speaking again. "I know that Brian Fucking Kinney can't admit to having made a mistake. I know you feel like shit and blame yourself, and I know it's hard for you to come face to face with someone you care about, and try to fix things."

Was he really talking about Michael?

"But you have to. You need him."

I hesitated, then shrugged and rolled my eyes. "Well, if *you* say so, I guess I had better."

The corners of his lips pulled up into a small grin. "Thanks."

I shrugged again, and put out the joint. Suddenly I didn't feel like I needed it. "I should go to work, or Theodore might scare away all my clients."

"Yeah," Justin said. "One more thing."

I arched an eyebrow at him, and shoved my hands into my pockets. The ache in my gut was fading, and I was suddenly painfully aware of just how close Sunshine was to me. It hurt to not touch him.

"You dropped this." He pulled something out of his pocket and held it out.

Fuck.

The rings.

I shut my eyes and bit the inside of my cheek. There was no fucking way I could explain it.

"I didn't come back here to fuck with you, Brian," he said. I felt him step closer to me, and my hands itched to touch him, and my cock quickly got hard.

I couldn't say anything. The last time I'd let myself relax, not controlled myself, I'd fucked my best friend and ruined everything. I couldn't do that again.

"I gave up a long time ago. But..." he stepped closer again, and now I could *feel* the warmth radiating off of his body. He grasped my wrist and pulled my hand up, placing the soft black box into it. I opened my eyes and he was so close that I could barely focus my eyes on his face. "I understand why you kept these."

I knew I looked skeptical. How could *he* understand it when I didn't?

"You kept them for the same reason I kept your photo in my sketchbook."

Shit. Justin...

I clenched my hand tightly around the box.

"Clean yourself up, go to work, and call Michael. You deserve better than this. Stop treating yourself like shit."

I couldn't let him have the upper hand like this. I couldn't let him get back *inside* me like this. I could already feel it happening. It wasn't like I'd ever really gotten over him, and I knew I never would. He'd made sure of that with that fucking determination of his. But I'd figured out how to live without him. I couldn't go back to that fucking hole that I'd finally crawled out of. I couldn't *feel* so much and not *have* him.

"Before that," I said, turning to walk to the bedroom. "I have something of yours."

He followed me, and I set the rings on top of the safe and unlocked and opened it. I dug through the various envelopes until I found one near the bottom with his name on it. "Here." I stood and handed it to him.

He frowned and opened it, looking confused. "What?"

"Sell it. You'll make enough to get yourself a little condo of your own, and open a gallery or something." I shoved my hands back into my pockets.

His face paled as he looked at the paperwork and the look on his face was pure shock.

Good. It was about time someone else felt like that.

"Brian... what..."

"It's yours." I shrugged. "I told you that before."

"You *kept* it..."

God, he really was shocked. I felt my footing again. This was how it was supposed to be. I was the confident, sure one. "It's in *your* name. I couldn't do anything with it."

"I... I can't..." he started, but I rolled my eyes.

"I don't accept returned gifts. Do whatever the fuck you want with it. Just take it, and shut up."

Hesitantly, he nodded, and walked to the front door. "For what it's worth," he said, once he reached the door. "I still care about you."

I didn't know what to say. I care, too? Fuck. I could barely tell him that when we were *living* together. I wasn't going to say it now, when we were over.

"I still love you. Time doesn't change that."

The air was knocked out of me. I couldn't breathe. Giving him the deed to Britin was supposed to send a pretty clear fucking message. It's over. *We're* over. You don't have to hang around. You don't have to put up with me. You can go. You're free.

I couldn't say anything. I just watched him leave. I watched the door slide shut. I heard the elevator lower. I stood there for a long time.

Then I took a shower, and got dressed, and went to work. I'd call Michael during lunch. Maybe it was time for me to fix things.

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**"Starry nights city lights coming down over me, Skyscrapers and stargazers in my head. Are we we are, are we we are the waiting unknown. This dirty town was burning down in my dreams. Lost and found city bound in my dreams. Forget me nots and second thoughts live in isolation. Heads or tails and fairytales in my mind. Are we we are, are we we are the waiting unknown. The rage and love, the story of my life. And screaming, Are we we are, are we we are the waiting...."**

## **Chapter 9**

As soon as I closed the loft door I wanted to throw it back open and run to him. I wanted to kiss him, hold him; feel him in my arms. He had kept the house. He had kept it. I couldn't stop saying it as I walked up and down Liberty Ave. He thought giving me the deed would push me out his life for good. I knew that. I read the Kinney operating manual. But all this did was make me want him more.

He wanted me to have it.

*"Sell it. You'll make enough to get yourself a little condo of your own, and open a gallery or something. It's yours. I told you that before."*

Sell it? How the fuck could I sell it? I'm not sure I am even going to be able to GO there. What did this mean? He kept the house for 10 fucking years. Jesus. He could have sold it. There were ways around it. He could have just called me and told me; its over we need to sell the house. But he didn't. He kept it.



GOD! What was I doing? I came back here...to....Jesus I have no idea what I came back to do. I had to face the facts. Calvin was right. I moved from New York not because I didn't want to be there. I did it because Brian wasn't there.

*"I still love you. Time doesn't change that."*

I clutch the paperwork in my fist as I make my way toward the diner. I needed to eat. I needed to talk...I needed...FUCK. I needed Deb. I stop dead in my tracks and bring my lips into my mouth. Deb wasn't going to be there. Shit. But it didn't change the fact that I needed her. I hail the first cab I see. I had to talk to her.

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I laid the paper work out in front of me as I sat Indian style in front of Deb's grave. I wanted to show her.

"So what do I do now Deb? Huh? What am I supposed to do now? Sell it? How the fuck can I sell it? Live there? How the FUCK am I supposed to live there? Jesus Christ. Why does he do this shit? Why can't he just tell me he loves me? He misses me?" I smirk. I already knew the answer.

"I know, I know. The same reason I don't."

I could hear Deb now.

*"Sunshine, you know as well as I do the reasons why he does these things. Its his own pride that keeps him prisoner."*

I smile. She was always right. I find it funny in the 2 days I have been back in Pittsburgh I have come to see Debbie more than I have anyone else. I mean, Jesus, I haven't even been to see my own mother yet.

My Mother.

Holy shit. My mind starts to race. Why didn't SHE tell me Brian never sold the house? What the fuck. She must have noticed he didn't contact her to sell it. She must have noticed he never ended up selling the loft. She must have wondered why. Was there more things she knew that she never told me?

FUCK.

I scramble up on my feet and grab the papers and shove them in my coat pocket. I tell Deb goodbye and I missed her and make a silent plea that she would give me strength through all this. She always had before. I knew she wouldn't let me down this time.

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I opened the front door to my mother's house and slammed the door. I was so angry I could break something. I find her sitting on the couch, with Molly by her side. They were deep in conversation. I didn't care. I had some questions I needed answers to.

"Why didn't YOU TELL ME!?" I scream at her as I throw the deed to Britin at her. A shocked look comes over her face. She hadn't even known I was in town. I hadn't had to guts to call her yet and tell her I had run home, scared of the big bad city.

"Justin! What are you doing here?!" She smiles at me and I wince at her excitement. Molly jumps up and throws her arms around me. I pat her back gently but don't give her the full hug she deserved and that I wanted to give her. I was too hurt and enraged to even think straight.

"Why didn't you tell me he didn't sell it!? All this time I thought he had moved on. I thought I was doing the right thing staying in New York. He didn't sell the house Mom! He didn't sell it. I could have come home years ago. I wasted so much time...I wasted..."

Tears are streaming down my face now and I sit down in the chair next to the couch. My mother looks at the papers I had thrown at her and her face drops. Now she knows what I am talking about.

"Oh honey. I didn't tell you because he told me not to. I promised." She extends the papers back toward me.

"You promised? YOU PROMISED??!! I'm your goddamn son. What about promises to me?!" I can feel the veins in my neck starting to pulsate.

"Honey calm down. What is this all about? And I have to ask again, what on earth are you doing here?" She comes and kneels down in front of me and puts her hand on my

cheek. I instantly calm down. My mother had that way about her. Only one other person could do that to me.

"I...needed to come home Mom. I needed to feel like I was me again. I hated it there." I am sobbing now.

"Shhhh...ok ok. It's ok. Come here." My mother pulls me into one of her world famous hugs and I throw my arms around her like I am 6 years old again and I had fallen off my bike and skinned my knee. Except this time the pain was internal and couldn't be healed by a band-aid.

She pulls back and wipes my tears with the back of her hand. "Your gonna be ok. And as for Brian...I..." She takes a deep breath. "Who knows why he does what he does. He kept the house. Why I have no idea. He just told me never to tell you. And I figured when you had told me it was over between the two of you all that time ago, I figured it was for the best not to tell you."

I nod. She was right. She was just trying to protect me.

"I'm sorry I yelled." I attempt a smile at her through my tears. She smiles and kisses my forehead.

She stands and I finally get a hold of myself. "So what are you doing here Mollusk?" I ask my little sister. Her eyes widen and she looks at my mother. My mothers smile soon fades. What the hell was going on?

"Honey, well. It's your father." My mother says sitting beside Molly on the couch.

"What about him?" I ask. My heart starts to pound harder and harder with each breath.

"He's sick honey. He had a massive heart attack last night. He is on a respirator. They want to do a triple bypass but they aren't sure its even going to work. His heart is just too weak."

I actually feel myself stop breathing for a second. My father.

Well he wasn't much of a father. I had spoken to him once in the 10 years I lived in New York. I had called Molly on her birthday and she was out to dinner with him. She put him on the phone and we had a 30 second conversation. Literally. He said he had heard I moved to New York and was still painting. He didn't say he was proud. He didn't say much of anything except he knew. Fucking bastard.

"Doesn't matter." I finally say and shrug my shoulders as I lean back in the chair.

"Justin he's your father." My mother's eyes get sad.

"Right." I snort. "Some father. He fucking hates me."

"No, he doesn't. He loves you. You're his son." My mother tries to take my hand in hers but I pull away and stand up abruptly.

"Fuck that. He hasn't wanted anything to do with me for almost 15 years. And now just because he is sick I'm supposed to care? I'm supposed to run and sit by his bedside and hold his hand. Well you can forget it. I'll ignore him the same way he has ignored me all these years. I-" I'm starting to cry again. "-I gotta go."

I brush past my mother and leave the house with a slam of the front door.

Again I felt like I couldn't breath. Today was not a good day for breathing. I wish I still had my inhalers. What a good time NOT to have them. I could be so dumb sometimes.

How could my mother even THINK I would care that my father was sick? After everything?? After disowning me and having me ARRESTED? And now that he is sick I am just supposed to forget all about that and forgive and forget? The truth was though, I

wanted to forgive and forget. I wanted to see him and have him tell me how proud he was of me. That's all I ever wanted from him. His approval and love.

I should get a cab I thought, but I didn't. I just started to run. I ran down street after street, out of the suburbs of my mother's neighborhood and back into the heart of Pittsburgh. It was starting to get dark and my dark coat probably wasn't helping the people who were driving see me any better. But I didn't care.

And so I ran. I had never run so fast in my life. And for once I knew exactly where I was going. There was no doubt. I ran to the only place I had ever known for sure I belonged. The only place I felt safe. To the only person who had ever made me feel like I was alive.

And as I banged on the door I held my breath and prayed he'd know what I needed.

.....

**There's some things in this world  
you just can't change  
Some things you can't see  
until it gets too late**

## **Chapter 10**

Michael was probably the person I should have fallen in love with. He was always there. He was loyal. He never would have tried to change me. He would put up with my shit, and never leave, no matter what I did. He would have loved me completely and honestly and openly, and never wavered.

He would have been fucking miserable. And I would have stayed exactly like I was.

I was glad I hadn't fallen for Mikey. He was happy with the professor, and he was being treated far better than I ever would have.

But right now, while I sat there in the diner, staring across the table at him, wondering what to say, I regretted never having fallen for him. It was selfish and stupid, but my life would have been so much fucking easier if things had gone that way.

And even up until I'd fucked him, he would have done anything for me. Despite being married, despite having Ben, if I'd asked him to run away with me, I think he might have done it.

Now it was too late.

I didn't love him. Not like that. And I was glad he didn't love me anymore. But the weak part of me, the part that was sick of all the pain, wished things had gone differently.

"I'm sorry," I finally said.

Michael leaned back and the scowl he'd had on his face softened.

"I was an asshole."

He nodded and smirked just a little. "You always are."

I didn't wince. He was right. I always was. "I didn't mean to fuck things up."

"You mean you didn't mean to fuck *me*." He arched an eyebrow at me and gave me the kind of looks I normally gave *him*.

"Yeah." I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"It's okay," he said, and he folded his hands on the table, finally relaxing completely on his side of the booth. "I know it didn't mean anything."

I bit my lower lip. "It didn't mean nothing." After all, I loved him. I'd fucked people I didn't even know. Having sex with Michael was... weird. But it wasn't nothing. It was just weird.

He ducked his head and grinned a little, and shrugged. "No. It didn't mean nothing."

"Tell Ben I'm sorry." I could have Michael pass that along, but I wasn't going to tell the professor directly. There was only so much apologizing I could do.

"He says you don't have to apologize to him," Michael said, looking back up at me.

"Oh, then I won't," I replied, and I smirked.

Michael rolled his eyes, but he was grinning. "I'm the one that had to apologize to Ben. I'm the one that fucking cheated on him. I'm such an asshole."

"Well, if it helps any, you can tell him I drugged you and took advantage of your weakened state." I felt myself slowly relax.

Michael gave me an amused look. "Yeah. You sort of *did*."

Oops. I tried to look innocent. "It's not my fault you can't hold your liquor."

Michael reached across the table and smacked me across the face, just like Debbie had done to him so many times.

I rubbed my cheek. "Ow."

He looked just a little smug. "I forgive you."

"Well, you'd better, I just fucking made an ass of myself apologizing to you."

He laughed, and I knew it was over. It was fine. Damn Sunshine for being right. I was fucking relieved.

"You're paying for lunch, right?"

Oh, now he was pushing it. I rolled my eyes. "I suppose so." I was about to say something witty and ridiculous to make him laugh and get rid of the last of the tension, when I heard something that completely distracted me.

"Um, excuse me, do you know Justin Taylor?"

What the fuck.

I looked over at the counter, where a boy stood, trying to get one of the waitress's attention.

"Excuse me? Hey! Um..."

He was fucking timid, that was for damn sure. His brown hair was cut too short, and his hoodie had dried paint on it, but from where I sat, his ass made up for all of that. And then he turned around and looked around the room, and I smirked. Oh, yeah. He was young, alright; almost too young for me to even be thinking about, but he was hot. And he was looking for Sunshine.

"Uh, kid?" Michael said, standing. "You're looking for someone?"

The boy smiled at Michael and nodded. "Yeah, Justin Taylor, do you know him?"

Mikey glanced at me and sat back down before responding. I just shrugged. "Yeah. Sort of."

"Oh, good." The kid looked relieved. "I wasn't sure how I was going to find him."



"Are you a friend of his?" Michael asked, and I sat back, analyzing the boy. He was *maybe* in his mid-20s, tops, and I was guessing he was a recent fuck. Good job, Sunshine.

"I'm his boyfriend. Name's Calvin."

Oh.

Michael's eyes widened and he turned to give me a worried look, like I was going to spontaneously burst into flame. I meant to shrug again, or do something to show that I didn't give a damn. The problem was, I *did* give a damn. And I couldn't make myself move.

"Uh, I'm Michael," Mikey said, not taking his eyes off of me.

I reminded myself to keep breathing, and tried to ignore the way my palms were sweating.

"And uh... that's Brian," Michael said, as if that should mean anything to the kid. I didn't expect it to. I had a feeling Sunshine didn't go around telling everyone about me. I wouldn't have.

But apparently I was wrong, because the boy's eyes narrowed and he frowned, and he looked me up and down for a moment before saying, "*You're* Brian?"

Uh, what the fuck does that mean? "That's me." Casual. Look casual.

"But you're so... *old*."

It took everything I had not to lunge across the table slam the kid's head into the table. I could see Michael wincing, like he expected me to do just that. Instead, I just grit my teeth and glared back.

"Why the fuck would he come back here for *you*?"

"Got dumped, huh?" I smirked, and my voice sounded bitter and full of venom. This kid was seriously pissing me the fuck off.

He winced, and shrugged. "Not for long."

I rolled my eyes. "Right. Good luck with that."

"You can't fucking keep him, you know. I heard all about the way you are. You fuck around, you're chemically dependent... you're an asshole."

Michael covered his mouth with his hand and coughed, trying not to laugh. Dick.

"It seems my reputation proceeds me." I arched an eyebrow at him. "But I don't recall anything about *keeping* anyone."

"Don't give me that crap," he said, and I rolled my eyes. "He came back here to be with *you*. I don't know *why*, but he did."

Yeah. A lot of people seemed to think that. Unfortunately for me, it wasn't true.  
"Actually, no."

"Then why *did* he?!" Now the kid was pissed, which just pissed me off more.

"How the fuck should I know?" I spat. Shit.

"Uh, look, don't you have his phone number? You could call him..." Michael said weakly.

"He... isn't answering when I call," the kid mumbled.

I snorted. "Well, it's about fucking time he had his own little stalker." But I didn't mean it. I didn't like the idea of this boy following Sunshine around all the time. Not that it was any of my business. We weren't together. We weren't going to *be* together. But I still didn't like it.

"Well uh... I can let him know you're looking for him," Michael said. "Here, write down your number." Michael pushed a napkin towards him, and I scowled at him. He shrugged sheepishly.

"Can't you just take me to him?" the boy asked. He looked pathetic. I wanted to kick him. I wanted to strangle him. I wanted... to be way less fucking crazy.

"Uh, sorry..." Michael mumbled. I didn't blame him. I'd be pissed if he'd given out my address to every fucking twink that showed up wanting more.

"Please?" Oh great, now he looked like he was going to cry. "I love him. And he must love me! We were together for four years!"

Fuck. Me.

My stomach lurched, and I shut my eyes. I couldn't handle the concerned look on Michael's face. I couldn't handle looking at this fucking *kid* that had been with *my* Sunshine for that long.

MY?

I was so fucked.

But four fucking *years*?!

I *wasn't* jealous. Brian Kinney didn't *get* jealous.

But the thought of Sunshine being with him every day for four years, fucking him, kissing him, sleeping with him, *touching* him... A fuck was a fuck, but four years...

Maybe Brian Kinney *did* get jealous.

"Uh, look... I'll tell him you're looking for him, and I'll try to get him to call you," Michael mumbled. I could feel the booth shift as he stood, and he placed a hand on my arm. "C'mon, Brian."

I inhaled deeply and stood up, trying not to look at the kid who was giving us such a lost, hurt look. The kid that had been with Sunshine for four years. The kid that loved him enough to follow him here and beg strangers to help him.

I hadn't gone to New York after that fight. I hadn't even called him. I hadn't done shit except for give up and feel sorry for myself.

Maybe this Calvin was the one he was better off with, after all.

We were outside before I realized it, and Michael was shaking me. "Hey! Snap out of it!"

I blinked and tried to grin at him. "What?"

"Look, he *left* Calvin. He left him, they're not together anymore. It doesn't matter--"

"That's right. It doesn't matter." I straightened my shirt and shrugged. "Because it's none of my goddamn business."

"Brian..." Michael was worried about me. He had good reason to be.

I grinned at him briefly before walking to my car. "Sorry. I'll buy you lunch some other time. I've got to go."

Michael hesitated, then nodded. "Okay."

I got in my car and drove back to work. When I got there, I went directly to my office, locked myself in, and didn't come out until it was time to leave.

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The loft was quiet when I got home. Gus must have not come back yet. Poor kid. He probably wasn't sure if it was safe to return, or if I was still passed out on the floor. I considered calling him, and then decided not to. He could take care of himself. I had no right to check up on him after last night.

I went to the bedroom and opened my closet, pulling out my tight jeans and my sleeveless red shirt. I was going to Babylon tonight, and not as the owner. I needed to dance and get laid, and that was the place to do it. I didn't do this very often anymore. I didn't really have the urge to. I'd proven myself a long time ago, and I didn't need to fuck half of Pittsburgh just to show them I was hot.

But I could still get any ass I wanted. It had been a relief to realize that even after I'd turned 40, no one turned me down. I guess Michael was right; I'd always be beautiful. Thank god I had that, if nothing else.

I was almost ready to go. I ran a comb through my hair and glanced at myself in the mirror.

"I'd fuck me." I smirked. Yes, I still had it.

I was determined to have a good evening. I was going to find the hottest guy at Babylon and fuck his brains out in the back room. I was going to –

Then I heard the knock on my door. It was urgent, it was panicked. It was Justin. I'd know that knock anywhere.

I went to the door and slid it open, ready to tell him to fuck off, to get lost, to stop messing with me, to leave me the fuck alone. He didn't need me or want me. He'd told me that nine years ago. Go the fuck away.

But the moment I saw him, I forgot completely.

"It's my father... my dad..."

He was a mess. He was barely breathing. He was gasping for air. He was sweaty and exhausted and pale. He was almost hysterical. He was crying.

I was kissing him before I even realized it. One hand behind his neck, one hand on the small of his back, I pulled him as close and tight to me as I could, and I kissed him. My tongue was in his mouth, and I could taste him, *really* taste him for the first time in what... almost ten fucking years?

He moaned and wrapped his arms around my neck, and I pushed him up against the door, and he wrapped a leg around my hips and it was all I could do to not rip off his clothes and fuck him right there.

God, he tasted incredible.

My head was swimming with his scent, and I heard him whimper, and I broke the kiss.

We stayed like that while we both caught our breath, panting loudly. His eyes were glassy and his lips were parted and swollen.

I could have done anything to him.

But I knew this feeling. This wasn't love. This was comfort. Something had happened, and he was fucked up, and he wanted someone to hold him. Maybe he even wanted it to be me. But I wouldn't fuck him, even though every cell in my body screamed out for it. This was too much like what had happened between me and Michael.

He needed me, and I was going to be there. But I wouldn't fuck him. Not like this.

I pressed my forehead to his, and inhaled his scent deeply. Finally, I found my voice again. "What happened?"

**I got a hole in me now  
I got a scar I can talk about**

**Some things in this world  
they don't make sense  
Some things you don't need  
until they leave you  
And they're things that you miss**

.....

**"All these people drinking lover's spit.**

**They sit around and clean their face with it.**

**And they listen to teeth to learn how to quit.**

**Tied to a night they never met.**

**You know it's time that we grow old and do some shit.."**

## **Chapter 11**

I couldn't tell you who kissed whom first. And it really didn't matter. As soon as I saw him, as soon as the door was pushed open and our eyes met nothing mattered. Somehow through my lack of air I got the words out.

"My father...my dad."

And before I knew it our lips and tongues were tangled in a feverish dance. I was practically climbing him like a tree and his hand on the back of my neck just gave him more leverage to push my mouth closer to his. He pushed me up against the loft door and our hardening cocks rubbed against each other through binding denim. I wanted him. I wanted him to rip my clothes off and take me on the floor right there. This is what I came for. I needed to feel something. Something that what I felt right now.

He wasn't kissing me out of love. He was kissing me out of need. The same reason I was kissing him. Need and want. Right now love had nothing to do with it. When he finally pulls back, I couldn't breathe any better than I had when I showed up at the door. We both pant and catch our breath, our hands never leaving each other's bodies. My arms were still wrapped around his neck, my fingers lost in his hair. His hand was placed perfectly on the small of my back, pinned against the wall. He leans his forehead against mine and finds a small breath to speak.

"What happened?"

I swallow, taking mine and his saliva down my throat.

"My dad. He had a heart attack. He may not make it. I went to go see my mom..." Tears well in my eyes and he brings me against his body with one soft pull. I breathe in his scent. A mix of cologne, (not the same kind he wore when we were together. No, this kind was new), cigarettes and gum. It smelled like heaven.

"Ok. Ok. Calm down." His voice is deep and demanding but nothing in the world could make me feel any better than the sound escaping his throat right now. He leans his cheek against mine and softly whispers in my ear, "Come on, I'll take you to see him."

I pull back and shake my head like I was trying to rattle my eyes out of my head.

"No. No. I don't want to see him. I don't care if he's sick."

Brian snorts. "Right. Clearly you don't care."

"I don't!" I start to yell and brush past him and walk more into the loft. "I don't care. Why should I? He obviously hasn't cared about me the past, I don't know 15 years. So why should I?" Tears are still stinging in my eyes. I looked up at the ceiling to keep them from flowing down my cheeks. Shit. This wasn't working at all.

Brian starts toward me and plants himself right in front of me. He takes my face in his hands and presses his lips against the side of my face. I could die right now and have no regrets.



"You have to go Justin. Even if it's just to finally give him one last fuck you. Show him how far you have come and it didn't matter if he was supportive or around to see it or not. You made it. You survived. Without him." His words finally let the floodgates overflow. I wrap my arms around him and sob into his chest.

"Why Brian? Why isn't he proud of me?" Brian's hands go immediately to my hair, like they had years and years ago to comfort me. He knew with his fingers in my hair, there was nothing else in the world that mattered. It soothed me and comforted me. And I also knew, whether he wanted me to or not he loved doing it as much as I loved having it done.

"You're hair is long." His voice is almost unheard through my sniffles and sobs. I look up at him and his lips are turned upward. It's not a smile. But it's more than a smirk. It was....just Brian. I lick my lips and reach up to meet him. He closes his eyes before my lips even reach him. I hear him suck in his breath. His lips are hot and tender, still swollen from the furious kissing we had done minutes ago. I just wanted to feel him again. He returned the sentiment. He finally let his body relax and we are now sharing the most intimate kiss I think we had ever had.

The kiss lingering and with our lips barely touching he says against me, "Come on Sunshine. I'll take you." I nod into him and he breaks away from me and my heartbreaks. I know he is only going a few feet but now that I was this close to him again, a few feet felt like an eternity.

He grabs his jacket off the coat rack and slides the loft door open. There behind the door was Gus.

"Where are *you* going?" He asks stepping into the loft. His eyes fall on me, and he stops.

Brian looks between me, and his son and for once in his life I think he may be speechless.

"A-are you ok?" Gus asks me. To say I was shocked was an understatement.

I nod at Gus and wipe the remaining tears from my face.

"His dad is sick. I'm gonna take him to go see him." Brian says gently to his son and ruffles his shaggy hair. I wonder when he did that if it ever reminded him of me.

Gus nods, never taking his eyes off me. Was that sympathy in his eyes? He shook his head, almost to rid himself out of his feelings. Just like Brian. Never let them see you care.

"You gonna be ok here?" Brian asks stepping out into the hall.

"I'm 15. Not handicapped." Gus lashes back.

"Same difference." Brian smirks. He waves his hand at me. "Lets go."

I walk slowly to him and my eyes meet Gus's. A small smile spreads across his lips. There it was. My approval.

I nod and smile at him. I let it be a real smile, because I felt it. I felt happy for just a moment.

"Now I know why they call you Sunshine." Gus mumbles.

Brian whirls around and stares at his son, as my eyes get as wide as dinner plates.

Without another word Gus drops his book bag onto the floor and heads toward the fridge. I look at Brian as he takes my hand and leads me out of the loft. I was going to be ok. I had Brian after all.

---

Brian held my hand the entire time he drove to the hospital. He had his arm around me as we rode the elevator up to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor cardiac wing. And he held my hand as I asked the nurse which room Craig Taylor was in. He never left my side. I see my mother standing outside my father's room and she looks relieved when she see's me. I hug her when I reach her and she sighs into me. I hug Molly next, the hug I should have given her earlier in the day when I saw her. It felt good to be home. When I release Molly from my hug I see my mother and Brian sharing their own moment. They had their arms around each other in the warmest embrace I had ever witnessed. Brian had his face

nuzzled in her shoulder. These were the same hugs he used to give Deb. And I know now, he felt the same way about my mother as he did Michael's.

"Thank you for bringing him. I knew he wouldn't come alone." She whispers to him.

He nods and pulls away from her. He immediately goes for my hand again and I let him intertwine his fingers in mine. God, it felt SO good to be home.

"How is he?" I ask staring at my father through the large observation window.

"He finally woke up and they removed his breathing tube. They want to run more tests before they decide about the surgery." My mother tells me. I take a deep breath and let go of Brian's hand and walk toward the hospital room door. I glance back at Brian and he smiles at me. He knew I had to do this.

As I approach my father's bed, the constant beeping from his monitors echoed my own heartbeat. A wave of courage washes over me and I knew it was now or never.

"Dad?" I ask as I reach his bedside.

He rolls his head to the side and slowly opens his eyes.

"What do you want?" He grumbles. Fucking asshole.

"I came to tell you a few things." I say calmly.

"And what's that? That you're not a fag anymore? That you have come to your senses? That you stopped with all that painting nonsense and got a real job?" His voice is hoarse and he can barely get the words out. God, even on his deathbed he could still find the words to insult me.

"No Dad I came to tell you that I'm still a fag. And I'm proud of who I am. I came to tell you that I still paint and I'm damn good at it. I even opened my own gallery in New York. I've made something of myself and I did it with out you. I did it without your money, or your support. And I thought maybe I would be the better person and come here and

offer my love and support to you when you needed it most." My voice is quivering because quite frankly it killed me to see my father this way. As much as I hated him, I loved him just as much. He was my father. Nothing would change that.

"Well good for you Justin. You had your fucking pedophile boyfriend pay your way through school and now you sell your ridiculous paintings to people who wouldn't know art if it spit on them. And as for me, I don't need your support. I'll be fine." He rolls his head to the other side and I see his fingers clench into fists.

I lean down and kiss his forehead gently. "I tried Dad. So did Mom. But we just weren't good enough. We didn't meet your approval. I guess Molly is the only one you are proud of. Maybe she will be the only one here by your bedside when you take your last breath. Cause you have made that choice, not me."

I knew those would be the last words I ever spoke to my father.

~~

When I leave my fathers room, my mother quickly brings me into her arms. I feel Brian's hand on my back and I felt safe and warm. I pull away from my mothers grasp and see a familiar face walking up the hallway toward us.

"Calvin?" I whisper.

My mother follows my own gaze and she smiles. "Yea honey. He called me this afternoon after you left. He's been so worried about you. I told him what happened and I told him if he wanted to see you he should come here."

"Mom! How could you do that??" I say through clenched teeth.

"Well Justin, he's your boyfriend." My mother brushes my hair out of my eyes. Oh fuck. What had he told her?

"No. No he's not Mom." I walk to Calvin and my blood boiling

"Justin! Thank god. I've been trying to find you." He tries to hug me and I push him away.

"What are you doing here? You need to go back to New York. Now." My voice is stern. He needed to understand I meant what I was telling him.

"No Justin. Not without you. This is ridiculous. I'll stay with you until your Dad gets better than we can go home." He has hope in his eyes and he has never reminded me so much of myself until this moment.

"No Calvin. Listen to me ok. It's over. I don't love you. I care about you. A lot but I don't love you. You deserve someone who is gonna love you. And it's not me. I belong here. I belong in Pittsburgh."

I see lighting flash in his eyes. "You want to be in Pittsburgh cause of HIM!" He screams and points to Brian a few feet from us. Brian raises an eyebrow and looks at us. He points to himself and makes the 'who me?' face. I have to smile at that. Same old Brian.

"It doesn't matter why Calvin. I'm moving back. And you're staying in New York. I'm sorry." I bring my hand to his face and he smacks it away. Ow. Bastard.

"It's been 10 fucking years!! You can't tell me you still LOVE him?" His eyes are pained and I feel so badly for him, I almost agree to go back to New York just so he doesn't have to feel any more pain. No one should feel like this because of me. I'm not worth all this.

I look over at Brian who is leaning against the wall, hands in his pockets a calm look on his face. I do still love him. Probably now more 10 years later. Without taking my eyes off Brian I tell Calvin, "It was only time."

Brian winces at my comment and looks down at the ground.

When I finally turn back to face Calvin he was already half way up the corridor, walking away.

"Calvin!" I yell after him. "I'm sorry." It's all I can think to say to him. I bring my hands to my face and groan. Jesus Christ. 'Is there anything else that could possibly happen tonight?' I think to myself.

I head back toward where my mother and molly are standing outside my father's room. But Brian was missing.

"Where...." I begin to ask my mother. Her face is a mixture of panic and hope.

"Mom?" I ask.

"He went in to see your father."

\*\*\*

**Every time when I look in the mirror  
All these lines and my face getting clearer  
The past is gone  
In the night, like dusk to dawn  
Isn't that the way  
Everybody's got the dues in life to pay**

## **Chapter 12**

"Craig," I said, waltzing into his room. I shut the door behind myself, and pulled a chair up to the side of his bed. It was about time I did this.

His eyes took a moment to focus, and when he finally recognized me, he looked disgusted. "You."

"That's right." I smiled and cocked my head at him. "I thought we could have a little chat, Craig."

"Go the fuck away." He turned his head, as if that was going to stop *me*. No, he was going to hear what I had to say.

"Hmm." I put a finger to my chin, as if I were considering it. "No." My smile dropped, and he glanced back at me just in time to see it. "I've got a few things to say to you, Craig. Now, we can do this the easy way, where you listen patiently, and then I leave you alone. Or we can do it the hard way, where I start poking you with these needles, here." I indicated the drawer on the other side of the room containing medical supplies.

His eyes narrowed, and I could tell he wanted to call me on it, but he wasn't sure I wasn't serious. Good call, Craig. Brian Kinney didn't lie about shit like that.

"Alright." I sat forward, leaning an elbow on the side table next to his bed. "Here's the thing. Justin is your son, and you might *die* tonight."

He paled slightly. "They said-"

"They said that you might die, Craig," I said firmly. "Don't shit yourself."

He looked away, frowning. Asshole couldn't even face his own mortality gracefully.

"I know that to you, I'm just the pedophile who molested your little boy and brought him into a life of sin and debauchery." I chuckled. "Well, that's not entirely untrue. But the thing is, Craig, you should be a little less obsessed with the kind of sex your son likes, and a little more interested in fixing things with him before you die."

"I'm not listening to this. You're just a perverted asshole... I should have fucking killed you back when I rammed into your car." He wasn't speaking clearly, and he wasn't making eye contact, but he was still saying it. The guy had balls. Little balls... but balls.

"Yeah. You should have. You should have killed me while you had the chance. That would have saved me a whole lot of trouble. But you didn't, and here we are, fifteen years later, and I'm still around." I smirked at him.

"You weren't. His mother told me that you'd let him go. You even canceled that *joke* of a wedding."

My entire body tensed up, and for a moment my control faded, and I was certain I was going to kill him. How *dare* he fucking bring that up.

"I thought he might come back to his senses, but... he just went to New York to become a faggot artist." He said the word 'artist' the same way that he said 'faggot.'

I breathed deeply before speaking. I couldn't let him get to me. "Oh, I let him go. I let him go tons of times. The problem is, he keeps coming *back*. Like this week, for example. He came back. After ten fucking years of not speaking to him, he's suddenly back in my life. And you know what, Craig?"

He just scowled at me, resigned to his fate. He was going to have to listen to every fucking thing I had to say.

"I'm pretty sure that despite having not spoken for ten years, and all the shit between us, and despite the fact that he could find a guy *much* better than me to waste his life with, I'm pretty sure that tonight we're going to fuck."

He looked disgusted. I tried not to grin.

"See, he's real upset about you being such a humongous asshole and being about to die and all, and he's going to want comfort. And you know who he turns to when he wants comfort? Me. I don't fucking know why, but he does."

"I'm *not* going to die, and you'd better not lay a fucking *finger* on him!"

Ooh, now he was mad.

"Oh, Craig, it's a little too late for you to have a say in it." I smiled. "Now, if you hadn't ended up in the hospital tonight, I'm pretty sure things wouldn't have gone this way. I was basically ready to tell him to fuck off, and ignore him for the rest of my life. Like I said, he could find some other guy who'd be *much* better for him than me. But now he's



upset, and *believe me*, when Sunshine's upset, the best thing to cheer him up is a lot of *fucking*."

"You... asshole!" He struggled to sit up, as if he was going to strangle me, and I chuckled and shook my head.

"Now, now, Craig, you don't want to have another heart attack. I hear those hurt *really* bad."

He lay back, breathing heavily, his face red.

"So here's my point, and then I'll leave you to your pathetic little life, whatever's left of it. I'm going to hang around here, until Sunshine wants to go. And then, if what I'm suspecting is right, he's going to want to go home with me. And I'm going to fuck him. And I'm going to suck his cock, and lick his ass, and make him come so hard, he forgets about his asshole father who only gave him grief."

Now he was trembling. He wanted to hurt me. He wanted to *strangle* me. Good. The feeling was mutual.

I leaned in, and put my hand around his throat, and squeezed ever so slightly. Our faces were close together, and I was practically growling. "And if you live to see the light of day, you are going to fucking *apologize* to him for being such a useless fucking *asshole*. He's a better person that you could ever fucking imagine, and he doesn't need to deal with the bullshit you're putting him through for the rest of his life." I tightened my grip around his throat slightly. "Do we understand each other?"

I released him, and he coughed a few times before responding.

"You're the one at fault here, not me! You *ruined* him!"

I shook my head and stood up, putting my hands in my pockets. "No, I haven't *ruined* Justin. If anyone's tried to do that, it's *you*. Luckily, he hasn't let you."

I walked towards the door, then turned to grin menacingly at him. "Oh, and Craig? I meant that about the apology. If you survive the night, and you *don't* apologize to him within a week, I *will* make sure you regret it."

I was pretty sure I'd gotten my point across, so I opened the door and walked out, shutting it behind me.

Outside his room, Justin and his family stood. They looked anxious. I smirked. "We had a little chat."

Jennifer smiled nervously at me before going into his room. I shrugged at Justin and Molly and stuffed my hands in my pockets. "What?" I tried to look innocent.

Molly shook her head and ran a hand through her hair. "Brian Fucking Kinney. What the hell are you doing here, anyway?"

I arched an eyebrow at her. "What, aren't you glad to see me?"

She grinned and rolled her eyes. "I can't even imagine what you just said to my poor father."

I could see Justin out of the corner of my eye. He winced. It'd always been hard on him that Molly and their father got along.

"Oh, Molly, you know I wouldn't say anything *inappropriate*." I smirked back at her.

"Actually, Brian, I'm pretty sure you're *always* inappropriate." She glanced at Justin, then at me, and gave me a pointed look. I knew what she was trying to get across. She didn't want me hurting her brother. She didn't have anything to worry about. Justin would be fine. I'd make sure of it.

"Brian," Justin said softly. I turned to look at him. He was pale. "Let's go."

I considered it. "Don't you want to stick around until we know if they're going to operate?"

He shook his head. I nodded and glanced around for Calvin before putting an arm around his shoulders. "Come on, I'll take you back to Mikey's."

He told Molly to have his mother call him on his cel if anything happened. She nodded, and we walked down the hall towards the elevators. God, I hated hospitals. I'd been here too many fucking times in my life. First because of my asshole father, then because of Justin, and then Michael... The only good thing that had come out of this place was Gus, and I firmly believed Melanie could have delivered him herself. (She new all about cunts, after all, and the stuff that came out of them.) Hospitals were bullshit.

Once the elevator doors shut, Justin leaned his head against my shoulder. It felt good. I pulled him close and wrapped my arms around him, resting my chin on the top of his head. This wasn't going to last, and I knew it, but I also knew that I was fucked. So I might as well be there for him, and be what he needed me to be. Besides, it felt incredible.

"Take me home with you," Justin whispered. I almost couldn't hear him, with his face pressed into my chest.

I shut my eyes and sighed. I knew it. "Are you sure?"

He nodded weakly and I tightened my arms around him. "Okay."

The ride home was too long, and not long enough. My hand held his the entire drive home, and every time I glanced at him, he was staring at me. Great. Pressure, much?

We rode the elevator up in silence, holding hands. I wasn't going to start anything. It was up to him. Besides, I was going to have to kick Gus out, first. The loft wasn't exactly built for privacy, which had seemed like a good idea when I originally set it up, and now just seemed like a pain.

I opened the door, and glanced around. Gus was nowhere to be seen. Justin wouldn't let go of my hand, so I led him to the kitchen, where a note was taped to the fridge.

"Dad,

Went to Uncle Emmet's for the night.

Fuck him senseless.

-Gus"

"Little brat," I grumbled, and snatched the note off the fridge, crumpling it up. I glanced at Justin, not sure how he'd react to that, but he was actually grinning. "Oh, so this is funny to you?"

His grin widened, and he nodded. "Yeah."

I tried to grin back, but all I could think, was how he had tasted just a few hours ago, and how good his skin felt against mine, and how if I went through with this, I'd just be throwing myself back into that pit and I'd probably never get out again.

If I was smart, I'd make him sleep on the sofa. It was the only way to protect myself from spending the rest of my life in a state of pathetic depression.

But when he leaned up to kiss me, I didn't resist. I wrapped an arm around his waist, and kissed him back gently. He needed this. He needed me. I knew it wasn't permanent, and I knew it was just for tonight. But I didn't care.

Right now all I cared about was the fact that he was *here*, pressed up against me, kissing me, touching me. My heart was racing and my head was spinning, and it took every last bit of self control I had to not just bend him over a counter and take him. I'd imagined this too many times, dreamed about it, jerked off to it, and now he was *here* and it was almost impossible to be *gentle* with him. But I had to. At least until he said otherwise.

When he broke the kiss, I was breathing heavily, and I felt warm all over. My cock was hard and throbbing, and those fucking jeans were tighter than I thought they were, because it almost *hurt* to be squeezed into them.

I ran a hand through Justin's hair, and didn't back away. Our lips were still close enough that I could feel his breath. But I had to know for sure. I couldn't fuck him when he was vulnerable, just to find out later that he regretted it.

"Brian." It was more of a whimper than a statement, and I swallowed a groan. "Please."

I tried to grin, but my lips wouldn't respond. "Please, what?"

"Touch me," he said quietly. He wrapped his arms around my shoulders, and brought his lips to my ear. "Make me *feel*. I haven't felt anything in ten years."

Fuck.

I slid my hand out of his hair and rested it on the back of his neck. Suddenly I felt like I was 29 again, and he was 17, and it was like no time had passed. He was still this vulnerable boy who *needed* me, even if it was just for this. My left hand slid down his back slowly, and rested on his ass.

He whimpered into my ear, and my grip tightened on him. Fuck. But I still hesitated. I didn't want to hurt him. I didn't want to-

And then he moaned into my ear, "I want you inside me."

And it was over. I heard someone moan, and realized distantly that it was probably me, and I didn't care. All I cared about right now was that he wasn't naked and beneath me, and that was *wrong*.

I ducked my head and kissed the nape of his neck, before biting down on it gently. Now *he* was moaning, and my cock was throbbing harder, and I was gripping his ass with one hand and undoing the button on his jeans with the other.

He stumbled back as his pants fell to the floor, and I stepped forward, pressing his body between mine and the counter. His cock was hard in his underwear, and I pressed my knee between his legs, spreading them. He groaned and pressed himself against my thigh and kissed me.

I slid a hand down his back and then back up it, under his shirt. His skin was smooth and soft and I wanted *more* of it right *now*, so I broke the kiss long enough to yank off his shirt, and duck my head to run my tongue down his neck and chest.

He was letting out these small gasps, and his hands caught my shirt, and tugged it off of me as I reached a nipple, running the tip of my tongue around it and sucking hard. He tasted incredible. I wanted *more*, so I slid lower, licking my way down his stomach, and tugging his underwear down at the same time.

Brian Fucking Kinney didn't give just anyone head. But right now I wanted his cock in my mouth, and to hear the noises I knew he made when I blew him. His hands were tangled in my hair, and my tongue was running up his shaft, and he was moaning my name. I reached down and unbuttoned my own jeans with my left hand, and took the tip of his cock into my mouth, sucking gently. *Fuck*, he tasted good.

"Brian," he was gasping my name now, and I lifted my gaze to his face, taking him deeper. His stomach was tense and his chest was jerking with the tiny gasps of air he was breathing.

He was going to come. I wasn't ready for him to come just yet. I had far too many other things I wanted to *do* to him before I could let that happen. I flicked my tongue over the tip of his cock once more before standing back up, and kissing him again. This time, my tongue went straight into his mouth, I pressed against him roughly. Our cocks ground together, separated only by the thin cloth of my underwear. He moaned into the kiss, and I could *feel* it more than hear it.

I rested my hands on his hips and tugged, and soon we were walking slowly towards the bedroom, and my tongue was in his mouth, and then it was running down his neck, and then it was in his mouth again, and he was panting. *Shit*, he was *panting*.

I got us up the stairs, and turned so that he was closer to the bed, and then I pushed him so that he fell back onto it. For a moment I just stood over him and stared down at his naked body, and then I kicked off my jeans, and tugged off my underwear, and got onto the bed, leaning over him.

I was going to fuck him. I was going to fuck him until he screamed my name, until his voice was raw, until he couldn't even moan anymore. Our lips met again, and my hands slid down his naked body, and my cock ached, and my head was spinning with his scent. I was going to make him *mine*.

.....

**"What if you could wish me away? And what if you spoke those words today? I wonder if you'd miss me when I'm gone. It's come to this, release me. I'll leave before the dawn. And what if you could hear this song? And what if I felt like I belonged? I might not be leaving oh so soon. Began the night believing, I loved you in the moonlight. But for tonight I'll stay here with you. Yes for tonight I'll lay here with you. But when the sun hits your eyes through your window there'll be nothing you can do."**

## **Chapter 13**

There are moments in your life that set the course of who you are going to be. Moments that stay with you forever. Your first home run in little league. Your first kiss. Your high school graduation. The day you get married. But for gay men, especially me, it wasn't any of those things that stay with you. Things that set the course of who I had become were much different. The first time I ever saw Brian. The first kiss, the first fuck with Brian. The first time I danced at Babylon. The bashing. The first time I ever saw Rage in print. The first time Brian ever told me he loved me. The day I saw Britin for the first time. And the night I left for New York.

And tonight. As Brian laid his hands on my body and kissed me so deeply I thought my heart may explode, I knew this would be one of those nights that no matter where we went from here, whether our paths went the same way or apart again, it would always be a part of me. After almost 10 years, it felt like the first time all over again. I felt the same things right now that I felt that night. Want, need, uncertainty, confusion. But none of it mattered. I needed him. I needed to feel him inside me. I needed him to take me. All of me. To make me feel something other than what I had been feeling.

I had to kiss him first. I knew he wouldn't. I knew he wanted this to be on my terms. He was gentle at first. Waiting for me to make my own moves. This was for me, and he wanted me to call the shots. But as soon I whispered the words I knew he couldn't resist, it was all over and my 'terms' went right out the window.

*"I want you inside me."*

And now here we were, our sweaty hot bodies pressed against each other in what can be called nothing else but pure lust. His fingers were slowly grazing over the slit of my cock as I bucked up into him. His lips were hard and forceful on mine, and our tongues danced to a song only we knew. It was the same song that played 15 years ago. The same song that brought us together that first night.

"Brian please..." I moaned as he traced his tongue from the nape of my neck all the way down to my hardened nipples. His hand never left my cock and I ached for him with every soft touch.

"Please what? Say it Justin. Say it." He nibbles my ear lobe as he groans his request.

I bite down hard on his shoulder and he yelps like a wounded puppy. He glares at me and I smile devilishly at him. His face softens and he cocks one eyebrow at me. I lick his lower lip and tug on it with my teeth.

"Fuck me." I demand against his mouth. And without further hesitation he grabs my legs and forces my knees up to my chest. I know this position. It's the 'I'm going to fuck you hard and deep and I want to see the look on your face as I do' position. And I wanted it so badly I could taste it. Our mouths practically became one as he fumbled to reach the bedside table. His lips have to leave mine to reach to the drawer. I wrap my fingers around his dick and pump up and down so fast my hand starts to cramp.

"Oh Jesus Justin..." He moans and almost loses his balance over me. He finally gets what he was wrestling for and positions himself back over me again. "That wasn't a very nice thing to do Mr. Taylor. I could have fallen off the bed."

"Who cares if it was nice, it would have been funny." I taunt at him. He rips the condom open with his teeth and spits the wrapper out onto the floor.

"You're gonna pay for that remark." He says in the deepest, sexiest voice I had ever heard.

"Promise?" I whisper against his ear. He hands me the condom like he used to years and years ago. I know what he wanted.

"Put it on me. Now." His eyes have fire in them. He needed to fuck me. And he needed to do it now. And I wanted him to. I wanted him to fuck me as hard as he could.

I slip the latex over his throbbing dick. He watches me as I do it and he licks his lips. He loved to watch me roll the condom down his cock. I cup his balls in my hand before I reach back up and he moans and leans his body down on mine. He kisses me and I feel the coldness hit my hole and it makes me jump. It's something I will never get used to.



He smiles against my lips at my sudden shivering. He pushes his finger inside me to heat up the cold liquid.

"Brrriiiaaannnn..." I push back against his finger. I need him deeper. I feel a second finger slide in my ass and he is fucking me now with his hand. I couldn't take it anymore. I had waited too long for this. I wanted him, needed him, to fuck me into the mattress.

"Now Brian. NOW." And with one quick movement I felt his fingers slide out of me and his cock push into me so hard my eyes roll back into my head. My mouth is open but I can't force any sound out. I bring my hands to my face and bite down on my palms. His dick pushes in and out of me harder and faster with each thrust. My legs are bent all the way to my chest and he pulls my hands away from my face so his lips can find mine. He is pushing his prick so far into me and I feel it hit the spot that makes my own dick unload its orgasm every time. He leans his forehead on mine and our sweat mixes to become our own. He just keeps fucking me.

He never lets up and he never lessened his pace. If anything every thrust gave him more energy. Our eyes meet and I swear I see something in them I had never seen before. I couldn't put my finger on it. But it was a look I had never seen Brian have before. It almost looked like....

Relief.

I touch my hand to his face and push my ass deeper onto his cock. His eyes close and he throws his head back. "Justin..." my name almost comes out as a question.

Or maybe it was an answer.

My legs are pushed so far up my chest my knees are almost to the side of my face. I knew I'd be sore in the morning. My legs and my ass. He was going a number on me. Bending me into a position I hadn't been in nearly 10 years. And giving me a fucking I'd never forget. His balls slapped against my ass as he fucked me, making me pant and cry out with every thrust. Brian and I had fucked so many times, we had to have been in the triple digits, but he had never taken me like this. And I fucking loved it. His dick felt so good I almost couldn't take the pleasure.

"God you're still tight." His eyes are closed in intense feeling and I clench my muscles around his cock and he bites his lower lip. "Jesus Justin."

I know he is close because he reaches between our intertwined bodies and starts to stroke my cock, my pre come acting as a natural lubricant for him to jerk faster and faster. His thrusts get more rushed and I know it will be within seconds that he will unload inside me. He hits my prostate with the tip of his dick and I know my own ecstasy is about to be released.

"Brian I...Brian..." My voice echoes through the loft and I feel every ounce of my pleasure seep out of me onto his fingers. The sound of my voice and the feeling of my come on his hand drives him over the edge and he screams my name over and over. His body shudders and my ass is so tight around his sheathed dick I can feel him unload his seed into the condom.

A few short thrusts later he lowered my legs back down and laid his sweaty body on top of mine. Our breathing became one breath and his fingers twirled my long wet strands as we took in the after glow. I knew then, in that moment, there was no way I was letting go again. I would never walk away from him again. I was going to stay, and fight. Fight for him. Fight for us.

When Brian finally caught his breath he rolled off of me and onto his back. He pulled the condom off, tied it and threw it in the waste paper basket next to the bed. He let out a loud sigh and I felt his body completely relax into the mattress. I waited for him to say something. Anything. But he didn't say a word. I must have opened my mouth half a dozen times to speak but I could find no words to express how I felt. I couldn't just make small talk. That would just take away from the perfection of the moment. But saying something too deep or meaningful could also ruin it. I know how Brian could be.

I feel myself start to drift off to sleep when I hear his voice.

"Tell me about him."

"Huh?" I roll my head to the side and look at him. He is staring at the ceiling, cheek sucked into his mouth.

"Him. Tell me about him." His voice is stern this time. Why was he asking me this? Did he honestly care?

"Um why?"

He shrugs.

"It's kinda a weird time to ask, don't you think?" He won't look at me. He just keeps his eyes on the ceiling.

"It was just a question Justin."

"A pretty fucking awkward question. Especially NOW. Hi, we just fucked for the first time in 10 years. Tell me about your ex. Are you insane?"

He smiles. "Seems that way huh?" I laugh at him and bump his shoulder with mine. It was the weirdest question. But I decided to answer him. He asked after all.

"Calvin is... he's...great. Smart, caring, funny, talented. Hot. But..." I'm not sure how I want to word the rest.

"But?" Brian probes.

"But, we weren't right together." I answer.

"And it took you 4 years to realize that?" He snorts. What? How the fuck? Damn Michael. He had such a big fucking mouth.

"Yea I guess. I don't know. He's young you know? And he's completely in love with me. It made me feel good. Made me feel like I was young again. He reminded me a lot of myself at 18 when we met-"

"18! Jesus Justin!" Brian groans.

"What? What's your point? He was 18 when I met him. If I remember correctly that's about the same age I was when we met." I roll onto my side and prop myself up onto my elbow. I stare at him for a reaction. He winces.

"That was different."

"How?" I ask.

"Cause it was."

"Right." It's just like Brian not to really answer a question. He can ask all the questions he wants but you can't expect him to answer any.

"So...?" Brian asks.

"So what?"

"So how come after 4 years of bliss you just up and leave?" He finally rolls his head to look at me. It takes me a moment to catch my breath. God he was so beautiful.

"It was time. It had run its course. I don't love him. He deserves to be with someone who will love him. I did the right thing." He looks up at me and his eyes say he understands.

"He sounded pretty perfect though. At least for you." He seems annoyed at the thought.

I smirk. "He kinda was. But he..." Don't do it Justin. Don't ruin it by revealing too much. Just let it be what it's gonna be for now.

"He what?" Brian whispers. He rolls on his side to be closer to me. He is inches from me and I can smell the dried sweat and sex radiating from his body. I close my eyes. This is it.

"He wasn't you."

There is silence. God, why did I just do that? I just ruined it. He's gonna tell me its time to go now. He is going to freak. Jesus.

When I finally open my eyes he is staring at me. There is that look again. Relief.

"Brian, I-"

"Shhh...no." He wraps his arm around me and pulls me down to him. He rolls back over on his back and I lay my head on his shoulder and press my body against his. I still fit perfectly here. It was my spot. I had always said I loved how much taller he was than me cause if he hadn't been I wouldn't have fit so perfectly against his body.

My eyes get heavier and heavier and I know within minutes I will be asleep. His fingers are in my hair again and it soothes me like nothing else can. This is perfection. This is what I am sure heaven is like. At least my own heaven. When I die I know in the afterlife I will be in Brian's arms, his fingers in my hair for all eternity.

"I missed you." His words are barely a whisper.

I smile against his shoulder and nuzzle closer into his body. Who knows how Brian would be in the morning. But it didn't matter. I hadn't come this far to give up without a fight. I was willing to do anything to prove to him how much I wanted and needed to be with him. It may not be easy in fact it may be the hardest fight of my life. And he may not feel the same way. But I was willing to take that chance.

I had a plan. And it was in full motion. There was no turning back now.

His arms around me, the scent of his body, the way his breath felt on my face, I could feel it....

This was home.

\*\*\*

**It's hidden far away  
But someday I may tell  
The tale of metal tangle  
When into your world I fell  
Without you now I wander soaking  
Secretly afraid  
'Cause in your grasp the fears don't last  
(And some of them have stayed)**

## **Chapter 14**

His scent coated me, and filled the air. I opened my eyes and found his face buried in my chest and my arms wrapped around him, and I wasn't surprised. I'd dreamt about him all night. It was just like before. Ten years hadn't changed the fact that as soon as Justin Taylor entered my life, it was like I was in quicksand. I could struggle, but there was no way out of it.

Fuck.

He was still deep asleep, so I carefully untangled our legs and pulled away from him. His forehead wrinkled and he whimpered.

I leaned down and brushed his hair out of his face, and kissed his forehead. It was all I could do to not curl back up against him and go back to sleep. I wanted to pretend that everything was okay, that we were like before, but I couldn't.

So I got up, and took a shower, and got dressed. When I came back into the bedroom, he was sitting up.

"I've got to go to work," I said.

I didn't know what I expected him to do. Maybe he would be upset about last night. Maybe he would act like it meant nothing. Maybe he would pretend it hadn't happened. Maybe he'd still be too upset over his father to even process it.

But when he stood up and walked to me, completely nude, and kissed me, and smiled, I was stunned.

"See you later," was all he said.

Well. Hmm. I felt the corners of my mouth tug up, and I fought it as much as I could. I didn't know what to say, so I turned and grabbed my briefcase, and left. Was he going to be there when I got home?

Fuck. I knew this feeling. It was *hope*. I thought I'd gotten every ounce of that out of my system a long time ago. I hated hope. It was never right, and it never worked out, and it just made things hurt more when they ended.

So why was I smiling like an idiot?

When I walked into Kinnetik, Cynthia approached me. "Hey, boss," she said cheerfully. "Today you've got a meeting with-"

I arched an eyebrow at her. "Yes?"

"Are you okay?" she asked.

What the fuck. "Is there a reason I shouldn't be?"

"No, it's just... well..." She squinted at me and leaned in as if she was telling me an extremely embarrassing secret. "You look *happy*."

Fuck. For a moment I thought about denying it, fighting it, doing everything I could to *not* feel anything. But the truth was, it felt *good*. And even if I fought it, when Sunshine left, I'd be just as fucked as ever. So I just shrugged and let myself smile.

Cynthia paled.

"I am, a bit," I said.

She followed me to my office, listing off my meetings and projects that I'd need to take care of, and I was barely listening. Justin was at the loft. Justin was in my bed. My body still ached, my muscles sore, from having fucked him so hard the night before.

Yeah. I had good reason to be happy.

"Brian, I have a few forms I need you to sign for--"

I looked up and now Ted was standing next to Cynthia at my desk. I arched an eyebrow at him.

"Um... are you okay?" He looked concerned.

"Why the fuck does everyone keep asking me that?" I rolled my eyes.

"Well, you look *happy*," Ted said, shrugging. "It's not exactly a common occurrence."

Cynthia nodded. "You *are* smiling."

"If I give you both a raise, will you shut up about how I *look* for five minutes?" I smirked and folded my hands on my desk.

"A raise?!" Cynthia squealed.

Ted's eyes widened. "R-really?"

I nodded, looking back down at the papers I needed to sign. "Profits have gone up, and you're both responsible for that. I think a small raise is in order."



Cynthia put her hands on my shoulders and kissed the top of my head. "Thank you!"

Ted was smiling widely. "Wow, Brian... yeah, thanks!"

I flattened my hair back out and arched an eyebrow at them. "Theodore, arrange the raises. I trust you to pick something appropriate."

They both gaped at me. What the fuck, it wasn't like they were working for Scrooge. What was the big deal?

"Unless you'd rather stand there and gape at me like idiots," I snapped.

That got their attention. They both nodded, Cynthia *saluted* me, and then left my office.

I smiled again, and went back to my work. Maybe I *was* acting oddly.

\*\*\*

It was lunch time, and I was considering going out to get something, when I heard a loud gasp coming from down the hall, and a squeal, and I couldn't resist standing up to go investigate. Had Cynthia won the lottery, or was she just having extremely good sex in the lobby?

When I got there, I froze, and bit my lower lip. Here was *another* situation I didn't know how to deal with.

"Yeah, I just got back in town."

Cynthia was hugging Sunshine so tightly I thought he might burst. "This explains so much!"

Ted was standing there, too, (didn't he *ever* do any work?) and smiling widely. "Why didn't you tell us you were back?!"

"Things have been a little crazy," Justin replied, and when Cynthia let him go, our eyes met. He grinned.

And fuck me, but I grinned back.

"Brian," Ted walked over and nudged me with his elbow. "This explains why you've been so cheerful."

My smile faded into a scowl, and I glared at him. "Do you want to *keep* your raise, Schmidt?"

Smiling widely, Ted and Cynthia both turned and hurried back to their offices. I sighed and ran a hand through my hair.

"And to what do I owe the honor?" I asked, trying to keep my eyes focused on anything but Justin's face.

He approached me and handed me a brown bag. "I thought I'd bring you some lunch."

What the fuck. I arched an eyebrow at him. "Oh, honey, how sweet."

He laughed and smacked the back of my head. Why the fuck did people keep *doing* that? It was like they were all getting possessed by Debbie. "For last night."

Fuck. I was grinning again.

"My mom called. My dad's going to be okay. They operated, and he'll have to stay in the hospital a few days, but he should be fine."

I nodded. "Well, I *guess* that's good news."

He laughed. "Yeah. Well... he also said he wanted to see me when he got out. Something about having his life threatened and almost dying being enough to make him think about things." His eyes were sparkling. "You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

I raised my eyebrows and shrugged. "I don't know *what* you're talking about."

He put a hand on the back of my head and leaned up to give me a *very* deep kiss. When we parted, we were both breathing a little more heavily than we were before.

"Michael and Emmet wanted me and you and Ted to meet them after you get off work."

I licked my lips. What was he saying? Oh. Dinner with the guys. "Sure," I said. "Whatever." I was far too distracted to give a damn about anyone else, or what I would be doing in a few hours.

He was beaming at me. "See you at Woody's at 5:30." With that, he spun around and left the building, and I watched his ass until the door shut behind him.

I looked down at my hands, and I was holding the bag. I opened it, and there was a huge sandwich inside. He'd probably even put mayonnaise on it. I swear to god, he was trying to make me fat.

I smiled again, and then sighed.

What the fuck was I doing?!

\*\*\*

"And the prodigal son has returned," Michael said, pinching Justin's arm. "Took you long enough."

Emmet jumped up and squealed and hugged him.

Ted just patted him on the back.

They all looked so fucking happy to have him back. The problem was, so did *I*.

We were sitting around a table at Woody's, just like old times. Fuck old times. I must be a glutton for punishment. I knew where this would go. I knew exactly where I was going to end up. But somehow, right this moment, I didn't *care* all that much.

"Oh, Gus said he'd be joining us," Michael said.

I smirked. "Right, and he'll get in here *how*?"

"The same way we did when we were fifteen, Brian. Fake IDs." Michael was grinning proudly, as if this was a *good* thing.

"Little punk," I mumbled into my beer.

"So, why did you finally decide to leave the *big city* and come back to little ol' Pittsburgh?" Emmet asked, leaning across the table and smiling widely. He looked from Justin, to me, and back to Justin.

"I missed it," Justin said. "Besides, what could New York have to offer, compared to you guys?"

Ted nodded and raised his beer. "Right. We're so much more interesting than Broadway."

"Well, I think it's sweet," Emmet said, giving me a knowing look. "It's romantic."

I felt my smile fade quickly. "What the fuck is so romantic about it?"

"Well, that you two are... *you know*, finally together again!" Emmet replied.

I suddenly felt all eyes on me. I rolled my eyes and took another swig of beer. "And who *exactly* told you that?"

Justin ducked his head, and the three stooges all gave me worried looks.

"What?!" I snapped. Now *this* was a way to ruin my good mood.

"Well, we sort of assumed..." Ted said, looking sheepish.

"You assumed *wrong*," I said. When the fuck did this become an inquisition?

"But you did miss him," Michael said.

"Brian Kinney doesn't *miss* people, Mikey." Fucking asshole. I never should have apologized to him.

"That's not what you said last night," Justin said, staring down at the table. He looked almost... *sad*.

I shut my eyes and bit the inside of my cheek. Fuck.

"Aha! I knew it!" Emmet said, sounding thrilled.

"Same old Brian," Ted said. "Never one to admit how he *feels*."

"Fuck you, Theodore." I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"I *wondered* why you didn't come home last night," Michael said, grinning widely.

"You stayed the *night*?!" Emmet gasped.

Ted looked impressed. "Way to go, Brian."

I gripped my glass tightly. I should never have come here. I should never have brought him home with me. I shouldn't even have invited him to have fucking pancakes.

"Hey, guys."

I turned my head, and Gus was standing there. I'd have to give him an even bigger check than I'd planned to for Christmas, to thank him for being a distraction.

I arched an eyebrow at him. "Aren't you a little *young* for this sort of establishment?"

He pulled up a chair on Justin's other side, and grabbed my beer, taking a swig. "Nah."

"Like father, like son," Ted said.

I was about to give the boy a little more shit, because he obviously needed to be brought down a few notches, when I noticed the look on his face. He looked... different. And ever so slightly flushed. And was that a *hickey* on his neck?

Oh, hell.

I stood up and grabbed his arm, pulling him towards the door.

"Hey! C'mon, dad, it's not fair!" He yanked against me and I sighed.

"I don't give a shit if you want to have a few drinks." I waited until I had him outside, and I leaned against the wall and folded my arms. "So? Who was he?"

He hesitated, sizing me up, trying to figure out what to say. But he didn't need to say anything. I could *tell*. Besides, his ears were turning red, like they always did when he was guilty of something.

"Some guy," he mumbled.

I rolled my eyes. "And?"

He ducked his head and bit his lower lip. I waited. The kid was going to have to talk to me. I knew how much it sucked to have to open up, that's for damn sure, but he was my son. I had to make sure he wasn't doing anything stupid, and then he could fuck around all he wanted.

"We used a condom," he mumbled.

I nodded. "Right answer."

He looked back up at me, and he was obviously embarrassed.

I smirked. "So? Where'd you meet him?"

He glanced away again, and he looked even *more* guilty.

"Aha. Babylon." I chuckled.

"I uh..." He was squirming now, and I couldn't help but be amused.

"Look, sonnyboy, I *told* them to let you in if you ever showed up with some shitty fake ID. I'd rather you pick up guys at *my* club, where someone can keep an eye on you, than on the fucking street."

I turned and opened the door for him, and followed him back inside. The kid was okay. That was the important thing. Of course, I'd take him to get his first test before he went home to the munchers. If he was going to fuck around, he was going to be responsible about it.

"What was that about?" Michael asked, eyeing us.

"What's wrong, baby?" Emmet asked.

"He wasn't at your place last night, was he?" I asked Emmet. "That's what the note he left me said, but..."

Everyone's eyes widened.

"I uh... well..." He squirmed. Good. A little embarrassment would keep him in line.

"You didn't," Justin said slowly.

"At fifteen? Wow, he really does take after his father," Michael said, looking amused.

I shrugged. "What did you expect?"

Gus looked around at all of us, then slowly smiled. "I thought I was going to be in such deep shit."

They all laughed. I grabbed an extra glass and poured him a very small portion of beer out of my glass. Better he did this shit with me, and *told* me about it, than did worse and hid it. At least this way I could keep an eye on him. "Well, don't tell your mothers, or you'll never get to visit me again."

He nodded quickly and took a gulp of the beer.



"So? Who was he?" Justin asked.

I sat back and drank my beer.

"Some guy," he mumbled. "From New York."

My entire body tensed. Oh, fuck. Oh, FUCK no.

"His boyfriend dumped him-"

Justin turned and gave me a look that said everything I was feeling.

"And? Details!" Emmet said, leaning forward. "Was he a hottie?"

Gus grinned widely. "Yeah."

"How old was he?" Justin asked, turning back to Gus.

"I dunno, early 20s," Gus said.

"An older man, huh?" Michael smirked at me.

"Your first time, too," Ted said, shaking his head.

"Sounds familiar." Emmet gave me an evil grin.

Bastards, all of them.

"I know it can be confusing, having an older man take advantage of you, but-" Justin started to say. Taking *advantage*? Who the hell was he talking about? I never took *advantage* of him...

"He didn't take advantage of me," Gus replied. "And anyway, *I* fucked *him*."

I snorted. "Good job, sonnyboy."

Justin laughed. "Okay, then I won't give you the rest of the speech." He hesitated, then frowned at him. "But did you get his name?"

Gus nodded. "Calvin, I think."

"Fuck," I mumbled. "Figures."

Justin sighed. "Well, Gus, looks like we've got a few more things in common."

"Oh, god," Michael moaned. "You just fucked Justin's ex."

Gus flushed and his eyes widened. "Huh?!"

Emmet laughed, and Ted just smirked at me.

"Doesn't that make this all a little *incestuous*, Brian?" Ted asked.

"I'm revoking your raise if you say one more fucking thing, Theodore," I snapped. I needed more beer.

Gus was giving me a worried look. "Dad?"

I sighed and rested my chin on my hand and my elbow on the table. "Well, Sunshine? He was *your* ex, *you* tell the child."

"Um... well, he's a nice guy," Justin said hesitantly. "But... well..." He reached out and placed a hand on Gus' shoulder. "I don't think he's going to be interested in dating someone so young."

Gus laughed and pushed Justin's hand off. "What? Who the hell is looking to date?! Especially someone so much *older* than me! That'd be crazy, trying to date the *first* guy I'm with."

I snorted, and the three stooges laughed.

Justin just scowled at all of us.

"What?" Gus asked, oblivious.

"Nothing, sonnyboy. Good for you." I poured a little more beer into his glass, and took a big swig of my own.

"Oh, I got a call from your *mothers*, Gus," Michael said. "They said they got your message, and they'll be flying in on Saturday."

I almost choked. "What?!" I gasped when I finally set the glass down.

Gus glanced at me and bit his lower lip. "Oh, uh... nothing. They just decided they wanted to spend Christmas here after all."

"Yeah, and they'll all be staying with us, so I can see JR," Michael said, smiling widely.

Gus nodded, staring down at the table. "They said I should sleep over there while they're here. Uncle Mikey has enough room for all of us."

That. Little. Shit. I knew what the fuck he was up to. Forget the extra money, he'll be lucky if he gets *anything*.

Everyone gave me a knowing look, and I shut my eyes and sighed. There was nothing I could say. I could play along and pretend that Sunshine was going to stay over there, too, but I wasn't sure anymore. I had thought for sure that he'd be going back to Mikey's, but...

I wasn't sure about anything anymore. My head was spinning. My whole fucking world was off-balance, and now Melanie and Lindsay were being thrown into the mix. PERFECT.

This time, I ordered some shots. Beer wasn't strong enough for this bullshit.

\*\*\*

When we left the bar, full of alcohol and ridiculous amounts of greasy food that I *really* shouldn't have eaten, Gus nudged me.

"I'm gonna go stay at Uncle Mikey's tonight," he said.

"You're going to come home with *me*," I replied. "And you're going to stop trying to fuck around with your father's life. It's none of your goddamn bus-"

I tried to say something more, but Justin had come up behind me, and placed a hand on my ass, and pressed his lips to the back of my neck, and suddenly it was hard to think. Fuck.

"Yeah, right, dad," Gus said, shaking his head. "You two have fun."

He turned and ran after Michael, and I was left there on the sidewalk with Justin pressed up against me.

FUCK.

"Look, Sunshine," I started, but he circled me, and wrapped his arms around my neck, and pressed his lips to mine.

He tasted good. His lips were soft.

Wasn't I going to say something?

Oh, right.

"What do you think you're doing?" I asked, trying to sound sure of myself, like he hadn't just made me instantly hard and delirious with just one kiss.

He grinned at me and ducked his head, looking up at me from under those long lashes of his. "I thought I was getting you ready."

I'm going to send him away. I'm going to tell him to fuck off. "For what?" I asked, trying to sound annoyed.

He leaned up and pressed his lips to my ear. "I'm going to give you the best blowjob you've ever had. I'm going to run my tongue up and down your cock and suck on you so hard, and when you come, I'm going to swallow every last drop."

Suddenly my mouth was dry and my cock was throbbing.

Never mind about sending him away. I could worry about that shit tomorrow. I could worry about plenty of things tomorrow. Right now, I was going to get him home, and in bed, and make him show me *exactly* what he was talking about.

.....

**"You say that I pulled the world from under you. You can't go through it this time. One day, this embarrassment will fade behind me. And that day I could think of things that won't remind me. But these days it's unbearable for both of us. I'm gaining strength, trying to learn to pull my own weight. Record and play, after years of endless rewind. Yesterday wasn't half as tough as this time. This time isn't Hell, Last time, I couldn't tell. This mind wasn't well Next time, hope I'm...Going to be good, and I would - If I knew I was understood And it'll be great, just wait - Or is it too little too late?"**

## **Chapter 15**

"This is the last of it Mr. Taylor." The driver tells me as he drops the last box onto the floor. I hand him a \$50 and thank him. I close the loft door and turn around and sigh deeply at the reminiscence of my life in New York. It was all just things in boxes now. Scattered paintings. Things that were.

I hadn't told Brian I was having my things delivered to the loft. I think I could have convinced him into the idea but I didn't want to take the chance. After the scene he made last night at Woody's, making it clear to everyone, and me, that we were NOT together, I knew it was better I had called yesterday while he was at work and arranged the delivery.

I wasn't giving up just yet.

His questions about Calvin the other night threw me for a loop. I didn't know how to take all that. And then his display at Woody's last night when the guys tried to say we were back together worried me. And now Gus. Jesus Christ Gus. Gus fucking Calvin. Brian found it amusing. I found it disturbing. Jesus. Pittsburgh is just too small of a town I guess.

To distract myself from the horror of the Gus/Calvin debacle, and to rid my sadness of Brian's reactions last night I decided to spend the day unpacking.

The boxes of art supplies, books and CD's I pushed to the side, stacking them against the wall. I carried boxes of my clothes and important paper work over to the bedroom. I

spent a while carefully hanging up my clothes, making a separate part of his closet just for me. The way it used to be. I smile at the memories of how this closet used to look. His Hugo Boss and Armani suits hanging next to my ripped jeans and sweaters. My clothing tastes had gotten a lot better. I thank New York for that. I wore button down shirts now, some from Prada. I know he would be proud.

The silence in the loft was over bearing. But as I unpacked, and the times that had been filled my head, I could almost hear our voices bouncing off the walls.

***So, are you coming or going? Or coming and then going? Or coming and staying?***

I'm staying Brian. I'm staying this time.

***One spoonful left. You want it?  
No. It means ten more minutes on the Stairmaster.  
Come on, I wanna see you lick it off the spoon.***

***Ice cream kiss. You should eat more you know. My mom says you're too skinny.***

***I think it's time for you to go.  
It always is. Luckily, you can't push me away. I'm on to you.***

My heart aches as I remember my words. You can't push me away this time Brian. I'm not leaving again. I'm not giving up.

***You can't control everyone's life, even though you'd like to.  
Obviously. You're still here.  
Being mean to me has never really worked. You should try another tactic.  
What are you doing?  
I'm killing you with kindness. It's proven to be a highly effective technique for achieving one's goals.***

He made me go to New York. He convinced me it was the best thing for me. The only way I was going to be successful is if I got out of this town. But for 10 years I had never felt more like a failure in my life. He tried to convince everyone last night that there was nothing going on between us. But I'm still here. I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to fight for us. There was so much to fight for.

***Better now?***

***Hmm***

***You really freaked me out.***

***You?***

***It was like you got hit all over again.***

***I remembered walking away and suddenly hearing your voice call my name, to warn me. You never told me about that. You tried to save me.***

***I guess I forgot.***

***It's a good thing one of us remembered.***

He may not have saved me that night, but he saved me so many times after that. In ways he may never know he did.

He took care of me. Protected me. When I was with him I was safe. Nothing could hurt me. Nothing else mattered.

***I want you safe. I want you around for a long time.***

I emptied the last box full of my underwear and socks and placed them on the bed to put away. The empty boxes I broke down and put by the door. I looked around and closed my eyes to take it all in. I was back. This loft was the only place that ever felt like a home to me. Thank god he didn't end up selling it and moving somewhere else. I don't think our reunion would have been the same.

***It's more than that. It's where we made love for the first time.***

***That wasn't love. I just gave you a rim job and fucked your brains out.***

***It was love to me***

It was here, for the first time, he actually acknowledged I was more than just a fuck to him. More than just some kid who wouldn't leave him alone. We were always more than that.

***I thought we were partners.***

***We are.***

I padded barefoot across the loft and when my feet hit the white shag carpet my heart almost bursts. I remember making love to Brian on this rug so many times. He must have cleaned hundreds of times. That poor carpet guy. How grossed out he must have been shampooing out all the come stains. Ha.



***A surprise awaits you. What's yours say?***

***The man you love will slowly and sensually peel off all his clothes for you, exposing his perfect body. Then he will take out his beautiful dick and you can suck it.***

***This is a long fortune.***

***There's more.***

***Oh...***

***Next, he'll rim your ass to get you crazy, then ram his cock up you and fuck you so hard you pass out.***

***In bed.***

***Hm?***

***You're supposed to add "in bed" to the end of that fortune.***

***I was thinking on the floor.***

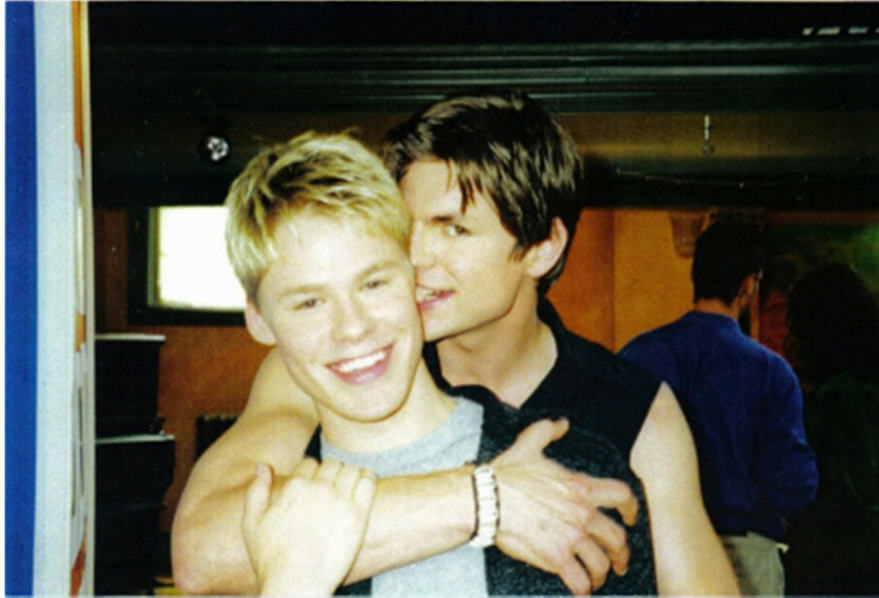
***Okay.***

My head and heart filled with memories of passion, laughter, dinners ate while sitting on this rug, movies watched as I laid my head on his chest. Our relationship filled every inch of this place. I couldn't step any place in here and not be reminded. I belonged here. He had to know it too.

I head back to the bedroom and start to pull open some drawers to find some room to put my socks and underwear. The top drawer was filled with his own, neatly folded and perfect. I contemplated moving them to the side and placing mine right next to him, but I wasn't that brave yet. I closed the top drawer and opened the bottom one. It was empty.

What?

Something caught my eye in the back of the drawer and I reached my hand out to grab it. When I pulled it out I gasped and sat down gently on the edge of the bed. It was a picture. Of us. It was the first picture that was ever taken of us. Me a young 17 year old boy beaming because I had this handsome 29-year-old man with his arms around me nibbling my ear lobe. It was the epitome of what our relationship was like then. Simple.



And he had it. He had kept it. In MY old drawer. My still empty drawer.

***And as for the times when you're not around, I wouldn't particularly mind it if you were.***

***Should I make room in my drawers, for your drawers?***

I smiled at the inkling of hope I felt. That maybe this wasn't over. I stood up, picture in hand and headed toward the kitchen. I used a magnet and stuck the picture right to the fridge at Brian height eye level. I wanted him to remember. I wanted him to know I knew he didn't just throw me away.

The rest of the day I cleaned up a little, checked my email, and sketched. It felt so good to draw again and actually feel something. I was lying on the couch with my sketchpad, the only light in the loft from the lamp next to me, when I hear the loft door open. I had always loved that sound. I wait. I know what is coming.

"What. The. Fuck." I hear him mumble. I peak my eyes over the back of the couch and see him standing in the middle of the boxes I had left by the door. Oh dear.

"Oh Justin?" He finally says dropping his briefcase on top of one of the boxes. I sit up.

"Yes?" I smile at him. His eyes narrow on me across the room.

"You wanna tell me why all YOUR crap is in MY loft?" He winces at the words.

"Well...I had to put it somewhere. And since I don't have a place of my own yet..." I didn't want to give too much of my plan away just yet.

The plan I had made to stay here.

"Mmmm.." he mumbles and makes his way through the maze of boxes. He heads straight for the fridge as he takes off his coat. Oh god. Oh dear god.

He doesn't even look at the fridge when he opens it. He takes out a bottle of water and closes the door with a thud. He was annoyed. I hold my breath. Then he see's it. The picture. He is frozen. I can't see his face. But he stands perfectly still as he looks at it. He knew I had found it. He had been caught. And he knew I wanted him to know I found it.

He finally turns around, his eyes almost closed and he clears his throat.

"Um, so I thought you were staying at Michael's?" He asks taking a drink of water.

I get up off the couch and walk to him slowly. I lean across the counter, him on the other side. I look right into his eyes.

"Well Michael is going to have his hands full with JR coming for Christmas and all. So I thought I could just stay here." I smirk and wait for his reaction. His face holds no emotion and he takes another long swig from the water bottle.

"And how long are you planning on staying?" His voice cracked as the words flowed from his mouth. He was nervous. He was scared. I knew the feeling. As much as I wanted him, I wanted us again, I was scared shitless. But he had to know. I had to at least try and tell him. Show him I wasn't giving up.

"How's forever sound?"

\*\*\*

**For you to go and take this, to smash it apart  
I've gone all this fucking way  
To wind up back at  
Back at the start**

## **Chapter 16**

"And then he says, 'how's forever sound'," I grumbled, setting my chin on the table.

Michael gave me a pitying, sort of amused look. "Brian..."

"What the fuck was I supposed to say to that?" I sighed heavily and reached for the Beam but Michael pulled it out of my reach.

"So? What *did* you say?" he asked.

I scowled at him, and then at my empty glass. "Nothing."

"So you just *stood* there?" He stood up and put the Beam back in the kitchen, and then came back and sat down next to me. I'd come over immediately after work, and we were now on the floor in his living room, leaning on his coffee table, and not altogether sober.

"I couldn't think of anything to say, and then he blew me." I mumbled.

Michael laughed. "What?!"

"Every fucking time I try to talk to him, he gives me a blowjob." My eyes narrowed and I sat up. "I think he's doing it on purpose."

Michael rolled his eyes. "Yeah, *maybe*."

"What the fuck does he *want*, Mikey? Why can't he just fucking go away?" I didn't care that I was whining. I was tired, and I'd had a little too much to drink, and I knew Michael would put up with it.

"Because he loves you," Michael said, patting me on the back.

I shook my head. "There's that *word* again. People sure do like to fucking throw it around."

"Well, he does! Otherwise he never would have come back," Michael said, leaning back against the sofa. "And you love him, too. Admit it."

I scowled at him. "Why the fuck would I?"

He shrugged. "I dunno, same reason you always have?"

"I haven't. I got over that temporary insanity ten fucking years ago." I sighed and flopped back onto my back and stared up at the ceiling. "Love is bullshit."

"You might think it's bullshit, but you *still* love him," Michael said. He crawled over to me and lay his head on my chest and wrapped an arm around me. "You always have."

I put an arm around him and shut my eyes. This was the first time we'd been this close since we'd fucked. I hated to admit it, but I'd come to rely on Mikey's ridiculous closeness whenever I was feeling like shit. It helped. "I don't want to," I mumbled.

"You don't get a choice about who you fall in love with, Brian. It just happens. And anyway, what's wrong with Justin? He's a great guy." Michael was nuzzling his face into my neck. He really *was* drunk.

I shrugged. "He always leaves."

Fuck. I'd admitted it.

Michael sat up just enough to look me in the face. "What if he isn't going to leave again?"

I glanced away. I didn't know what to say. Prove it? There was no way to tell. I couldn't go through that again. I just couldn't.

"You should talk to him about it," Michael said, lying his head back on my chest. "Tell him you're worried about it. Tell him you don't want him to ever leave again. Then fuck him."

I snorted. "I don't think so."

"You know you're miserable without him, and you *want* him. Hell, you almost married him. Why not take him back?" Michael asked. His voice was getting softer. I could tell he was falling asleep.

"Because he'll just leave again," I replied, shutting my eyes. I was fucking exhausted. It had been a long day, and I'd barely slept the night before, and the shots we'd just had were the last straw.

"Mm," Michael mumbled. He was probably about to say something, but at that point, we both drifted off.

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"What the- Michael?"

I was pretty sure that was Ben, but I was still too deep asleep to care. Fuck off, professor, I'm tired.

"Michael, wake up. Brian... come on."

I scowled and kept my eyes shut tight. What the fuck was going on?

"Looks like they were drinking," a female voice said.

"Shocker there," a third voice said.

"Michael," Ben said again.

"Wha?!"

The warm weight that had been on top of me suddenly jerked off, and I reluctantly opened my eyes.

Michael and I had fallen asleep on the floor together, and we'd woken up surrounded by Ben, Lindsay, and Melanie. *Great.*

"Have a nice nap?" Lindsay asked, peering down at us with an amused expression.

"Oh, shit..." Michael stood up, rubbing his eyes. "What *time* is it?"

Ben bit his lower lip and gave me an almost threatening look, before smiling at Michael. "It's seven."

"Shit," Michael mumbled, glancing back down at me.

I glared up at all of them. "I'm tired."

"Good to see you, too, Brian," Melanie said, scowling down at me.

"Fuck off," I replied, sitting up. I obviously wasn't going to get any more sleep right now.

"Daddy!" JR shouted, running into the living room and throwing herself at Michael.

"Hey, honey!" Michael hugged her and everyone (but me) 'aww'ed.

I stood up and ran a hand through my hair. "So, the munchers have arrived."

Lindsay rolled her eyes and pulled me into a tight hug. "Good to see you, too, Brian."

I grinned and hugged her back, but only for a second. "And *why* exactly was it such an emergency to come down *now*?"

Melanie gave me a disgusted look. "Gus called us and said he *missed* us, and he didn't want to spend the holidays without us. You know that's crap, he's a fifteen year old boy, he shouldn't be missing his mothers. So what the hell did you do to him, Brian?"

Great. Just what I wanted. I opened my mouth to say something cutting and witty back, but Michael cut us off.

"Hey, it's great to have you here, who cares what the reason is? Now, who wants cookies?"

"Cookies?!" JR asked, eyes wide.



Ten year olds. I shook my head and watched as Michael lead JR into the kitchen to feed the poor child processed sugar.

"Well?" Lindsay asked, hands on her hips. "What happened?"

I arched an eyebrow at them. "What?"

"To Gus," Lindsay said. "Melanie's right, it isn't like him to call us up like that."

I shut my eyes and sighed. "Nothing."

"Brian," Melanie started, sounding pissed.

"I think you'll see the reason if you turn around," Ben said, sounding amused.

I opened my eyes just in time to see Sunshine walk in the front door, followed by Gus.

*Great.*

"Justin!" Lindsay and Melanie both squealed his name, and ran over to hug him and kiss him and cover him in disgusting girl cooties.

I shoved my hands in my pockets and glanced towards the back door. Maybe if I ran really fast...

Gus walked over and smirked at me. "Hey."

I frowned down at him. "Sonnyboy. Where've you been?"

"I went to the airport with Uncle Ben," he replied. "And we ran into Sunshine on the way back."

My frown deepened into a scowl. Now *he* was calling him that?

"Brian, can I speak to you for a moment?" Ben asked, giving me this look that meant he wasn't *requesting*, so much as *demanding*. Swell.

I followed him into the guest room, and he shut the door. He looked annoyed. No, he looked pissed.

Shit.

"Look, professor, I didn't do anything *indecent* to the missus, we were just--"

"Shut the fuck up, Brian," Ben said.

Well, fuck.

"I'm sorry you're having such a hard time right now, and I'm sorry that you're depressed or whatever the hell it is you are, but I don't want you pulling Michael down with you."

I frowned at him. "Who the hell is pulling him *anywhere*?"

"He's just started to act like himself again, like he's finally moving on from Debbie's death, and then you come along and start pouring liquor down his throat until he passes out on the floor."

I bit the inside of my cheek. He was right. "Well, tell him yourself, I'm not his fucking keeper."

"No, you're worse, you're his best friend." Ben sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Look, just...don't start stuffing drugs up his nose. Let him deal with things in a healthy way, even if you can't."

What the *fuck*. "A healthy way? You mean like *talking* about it, *sharing* my feelings? *Fuck* that. None of that is going to bring Debbie back. If he wants to get stoned or drunk, that's his fucking business, not yours." Shit. I hadn't meant to get so pissed.

"But this isn't about Debbie, Brian. He's moving on. He's dealing with it. This is about *you* and *Justin*." Ben's expression softened slightly. "I know what you've been through, I saw it happen. Just... please don't pull Michael down with you, if you insist on doing this self-destructive shit."

I shut my eyes and sighed. "Fine."

I felt Ben step closer, and when I opened my eyes, he was glaring into them. "You're my friend, Brian, but I want you to understand one more thing."

I raised an eyebrow at him and tried not to seem intimidated.

"If you fucking touch him again, if I find out you did anything *remotely* sexual with him again, I'll rip off the one ball you've got left, and shove it down your throat."

I smirked. "Gotcha," I said. Asshole.

He stepped back and grinned at me. "Alright." He opened the door and went back into the living room, and I waited a moment, catching my breath.

Well, he had every right to say what he'd just said. I really had fucked up with Mikey, and I'd been shocked when he didn't kick my ass in the first place. I guess he was waiting for us to resolve our issues, before threatening my balls.

As for getting Mikey drunk and inebriated, well... I guess I could stop dragging him down that path. Ben was right. I was only getting started. Soon I'd be stoned all the time and cussing everyone out. I knew it, he knew it, even if Mikey didn't admit it to himself. There was no reason to make him go through all that shit with me.

In fact, there was no reason to make anyone. What I should do is leave and go home, and not open the door to the loft for *anyone*, sons *or* Sunshines.

"Dad?" Gus poked his head in the room. "Mom's yelling at Sunshine."

I scowled at him. "Don't fucking call him that."

Gus shrugged.

"Why is she yelling at him?"

He shrugged again. "Wanna go listen in?"

Well, why not? I walked out into the hall and into the living room. What was going on *now*? Melanie, Michael, Ben, and JR were gathered in the living room, chatting away. I followed Gus to the back door, and peered through the window. Thank god for shitty insulation. We could hear everything.

"You *know* that's not true, Justin!" Lindsay was saying. They were standing in the back yard, facing each other, and looking pissed.

Justin's hands were fisted at his sides and his jaw was set. Ooh, he was being defensive. I wondered what the *hell* he'd done to incur Lindsay's wrath.

"Yes, it is!" he snapped back.

"And that's your grand plan? Drop *everything*, drop your *relationship* and your *home* and your *art gallery* and just come back *here*?!"

He shrugged stiffly. "Why the fuck not?"

"Because you had a *life* there, Justin! You can't just *leave* a whole *life* behind on a whim!"

"That's what I did in the first place when I moved *there*! And *this* is my home, *this* is my life! Not fucking New York!"

I glanced down at Gus, and wondered if I shouldn't tell him to get lost. This was sort of private shit we were listening in on. Then again, I couldn't tell him to stop if I wasn't going to, and they were practically *shouting*, so it's not like it was *that* private.

"And what about your boyfriend? You just *left* him?" Lindsay was doing that thing where she held her hands out, palms up, questioning with her entire body. "How could you *do* that?"

"That's what I did to Brian," Justin snapped back.

I winced. Gus looked up at me and arched an eyebrow. I ignored him. Too late to get rid of him now. I guess he'd have to hear about this all somehow.

"That was for your *career*, Justin! And he's the one that didn't stay in touch. Coming back here, *now*... it's *suicide* for your career!"

"*Fuck* my career! I don't give a shit about being *famous*, Lindsay. I just want to be *happy*. If that means working at a tiny gallery with little recognition and never having my paintings sell again, *fine*."

"But this isn't about *any* of that, Justin. This is about *Brian*. We *all* know it is! I just don't understand why you'd come back after ten *years* to be with him!"

Okay, Sunshine. Go ahead. Correct her. Tell her all about how you missed your family, your home, all that bullshit. Tell her it had nothing to do with me.

"Because I love him!"

Fuck.

I swear to god my heart skipped a beat, and it wasn't because of happiness or some bullshit like that. No, this was just shock. Shock, horror, fear...

Gus grabbed my sleeve and yanked. "They're coming back in, come on!"

Shit, he was right. We stepped away quickly and went to the fridge, pretending to be looting through it for food. I pulled out a beer and opened it, offering Gus a swig.

Justin burst through the door and froze, obviously wondering if we'd heard anything. I arched an eyebrow at him, trying to keep my expression blank.

Lindsay came in behind him and gaped at me. "Brian! What the hell do you think you're doing?!"

I blinked and glanced at Gus, who was handing the beer back to me.

"One little sip isn't going to hurt him," I said, drinking some of it myself.

"What did he do now?!" Melanie yelled from the other room. She came in, followed by the whole rest of the damn family, and glared at me.

"He was giving Gus *beer*!" Lindsay said.

"Shit, mom, it's just a little beer. Kids in Germany drink it all the time," Gus said.

I smirked. Good boy.

"Gus," Melanie snapped. "Language."

He folded his arms and shrugged.

"Well, that's my cue," I said, setting the half-drunk beer on the counter. I walked through the crowd, towards the front door. It was definitely time to make my exit. With any luck, the lesbians would keep Justin there, and I could finally have some fucking time *alone*. Then maybe I could think, or at least drink until I couldn't.

"Brian," Michael said, grabbing my arm.

I glanced at him. "What?"

He grinned. "See you."

I sighed. "Sure." I grabbed my coat, opened the front door, and walked out into the cold December air. The door shut behind me, and I felt just a little bit less trapped.

"Lindsay sure knows how to yell," a voice said from behind me.

I shut my eyes and gritted my teeth. "Sunshine," I said, turning to look at him. "You're staying *here*."

"My shit's all at your house." He gave me a look like I was crazy. "And where the hell would I sleep?"

*Fuck*. He had a point.

I gave up. Whatever. If he really wanted to sit in the loft and draw or whatever the fuck it was he did these days, so be it. I was going to go home, get drunk, and go to sleep. I turned and walked to the car, unlocking his door first.

We got in, and I started the car, and we were on the road, he spoke again.

"I think I really let her down," he said.

I glanced at him. He was staring out the window. "Yeah, well, she expects too much."

He frowned and looked at me. "Maybe."

I quickly looked back at the road. "She'll get over it. She always does."

We didn't say anything else, until we reached the loft.

I slid open the door, and walked to the kitchen to get a glass. I needed more to drink.

"Where did you get that?" Justin asked.

I looked up, holding the empty glass in my hand. He was staring at the painting, *his* painting, on the wall.

"I believe I purchased it in New York," I replied. Where the hell was my Jack Beam?

He turned and walked over to me, placing a hand on my arm. "When?"

I rolled my eyes. "At the show you *put* it in." Duh.

"Brian... you were at that show?" He sounded... hurt.



I set down my glass loudly and scowled at him. "Yes. I was at the fucking show. Okay? I went all the way to *fucking* New York to see *your* art. Is that what you want to hear?"

He was stunned. His eyes were wide and his lips were parted.

"Fuck," I mumbled. Had I really drank *all* my Beam? I walked into the living room, looking around for it.

"But I made that piece ages after we stopped talking," Justin said softly.

Great, now he was following me around. I spun around and glared at him. "So?!"

He shut his mouth and shrugged weakly.

I really should have kept my own fucking mouth shut, because now I could tell, I was only that much more fucked than before I'd started talking.

**Hey, the closer we think we are  
Well it only got us so far  
Now you got anything left to show  
No no I didn't think so  
Hey, the sooner we realize  
We cover ourselves with lies  
But underneath we're not so tough  
And love is not enough**

.....

**"As long as you hold me I'll get by. As long as you need me I will try not to die. I don't want the shame. I don't want the blame. I don't want the fame anymore. If only they'd tell me, tell me why. If I could believe them and their lies. But I don't want their name. I don't want their pain. I won't play their games anymore. I always look at the last page of the book. How will it end? The suspense robs me of lovers and friends. As long as you hold me I'll get by..."**

## **Chapter 17**

I had never understood why people used to say 'Be careful what you ask for' until this moment.

I feel like I just had the wind knocked out of me. I don't know what answer I expected when I asked him where he got my painting. Maybe in my mind I had thought he had gotten it from Lindsay or maybe my mother, but the answer I got wasn't what I had expected.

*"Yes. I was at the fucking show. Okay? I went all the way to fucking New York to see your art. Is that what you want to hear?"*

And now here we stood, his hand grasped firmly around his bottle of Beam that he had finally found next to the couch in the living room, with nothing but unanswered questions and emotions filling the silence.

There were so many things I wanted to say. So many questions I needed answers to. But all we could do is stare at each other. I went to reach for him and he pushed my hand away.

He *pushed* my hand away.

My mouth falls open and with his eyes half closed, he finally speaks.

"You need to go."

"What? Why? Where am I supposed to go?" I go to reach for him again and he makes a bee-line for the kitchen before I could touch him.

"Michael's. Your Mom's. A Hotel. I don't care. You just can't stay here." His voice is harsh but he won't look at me. He keeps his back to me the whole time he says it.

"Why do you keep doing this?" I ask.

He doesn't answer at first. I can see he is breathing heavy and he takes a huge gulp of his Beam before he finally speaks again.

"Doing what?" Answering a question with a question. Typical.

"Pushing me away. Every time I get close, you make me leave. You always find a way to convince me to go. I'm not doing it this time Brian. I'm not leaving." I stand my ground. I fold my arms over my chest.

He whirls around, teeth clenched, his hand gripping the liquor bottle so tight his knuckles were white. "Well, you don't have a choice in the matter!"

He storms over to me and gets in my face. His breath is hot and it smells of Beam and cigarettes. My hands fall to my sides.

"I want you to get the FUCK OUT!!"

I don't flinch. I don't back down. I don't even show any emotion on my face. I knew this song and dance. I had been through it so many times I could do it with my eyes closed.

"No."

He looks stunned, like someone had just punched him in the gut. He winces. "No? Did you just say no, you little shit?" He grabs my arm hard and jerks me for an answer.

"Yes, Brian. I said no. I'm not leaving."

"Listen, you little twat, this is *my* place. And I don't want you here." His face is red and his breathing is uncontrolled. He doesn't look angry. He looks....scared out of his fucking mind.

"No, its not. It's our place. It always has been. Even the times I wasn't here." I reach for him again; he pulls back. But I don't give up.

I reach my face up to his and trace tiny kisses along his jaw line. He protests and I wriggle free of his grasp on my one arm, and pull his face so he looks at me.

"I'm not leaving. I'm not leaving again. You can't push me away this time." I kiss his lips softly and he tries to resist, but after a few seconds of my tongue trying to inch its way into his mouth, he finally gives up the fight and wraps his arms around me and plunges his tongue into my mouth.

Sex had always been our own unique language. We spoke through our mouths, hands and dicks. When we had sex we said things we couldn't say with the lights on. We let our bodies speak. And in this moment, with all the unanswered questions and fears swarming in the loft, I knew the only way to show him, to prove to him that I meant what I said was to have him fuck me.

"Brian.." I moaned through saliva and tongues. I knew what to say. I knew what would make all this go away. What would make him forget that he wanted me to go, and remember why I should stay.

"Please."

That's all that was needed to be said. He lifts me up and my legs go around his waist. He carries me toward the bedroom, his mouth hot and wet on mine, and his hands caressing my ass through my jeans. I felt in his kisses, he wasn't going to just fuck me. He was going to make love to me. I knew those kisses. They were yearning kisses. The way his tongue massaged mine. The way his hands groped my ass, and as he laid me down gently on the bed, I saw it in his eyes.

Nice try, Brian. You weren't getting rid of me that easy.

He knelt down in front of me and yanks me up by my arms so he could pull my shirt up and off my body. I return the favor and shed him of his dress shirt and without missing a beat I bring my lips to his golden skin. I use long strokes of my tongue to wet his chest and his moans make my cock harden through my denim. We wrap our arms around each other and let our mouths find their way back home again and we fall back on the bed. Lips, legs and arms tangled, we grope at each other with need and I have never felt so complete.

I want to tell him I love him. I want to tell him it's always just been him. But I can't. Not yet. That time will come.

I unbutton his pants and slowly start to slide them down over his perfect ass. He was 10 years older now but he was still like a Greek god. Perfect ass, perfect abs, perfect face and....

I reach between us and stroke his hardening sex.

Perfect cock.

"Uhhh yea..." he moans. He frees himself of the rest of his clothing and looks down at me with lust in his eyes. I feel his fingers fumble with my jeans as he reaches up to bring his fingers through my hair. I close my eyes as he twirls my golden locks. I lift up from the mattress so he can pull my jeans down. Then I see him smirk and I smile up at him. I wasn't wearing any underwear.

"I think you plan these things..." he purrs in my ear as his hand wraps around my prick.

"Who me? No...." I giggle.

"Roll over. I want you spread all the way open." He tells me. I oblige and as I roll over onto my stomach. I get on my knees and lay my chest onto the mattress. My ass is perfectly placed in front of him, ready and wide open for him. I feel his hands run slowly over my cheeks and he sighs heavily.

"It's been a long time since I've had you in this position." I hear him moan as his fingers gently touch my pucker.

I buck into him and grab the sheets. I could come right there just from the sound of his voice.

"Too long." I whisper out of the side of my mouth.

I feel the bed sink and move and I know he is going for a condom and lube. God yes. I was so fucking ready for this. I feel him position back into place and I bite my lip waiting. I feel a lubed finger probe my opening and I suck in my breath. He takes his time entering me with his fingers and he groans as he fills me.

"Justin, Jesus. So tight."

"Please Brian." I whisper into the bed. I hear the condom wrapper tear and I hear latex hit skin. I don't think I could have been more ready for anything in my life. He leans down and rests his chest on my back. I feel the tip of his dick against my hole and I wait patiently for him enter me. He kisses my ear, my neck, and shoulders. He enters me slowly and I let out my breath. He is going slowly. He is making love to me. Just like I wanted. Just like we needed.

We made love for what seemed like hours. He would come, pull out, put on another condom and enter me again. He just kept going. My own dick was sore by the time were done from coming so many times and my ass was on fire. He fell asleep in MY arms for the first time in forever. I smile as I fall asleep. Nice try, Brian. It won't work. I told you. I'm not going anywhere.

~~

I felt him kiss my forehead goodbye as he got up and left for work the next morning. I finally decided to get up out of bed around 11. I took a shower, made myself something to eat, checked my emails and sat down on the couch with my sketchpad and let the art flow out of me. I felt inspired today. Couldn't imagine why.

Around 3 I hear the loft door slide open. Did Brian come home early? Excited and eager I jump off the couch.

"Don't get too excited. It's only me." Gus says dropping his jacket on the counter. He smirks at me. I smile back and lean against the couch.

"So what's up?" I ask after a few minutes of silence.

"Nothing. Just came to get some stuff. Dad and I went shopping last week and Mom and Ima want to see what he got me. They need to approve, I guess, before they let me

wear it. It's such crap." He walks to Brian's closet and his eyes widen. I make my way to the edge of the stairs and he turns to look at me.

"Made yourself at home, I see." He says waving his hands at the closed I had hung up in the closet.

I laugh and nod at him. He smiles. He rustles around at the bottom of the closet and pulls out some bags. He takes them to the kitchen and drops them next to the counter.

"Well... I guess I should get going."

"Gus, listen..." Shit, how do I start this.

"You don't have to say anything. I was a shit. I'm my father's son, remember? I shouldn't have given you so much shit when I didn't know all the facts. I had only heard bits and pieces about 'the only relationship my dad had ever had' and all I knew was you left. It was hard on him. I didn't want to see him get hurt again." He runs his fingers through his hair, the same way Brian did when he was revealing things he didn't want to.

"It's been hard on me, too." I mumble.

"I know." I look at him. "I know it has. And that's why I'm not mad anymore. I know you love him. And he won't admit it, god he'd kill me if he knew I was even talking about this with you, but he loves you too." I smile.

"Hey, do you want to stick around? Watch a movie? Talk?" I motion toward the couch and he looks stunned for a moment. He finally smiles and nods.

"Yeah, that would be great."

We sit on the couch and he picks up my sketchbook.

"Wow, these are good." He says.

"Thanks."

He sets it down on the coffee table and I find 'Mallrats' and set down the remote.

"So, was your first time with my dad?" he asks. I must have swallowed my saliva the wrong way because I begin to choke and cough uncontrollably.

"What?" I ask when I get my breath back.

"Well?" His eyebrows rose. "Was it?"

"Yes. It was."

"He fucked you?"

I nod.

"When the first time you fucked anyone? Was that with my Dad, too?"

"No." Is all I reveal.

"What was it like for you?" He is looking at me intently. I take a deep breath. Shit.

"With your Dad, I was nervous. Fuck, I was scared out of my mind. But he made me feel at ease and after a while the fear subsided and it was just us. He was gentle and slow. It was-" I could feel my cock start to harden thinking about my first time with Brian.

"-nice." I finish.



"And the other guy?" God, this kid asked a lot of questions.

"I felt empowered. Like I owned him. It was hot." I can't believe I just told him that. Shit.

I look at him and he nods. He is staring at his hands. Fuck. Now I know what this is all about.

"How did you feel the other night?" I ask him. His head shoots up and he stares open mouthed at me.

"I...um...it was ok." He looked nervous.

"Gus... it's ok. You can tell me. I'm not mad about Calvin. I'll admit I think its weird as hell, but I'm not mad. No one is mad." I pat his shoulder.

"Well...I know what you mean by empowered. It was pretty awesome. And in a way I wanted him to, you know, fuck me too, but I didn't tell him that." Shit, this kid WAS just like Brian.

"It's ok to want to be fucked too, Gus. Trust me."

"Did you ever fuck my dad?" I choke again. How do I answer this without giving away a real answer and it not getting back to Brian?

"Never mind. You don't have to answer. I see it on your face." The little shit smirks at me.

"Just promise me you'll be careful. No matter what you do, ok?" I give him a serious look.

"Yes *Dad*" He rolls his eyes and grabs the remote. "Who watches this stupid movie? It's so OLD."

"Old?? It's from the 90's!" I yell.

He rolls his eyes again and I try to wrestle the remote away from him. This went on for a while before I hear the loft door open again. I glance at the clock. 4? I look over the couch and see Brian door still slid open, staring at us, open-mouthed.

"Hey Dad!" Gus jumps over the side of the couch. I stand up and smile at him.

"What are you doing here?" Brian finally asks sliding the loft door shut.

"I came to get the clothes you bought me. Mom and Ima wanted to see them."

He nods never taking his eyes off me. Was that jealousy in his eyes?

"What are you doing home so early?" I ask walking toward him.

He shrugs. "Felt like it."

He had come home to be with me. Fuck. That was so sweet.

"What have you two been up to?" Brian asks.

I go to answer but Gus beats me to it.

"Nothing much. Watching TV, talking." A devious smile spreads across Gus's lips and I hold my breath. Oh shit. What was he going to say? Fuck. Please, God, don't tell him I told you he bottoms.

"And *Dad* was showing me some of his drawings. They're awesome." He tells Brian matter-of-factly.

Brian's head shoots up from the counter where he was looking at the paper. His eyes narrow. His teeth clench. Fire burns in his eyes.

Yes, Brian. You heard correctly.

Your son just called me Dad.

\*\*\*

**I tried to live alone  
But lonely is so lonely, alone  
So human as I am  
I had to give up my defenses  
So I smiled and tried to mean it  
To let myself let go**

## **Chapter 18**

Gus called Sunshine 'dad.' I knew it was probably sarcasm. I knew he was trying to fuck with me. I also knew that didn't matter. It pissed me off. It *fucking* pissed me off. So Gus left, and Sunshine tried to get me to *talk* about it. He said I was jealous.

Of course I was fucking jealous.

Even I get jealous over shit like that. The son that I barely ever see, who my relationship with is awkward and confusing for me most of the time, was suddenly bonding with Sunshine like they'd been friends forever. And the boy... the *man* that I'd admitting to *loving*, of all things, who left almost immediately afterwards, who fucked up my entire world, who was suddenly *back*, who I had no idea how to relate to or deal with, was talking to my fucking *son* as if he were *his*.

I told Sunshine to fuck off, and I went to Babylon. I'd left work early just to spend some fucking time with him, which I *knew* was stupid, and now *this*? Fuck it. I stayed at Babylon until 2:30 in the morning, but I wasn't dancing or fucking. I tried to find someone hot enough to blow me, but I couldn't. Somehow my standards had been raised. So I sat in my office and drank, and stumbled home.

Sunshine was already asleep when I got there, so I got into bed next to him and went to sleep, feeling stupid for staying out so late, and getting so fucked up.

I woke up to the next day to the sound of someone humming.

"Shut the fuck up," I grumbled, sitting up and glaring out towards the living room.

The humming stopped.

I got up and walked into the living room, naked. There was no reason to get dressed, and anyway, it would distract him. Sunshine was on the sofa, drawing. I folded my arms and stood in front of him.

"Brian," Sunshine said, not looking up from his sketchbook. "You were out late."

I shrugged. "So?"

"I really pissed you off, huh?" he said, finally glancing up. "You know, I didn't ask him to call me that, he just..."

I smirked at him. "Yes?"

"Oh, um... I just..." He blinked at me. "Damnit. Can't you put on some clothes?"

Works every time. "No," I said. I sat down on the sofa next to him, feeling quite smug. I have no qualms about using my sex appeal to manipulate people, even him. Whatever got him to shut up and back off was worth it.

He hesitated, then licked his lips, eyeing me. "But it's distracting."

"That's the point, Sunshine," I said, leering at him.

"Damn," he mumbled, leaning towards me and putting a hand on my shoulder. I let him pull me into a hungry, awkward kiss.

Okay, so I really *did* mean to kick him out. Last night I'd even thought up what I was going to say, and how I was going to do it. But now it seemed sort of stupid to get rid of him like that. Right now, the jealousy seemed immature and petty. I knew he hadn't meant anything by it. I knew Gus was just fucking around. And I knew it was a good thing they were close. I mean, if he stayed around, it would be good for them to be close... not that I expected him to stay.

Besides, at the moment he was kissing his way down my chest, and I was pretty sure I was about to get a blowjob, so...

Yep. I was right.

I put my hand on the back of his head and gripped his hair gently, and he ran his tongue up and down my hardening cock, before taking it into his mouth and sucking hard.

I didn't need to kick him out. Maybe he *should* stay. At the very least, he gave better blowjobs than anyone else.

\*\*\*

"He called Sunshine 'dad'," I said, tossing some apples into the cart.

How I got roped into helping Lindsay at the grocery store, I don't know. Melanie was taking the kids to a movie, and Michael and Ben needed some "alone time" (they were

fucking), and Lindsay had called me up to meet her here. Seems the Stepford-fags kept too much organic asian crap in their house, and JR wouldn't eat it.

Lindsay looked up from the tomatoes she was analyzing, as if one of them would be the perfect shade of red, and gave me a startled look. "Dad?"

I nodded and pushed the cart. "Yeah."

Lindsay bit her lower lip and followed me, putting a tomato into the cart. "How did that make you feel?"

I rolled my eyes.

"Okay, let me re-word it. Did it piss you off?" She gave me a look that meant 'drop the shit and tell me the truth.'

"Yeah," I said. "It pissed me off." I avoided looking her in the eyes. I hated that she could force me to say shit I didn't want to.

She put a hand on my shoulder and squeezed it before going to the bread and picking out a loaf. I arched an eyebrow at the Wonderbread, picked it up, put it back on the shelf, and got a loaf of the whole grain stuff.

Lindsay rolled her eyes at me, but let me get away with it. No one should eat Wonderbread. If she feeds Gus and JR like that, they'll probably die of malnutrition.

"So?" Lindsay asked, pushing the cart to the cereal aisle. "Did you talk to him?"

"Who, Gus or Sunshine?" I shrugged and tried not to say anything about the Lucky Charms she was putting in the buggy. God, did they eat enough sugar?

"Justin," she said. "Did you talk to him about it?"

I shook my head. "I got him to blow me instead."

She didn't laugh. What the fuck. I narrowed my eyes at her.

"What the fuck is going on?" I asked.

She shrugged stiffly at me. "Nothing."

"No, something's up. Usually when I say something like that, you laugh at me and say something like 'Oh, Brian'," I said, pitching my voice ridiculously high.

She finally grinned. "I'm just worried."

"About Sunshine?" I pushed the buggy past her, and turned down the next aisle.

"More like you," she said, going to the Campbell's soup and started picking out Chicken and Stars cans.

"You know, if you can't even afford the good soup, I can send more money every month." I sneered at the red and white cans. "At least get the shit you don't have to add water to."

"Stop changing the subject," she said, swatting my arm. "I'm *worried* about you, Brian."

I rolled my eyes. "I'm not the one eating condensed soup."

Lindsay grabbed my arm and frowned at me. "Seriously."

I sighed and looked her in the eye. "Why?"

"Because he's *back*, and it seems rather... sudden."

I shrugged. "Yeah."

"And you let him move right back in with you, and-"

"I didn't *let* him do shit. He just sort of *did* it," I mumbled, pushing the cart ahead.

"Oh, so Justin's the top now? I didn't realize you were such a pussy." She gave me a challenging look.

I laughed. "Uh, no. I just..." Shit. There was no way to explain it. I didn't even understand it myself. "His dad was sick, and..."

"So shouldn't he be with his mother?" She frowned at me. "It seems like she'd want him around."

Good point. "I don't know," I said. "He asked to stay with me. Then he just sort of... hasn't left."

I stopped the cart in front of the juice section, and got out a bottle of guava.

Lindsay took the bottle from me and put it back, retrieving Minute Maid instead.

"Okay, *seriously*?" I ran a hand through my hair. "You're letting them drink *that* crap?"

"*Listen* to me, Brian," she said, ignoring my protests. "So did you ask him to leave?"



I nodded. "Yeah."

"And?" she asked, grabbing a few containers of yogurt. At least she was getting the real shit, and not that rainbow colored crap JR used to like.

"And he blew me," I said.

She gave me a skeptical look. "You told him to leave, and he got on his knees?"

"Basically," I said.

"There must have been more to it," she said.

I shrugged. I didn't want to talk about this. Why the fuck didn't she just drop it?

"Well, he needs to go back to New York. I don't know why he came back. It's ridiculous, saying he still loves you," she said, going for the frozen cookie dough.

That was it. That was *fucking* it. I snatched the cookie dough out of her hands and put it back on the shelf. "Okay, first off," I said, letting my anger show finally. "You don't feed *my* kid this frozen crap. If you're going to force processed sugar down his throat, at least fucking make the real thing."

Lindsay's eyes went wide and she blinked at me. Good. I'd caught her off-guard.

"Second, back the fuck off." My voice raised, and people were staring, and I didn't care. I was *pissed*. "It's none of your goddamn business if Justin wants to move back here, or what's going on between us. You *really* fucking upset him before, and it's *bullshit*. He's a fucking adult, he can do whatever the fuck he wants."

Lindsay's eyes narrowed and her hands went to her hips. "You know, Brian, I'm just looking out for you. For both of you! Justin is giving up on his *dreams* to come back here, and *you* were finally moving on!"

"Moving on?!" I got in her face, practically shouting now. "Who the fuck is moving on?! I've been a fucking pathetic mess ever since he left! Everyone knows it, that's why they always give me those annoying fucking looks of *pity* all the time! I haven't *moved on*, I've just gotten good at *dealing* with it, and fucking *hiding* it most of the time!"

Lindsay's expression softened. "Brian..."

"Look, I don't expect him to stick around this time. He never fucking does, and it's not his responsibility to. For now, he's here, and I'm fucking *happy* about it. I know I'm going to be pissed and sick and a fucking wreck when he goes, and I'll have to go through all that shit again, but for now, he's *with me*. I've given up on trying to fight it. I'm going to enjoy it while I can, and deal with it when he goes, just like I *always do*."

I was breathing heavily and my face was warm. I'd just admitted more out loud than I'd meant to, but I didn't care.

"You really love him, don't you?" she asked softly.

I just shut my eyes and took a deep breath, trying to calm down. "Just fucking leave him alone, and save the lectures for the children."

I felt Lindsay's hand on my arm and I opened my eyes. "I'm sorry," she said.

I rolled my eyes. "Whatever."

She grinned a little, but she was giving me this nervous look, like she wasn't sure if I was going to freak out again or not.

We walked through the rest of the store, and I gave up on getting her to buy healthier food. She was determined to give Gus and JR diabetes. Well, at least they had free health care in Canada.

Outside, Lindsay nudged my arm and grinned at me. "I hope things work out, Brian."

I pulled out a cigarette and lit it. "Yeah."

"I just want you to be happy." She cocked her head at me. "I don't want you to get hurt."

"Yeah," I said again, shrugging. I didn't want to, either.

"Just take care of yourself. And if he goes..." she trailed off.

"When he goes," I said. "I'll deal with it."

Lindsay pulled me into a tight hug and kissed my cheek. I patted her on the back, and she pushed the cart towards the car she'd borrowed from Mikey.

I walked back to my own, much sexier car, and leaned against it while I smoked. I hadn't really meant to say any of the shit I'd said to her. Hell, I hadn't even realized that's what I was thinking.

But I guess that was it.

I was going to let Sunshine stick around, if that's what he wanted. I was going to fuck him, and let him stay with me until he got his own place. I was going to relax, as much as I could, and try to let myself enjoy it, while it lasted.

And when he left, I'd deal, just like I always did.

.....

**"I'll do whatever it takes, to turn this around. I know what's at stake; I know that I've let you down. And if you give me a chance, I believe that I can change. I'll keep us together whatever it takes."**

## **Chapter 19**

I slide into the usual booth at the diner and scoot all the way to the wall. Brian will probably sit across from me. I know how he likes the wall.

"Out." I hear him say. I look up at him and he is standing there looking at me impatiently.

"But..."

"Out." He narrows his eyes at me. I sigh heavily and climb out of the booth. I start to walk around the other side of the booth when I feel his hand pull on my jacket and yank me down back into the booth next to him. He leans up against the wall and smiles at me. I can't help but smile back. I feel his leg touch mine and electricity instantly radiates through my body. I glance at him out of the corner of my eye and I feel his hand rub my leg. God. If he keeps doing that we are gonna have to make a trip the bathroom before lunch gets here.

Michael, Ben, and Ted file in soon after us and take the empty seats across from us. Emmett isn't far behind and he plops down next to me and tussles my hair. I smirk at him. Michael shivers as he removed his jacket.

"I can't believe it's THIS cold and its only December." Ben smiles at him and puts his arms around him. "I'll keep you warm." They kiss and I smile to myself. I hear Brian groan. I smack his leg.

We order our lunches and Brian and I sit quietly while everyone around us buzzes about current events. Slowly I feel his arm reach across the back of the booth and his hand gently touch my shoulder. I can't hide my smile and everyone else sees's it too.

"So....how are things Brian?" Emmett asks with a devilish look in his eyes.

"Fine Honeycutt and you?" He winces as if it actually hurts him to ask how someone is doing.

"Good. How's it feel to have the sunshine back in your life." He nudges me and I keep my eyes down at the table. I know how this went last time. Brian will say we aren't together. Tell them they don't know what they are talking about. Deny the fact...

"He's staying with me FOR NOW. It's just until he gets his own place." He takes a sip of his coffee and I see Michael smirk.

"Right. For now." Brian glares at Michael.

"That's what I said."

"So Justin how comfortable is Brian's couch?" Ted asks.

I look up at him. "I'm not sleeping on..." Oh fuck.

Everyone's eyes get wide and a large unison "AHA!" falls over the table.

Shit.

Fuck.

I totally fell right into that one.

"Fuck you. And you. And you. Oh and you." He says as he looks at each one of our friends at the table one by one. He punches my shoulder. "Nice going little twat."

"Ow." I rub my shoulder and glare at him. Fucker.

"Anyone have any exciting plans for Christmas?" I ask.

A hush falls over the table. Dammit. I just totally suck today.

I look at Brian out of the corner of my eye. He gives me a half smile.

"I'm just not much in the celebrating mood you know? With Ma not being here." Michael finally says. Everyone nods.

"How about we have you all over?" Ben suggests. Michael snaps his head and stares at Ben. Ben smiles at his husband.

"OOOO! Yea! I'll arrange everything!" Emmett screeches and claps his hands together. I laugh.

"Well it would be nice to have everyone there. Since Mel and Linds are here with the kids." Michael says looking around the table.

"It's what Deb would have wanted Michael." I tell him. He smiles at me.

"I'm assuming you WON'T be making an appearance." Michael says to Brian with an annoyed tone.

"Who said that?" He asks.

"Well I just assumed. We all know how much you hate Christmas." Michael eyes me and I look at him confused. I see everyone else's eyes fall on me and I mouth 'What?' to my friends.

"Brian just hasn't been much in the Christmas spirit since-"

"I'll be there." Brian cuts Emmett off before he reveals any more information. I look at Brian and I feel him squeeze my shoulder.

"Y-You will?" Michael asks stunned.

"Yea. Close your mouth." Brian says smirking at his best friend.

"Heeeey Guys!" Gus jumps into the booth behind Brian, Emmett and I making our whole table shake. He leans in between Brian and I smiling from ear to ear.

"Hello little Kinney." Ted says smiling at Brian's clone.

"What's the good word?" Gus asks eyeing the table.

"We are gonna have a party at the house on Christmas. Everyone will be there." Michael tells Gus smiling from ear to ear.

"Even you?" Gus asks Brian shocked.

"What the fuck? Yes even me. Why is this so hard for you all to believe?" Brian looks pained.

"It's just, you know. Whenever Christmas rolls around you usually lock yourself in the loft and play that old crappy music and pine away over-" It seems a light bulb goes off in Gus's head and he looks at me and smiles.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhh." Everyone at the table, including Gus must have got the same light switch turned on.

They all stare at me. I know what they are thinking. They think Brian actually wants to celebrate Christmas just because I am here. But I know that's not the case. I mean Gus is here. And Mel and Linds. And it's the first Christmas without Deb. Of course he would want to be with Michael. It has nothing to do with me.

"I can't lock myself in my loft this year Sonny boy. This little shit is here. So I might as well come out and play with my friends." I glare at him. Fucker.

"Oh! Dad! I rented that movie you told me to watch. Chasing Amy? So fucking hilarious!" He turns his attention to me and I wince and wait for the reaction from the table. He did it again. He called me Dad.

"Wait. WHAT!?" Michael exclaims.

"What?" Gus asks.

"You're calling him DAD now?" Michael looks between Gus and Brian and me and back to Gus again.

"And?" Gus asks rolling his eyes. "Anyway, we GOTTA rent the other ones you told me about!"

"Yea you have to see Clerks if you liked Mallrats and Chasing Amy." I tell him.

"Why do I feel like I am in a really weird episode of the twilight zone?" Ted asks.

"You're ok with this?" Michael asks Brian.

I see Brian shrug. "He was there when the kid was born. I mean he calls you Uncle Mikey. What's the big deal?" I look at Brian stunned. Is he actually ACCEPTING this? Our eyes meet and a small smirk forms on his lips. He nods at me and I smile as wide as I can. He is. He's ok with this. Oh my god.

"Wow so I guess...you guys are..." Michael begins.

"No. We. Are. Not. I told you." Brian says through gritted teeth.



"Right. He's staying with you just for now." Michael says rolling his eyes.

"Well I have an idea. Why don't we ask Justin?" Ben says leaning one arm on the table and draping the other across Michael's shoulders.

"Yes shall we?" Ted smiles.

My body stiffens. I look at everyone and scratch the back of my head.

"I....Um....Well...." What do I say? Everyone is staring at me, including Brian. He raises one eyebrow at me and folds his hands in front of him. Jesus. I don't want everyone to know my plan, especially since it was going so well and was right on schedule.

"I'm staying with Brian until I find my own place." I say softly. Brian smiles and looks at everyone and nods.

"See I told you."

"But you...you guys are-" Emmett looks at me with confusion in his eyes.

"-Fucking?" Gus answers. "Yea they are fucking." Brian slaps his son on the back of his head.

"Shut your mouth or you don't get your inheritance."

"Staying with you for now. Keep telling yourselves that." Emmett pats my head and gets up from the table. "Gotta go fella's. Have parties to plan." He turns on his heel and shakes his ass as he walks out of the diner.

"Yea I gotta get back too. Mom and Ima are probably freaking out not knowing where I am. Later." Gus punches my shoulder and heads toward the exit. Brian and I are now left alone on the other side of the table, 3 sets of eyes on us.

I pushed my plate with my half eaten sandwich across the table and away from me. Suddenly I wasn't very hungry anymore.

I feel Brian's hand fall on my thigh and he squeezes gently. I don't look at him. I just reach under the table and intertwine his fingers in mine. He allows this and my heart soars. It didn't matter what anyone else thought. All that mattered was us.

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The only light in the loft came from the dimly lit streetlamps that line Brian's street. But even in the darkness I could make my way up and down his body. I knew every inch of it. I knew how to touch him to make those soft moans escape his mouth. And I knew exactly where to put my mouth and knew the tongue speed I needed to use to make him say my name.

He didn't need the light either.

After I was done licking the sweat off his body and teasing his cock for what seemed like hours, he flipped me over onto my stomach and in all a matter of seconds the condom was on and he was inside me. His cock filled my ass and even though he was fucking me harder and harder with each thrust, I could feel more than just his dick. I could feel all of him. I could feel his breath on the back of my neck followed by tiny kisses down my back. I reached around and grabbed at his thigh to push him deeper inside me. His hand found mine and our fingers locked.

**"If we're gonna make this work, you gotta let me inside even though it hurts. Don't hide the broken parts that I need to see. You gotta love yourself if you can ever love me."**

"Justin..." He whispers and grabs my hair and pulls my head back. Our mouths find one another in passion and I couldn't remember ever feeling so close to him. This could have been the moment. The moment I tell him how much I love him and that I wanted to stay here and have him fuck me like this forever. But I don't. I just let him fill me with every inch of his being, physically and emotionally. His embrace on my fingers and hair tightens and he thrusts hard and fast and I know he is close. I bring my other hand to my own cock and jerk with long, hard strokes.

"Feel good? Do you like jerking your cock while I fuck your tight ass Justin?" Jesus. That alone just made my orgasm almost explode.

"God yes Brian. Come, so I can come. Please."

He leans his chest on my back and moves his hand from my hip and intertwines it with mine over my cock. Oh. My. God.

He jerks with me while he fucks my hole and the sensation of his cock in my ass and his hands around my cock is too much for me to handle and I come in a rage of ecstasy. White ribbons shoot all over our fingers and his name is repeated over and over as if I'm saying a prayer.

He comes soon after me, now my name being repeated as if it were a promise. A promise that it would be like this forever.

**"But remember the time I told you the way that I felt? That I'd be lost without you and never find myself? Let's hold onto each other above everything else. Start over, start over."**

He lies on top of me for a moment before finally pulling out of me and cleaning himself off. I roll onto my back and he kneels on the bed and uses a towel to clean off my come stained stomach and even takes my hand to clean that off too. His eyes are soft and he takes his time to make sure I am all cleaned up before heading the bathroom.

I lay in the darkness and take in the warmth and pure happiness I felt in this moment. I was home. With Brian. We had just had the most amazing sex, and I couldn't imagine anything else worth living for. This is why I came home. This is why I needed to be here.

He finally emerges from the bathroom and gets back into bed. He doesn't touch me and I don't reach for him either. There is a thick silence between us and I wonder what he is thinking. Sometimes I would give anything to be inside Brian's brain. Is he thinking about me? About what we just did? Is it work? Gus? I bet he has the most profound thoughts.

"Do you think I should get a new car?" I hear in the darkness.

I roll my head to side and even though I know he can't see me my mouth is agape. This is what he has been pondering about for 20 minutes?

"What?"

"Do you think I should get rid of the 'Vette and get a new car? I really like the new Mercedes that are out now."

Unbelievable.

"If that's what you want and you can afford it." I tell him.

"We made a lot of gross profit this year. I think I deserve to buy myself something nice for Christmas, don't you?"

I laugh. "Sure Bri."

I felt the bed sink and then his hot breath on my cheek. He had rolled over and was facing me now. I closed my eyes and took in his scent.

"So tell me Mr. Taylor. What do you want for Christmas this year?"

My eyes shoot open. Stay calm Justin.

"I thought you didn't believe in all that shit. Buying presents and celebrating."

"Do you want a present or not?" His voice is demanding with a hint of annoyance.

I roll over on my side and find his lips in the dark. His mouth is hot and his lips are still swollen from before. I take in the moment and retrieve every ounce of courage I have in my body. Here goes nothing. I press my lip to his ear and whisper what I want for Christmas. This year and every year after that.

"I want to go to Britin. With you."

\*\*\*

**All the stars may shine bright,  
All the clouds may be white,  
But when you smile,  
Oh how I feel so good,  
That I can hardly wait**

**To hold you,  
Enfold you,  
Never enough,  
Render your heart to me.**

**All mine,  
You have to be**

## **Chapter 20**

How we ended up back here, I don't know. But here we were, standing in the doorway to Britin. My hands were in my pockets, and I tried to ignore that my palms were sweating.

Fuck.

Justin used the key I'd given him when we first got into the car in Pittsburgh this afternoon, to open the door. We hadn't spoken the entire way here. He must have thought that if he said even one thing wrong, I would turn the car around. He wasn't wrong.

This was terrifying. This was even more terrifying than the first time I brought him here, because that time I'd really thought that things would work out. That time I was high on shock and it was easy to make dramatic gestures. I'd been in the deep end.

Right now, I was just sitting on the edge, with my feet in the water, wondering if I jump in, would I drown? Last time I'd barely made it out. This time I was sure I'd sink right to the bottom.

So I didn't barge into Britin (god, I'd never get used to that name) and show it off proudly, sure of myself, confident. Instead, I stood here, trying to breathe slowly and deeply, trying to act as if I was completely unmoved and fine. I was Brian Kinney. I didn't give a fuck.

Except I did.

The door swung open, and I followed him in. The windows had no curtains on them, but it was dark and cold outside from an approaching winter storm, so the house was dim. I flicked on the light and glanced around.

Justin exhaled slowly, as if he'd been holding his breath for hours. "It's so... clean," he whispered. "Shouldn't it be dusty, or..."

I snorted. "If it was, I'd fire the maid."

His eyes widened and he turned to look at me.

He looked vulnerable and nervous. Good, I wasn't the only one.

"Maid?" he asked softly.

I shrugged, as if it meant nothing, as if it was no big deal, as if it wasn't proof that a small part of me had dreamed of this moment for ten fucking years. "I like things to be clean."

Justin nodded hesitantly and turned to look back around at the large empty room.

I hadn't furnished it, beyond a few things here and there. I'd hoped we would pick out all of the furniture together, after the wedding. I didn't want it to be another loft. I'd wanted it to reflect Justin, too.

How fucking stupid.

I followed him as he walked into the house, and I shut the door behind myself. The inside was cold. It wasn't as if there had been a reason for the heat to be on.

"It's cold," he mumbled.

I nodded. I didn't offer to turn on the heat. A place this big took a long time to warm up. "There's the fireplace," I said.

I could see his back tense.

Fuck this. It was stupid. I put my hands on his shoulders and rubbed gently. "Don't have a seizure."

He slowly relaxed in my grip. "It's just..."

"Yeah," I said.

He placed his hands on top of mine and moved them from his shoulders, turning to face me. "Why the hell didn't you sell it?"

I stared back at him. I was going to be honest today. After all, even I could tell that all of my excuses were bullshit when we were literally standing in the *house* I fucking *bought* for him, for us to live in *together*. There was no point in protecting my pride, in trying not to embarrass myself. The embarrassment was all around us. My pride was already destroyed. I might as well be blunt and honest at this point.

"Because I bought it for you," I said.

His forehead wrinkled in frustration. "Brian-"

"No," I said, cutting him off. "Listen. I bought it for you. I couldn't make myself sell it."

He peered at me, like he was trying to make sense of what I was saying, but he couldn't quite do it. Instead, he took my hand, squeezed it gently, and led me through the house.

First, the kitchen. I'd gotten a few things for that.

"Brian," he said softly. "Shit..."

I shrugged. "We're not exactly within walking distance of the diner. I thought we'd want to be able to *eat*."

His eyes widened and he stared at me again. "You mean after the wedding."

I forced myself not to roll my eyes.

"Shit, Brian..." He looked around at the stainless steel gadgets around the room, the brand new oven and refrigerator that had never been used, the espresso machine, the toaster, the waffle iron.

Yeah, I'd gotten a waffle iron. Like I said, I had been in shock.

He walked over to the counter and traced his fingers over the iron.

I cleared my throat, feeling stupider by the moment. "I thought you'd make us breakfast."



"After the wedding," he said again, even quieter this time.

I didn't reply. It was obvious what I meant. Yes, after the wedding.

He turned and led me through the silent house. We glanced into large, empty rooms and I knew he was picturing what would have been in them, just like I was. There was the gym. There was my office. There was the library. There was... shit, there was his studio.

And then we got to the bedroom door. He opened it and gasped.

Well, what did he expect? That we would fuck on the floor on our wedding night?

Fuck. Wedding night. Just the thought of it made my ears hot and I knew I was actually *blushing*. I guess a big enough embarrassment would make even me show some shame.

"Wow," he said. I followed him into the bedroom and glanced around. Not a speck of dust. Just the huge bed, and the fireplace, and the plush carpet, and the overstuffed pillows.

"White silk," he said softly, tracing his hands over the sheets. The comforter was already pulled back, so it wouldn't have been in our way. I wouldn't have wanted to mess with it when I was carrying him to bed, undressing him. The maid had been given explicit instructions to put everything back exactly as it had been after cleaning, and that included the sheets.

God, I was a mess.

He slowly sat on the edge of the bed and stared out the window. "This was going to be our wedding bed."

I just stood there, feeling more uncomfortable than I had in my entire life. Every single thing I'd done to make myself unflappable, everything I'd done to put up that wall, every single moment that I'd denied caring for anyone in my life, was destroyed by this *place*. I was standing in the center of the biggest embarrassment of my life. I sort of wanted to throw up.

"So," I said, trying again to pretend that I didn't realize how uncomfortable we both were. "It'll sell for a lot."

He bit his lower lip and held out his hand. He wanted me to go to him, sit down next to him on that bed. And fuck me, but I did.

"I should never-" he started to say, but I stopped him.

"Regret is bullshit," I said. I sat down heavily next to him and sighed, turning to face him. "You did what you needed to do. You had a lot of experiences you wouldn't have had otherwise. You learned. You are who you are now because of what you've done."

He sucked on his lower lip and looked unconvinced.

I couldn't help myself. I reached out and traced my thumb over his lips. "There's no point in regretting anything. What's done is done. All you can do now is decide what you want to do from now on."

He leaned into my touch and stared at me with half-lidded eyes. "I don't know if you'll like what I want."

"If you're smart, you'll sell this ridiculous place, move back to New York, and be rich and successful, and forget all about me." There. I wasn't pretending anymore. This was about me, at least partially. I had admitted it. So why the fuck did that just make me feel *worse*?

He took a deep breath and took my hand and squeezed it. "I was a spoiled brat, Brian. I didn't know... how hard you work. My parents were wealthy, you were wealthy, I had no idea what it meant to have a job, to be able to afford cars and... and fucking estates. But I do now."

I glanced away, feeling stupid. Sometimes I hated having as much money as I did. It was a little embarrassing. I wanted to be successful, yes, and I did enjoy being able to buy all the expensive shit I liked. But this fucking house... it was ridiculous. Besides, having *this much* money was stupid, if you didn't have anyone to spend it on.

"I realize now... what it meant when you bought Britin. You weren't just making a romantic gesture. You were making an investment... in us." He looked like he was about to cry. I wanted to say something, but I didn't know what. "You didn't just ask me to marry you because you were scared. You really meant it, didn't you?"

I shrugged stiffly. "When have you known me to do something I didn't really want to?"

He blinked hard and reached up to rub his eyes with the hand that wasn't clutching mine. "Fuck. I fucked up so much."

I couldn't help it. I leaned in and placed a kiss at the corner of his eye. "You didn't fuck up."

"Everyone told me," he said, leaning against me. I pressed my face against his and inhaled his scent, wrapping an arm around his waist and pulling him close. I couldn't help it. I had to touch him. "Everyone told me that I had to go to New York to be the best artist... the best *person* I could be. But what they didn't get is... I'm the best person I can be when I'm with *you*."

My grip tightened on his hand and waist, and I bit my lower lip. What the fuck was I supposed to say to that?

"I sold the gallery," he said, so softly I thought I'd misheard him.

I sat back just enough to see his face and frowned. "What?"

"To my friend... he'd helped me manage it. I sold it to him." He sniffled and rubbed his eyes with his free hand again, catching the beginnings of tears that had been there.

I didn't know what to say. I knew I was staring at him with my mouth open and my eyes wide, looking shocked and probably stupid, but I had no idea what to say.

"I'm going to use the money to go back to school." He grinned nervously at me, gripping the hand that was still in his tightly. "In Pittsburgh. But not just for art... I want to be a teacher. An art teacher."

My heart was racing. "You enrolled?" I managed to choke out.

"On Friday, while you were at work," he said.

"Fuck," I mumbled, removing my hand from his waist and running it through my hair.

"I'm going to go to school in Pittsburgh, and work part time on campus. And when I graduate, I'm going to get a job *teaching* in Pittsburgh," he said, leaning in to press his face against my neck.

I pulled away, yanking my hand out of his, and walked across to the window, even though it was so dark out that I couldn't see anything at all.

He let out a short, bitter laugh. "It's too late, you know."

I didn't reply. I didn't know what to say or do. I felt shut down. I felt numb. Maybe I was in shock again. Hopefully this time I wouldn't buy another fucking house.

"Fifteen years, Brian," he said softly, and he got up and walked to me. I could see his reflection in the window. He wrapped his arms around my waist from behind and peered at my reflection from over my shoulder. "It's been fifteen years since we met. I've been in love with you ever since you found me under that street light."

I wanted to shut my eyes. I wanted to shove him off, to tell him he was being a drama queen, to tell him to stop exaggerating, to leave me the *fuck* alone, but I couldn't. Instead, I actually felt myself *grin*.

I was so fucked.

"Fifteen years is too long to *not* be together." He stepped around me and looked me in the eye. "I told you I still love you. I'm not leaving. I'm staying with you this time, Brian."

I should have kept my mouth shut, but I couldn't. "Oh, this time is different?" I winced as soon as I'd said it. Fuck.

He reached a hand up to my face and touched it gently. It was hard not to lean into his hand. I was so fucking pathetic.

"This time is different."

I wanted to believe him. Fuck me, but I wanted to believe him so much. I shut my eyes and sighed. "Justin..."

"I know I hurt you when I left. I'm sorry."

I opened my eyes and meant to tell him that sorry was bullshit, that it was crap, that he was full of shit and to get the fuck out of here, but he was giving me this look... somewhere between desperation and hope. I knew that look. I felt the same way.

Fuck this. I put a hand on the back of his neck and leaned in, kissing him deeply and slowly. He tasted so good. He moaned into the kiss and wrapped his arms around my neck, and I broke the kiss, breathing heavily.

"So what you're saying is, you can't live without me?" I arched an eyebrow at him. If he said it was true, I'd know he was full of shit. He was totally capable of living without me. He'd done it for ten years.

"I'm not saying I can't. I'm saying I won't." He stared right back at me, completely sure of himself, completely certain of what he wanted. And what he wanted was *me*.

It was the sexiest he'd ever been.

I ducked my head and rested it on his shoulder. He put a hand on the back of my neck and let me stay like that for a moment, working his fingers into my hair.

"I can't go back," I said, so quietly I barely heard it myself.

"I'm not asking you to," he said.

"If I do this... I can't lose you again," I said, wincing at my own pathetic weakness. Who the fuck ever thought Brian Fucking Kinney would be so... vulnerable? But somehow, right now, I didn't care. It was Justin. He'd seen me worse off.

He wrapped his other arm around me and held me tightly. I wrapped my own arms around his waist, breathing him in, my face pressed into the crook of his neck.

"You won't," he said softly. "I'm yours."

Mine?

He was *mine*?

That was the last straw. I pressed a kiss into the nape of his neck, sliding my hands down to his ass, pulling his body tightly against mine. He was hard. Shit. I felt my own body respond quickly, and I was almost dizzy from the blood rushing to my cock so fast.

"Justin," I whispered into his neck. I didn't know what else to say. I wanted him. I *needed* him. I needed him under me, around me. I needed to be *in* him. I needed to *possess* him. If he was mine, if he was really mine, I needed to *feel* it.

"Brian," he whimpered.

Fuck. No one said my name like that but him. I lifted my head and moved my hands to his hips, gripping them tightly. I kissed him, hard and slow. I was probably bruising his lips, and I didn't care. He was *mine*.

The room was cold, and I should have lit a fire, but I didn't. I didn't have time. I had to have him *now*. The kiss deepened, and he was sucking on my tongue. I heard myself moan, and I grabbed his shirt, pushing it up his chest, circling my fingers around his nipples before parting the kiss long enough to rip the shirt off of him.

The moment his shirt was off, I pushed him towards the bed, placing fast, hard kisses on his lips and neck. He stumbled back and fell onto the bed. Fuck. He was finally *here*, before me, on those sheets I'd picked out just for this. I was going to take him. I was going to claim him. He was *mine*.

I ripped off my own shirt and got onto the bed, my legs on either side of his body. He reached for me, but I grabbed his wrists and pinned them at his sides, placing kisses on his chest, slowly working my way down. He wriggled when I sucked on his nipples, one at a time, making his breath come in soft gasps. He moaned and arched his back as my tongue slid down his stomach, towards his pants.

Every sound he made urged me onwards, every movement made me hotter. Suddenly the freezing temperature in the room was gone. His body was hot, and the closer I got to the bulge in his pants, the hotter he got. I hooked my thumbs under the waist of his pants and tugged them down slowly, cocking my head and watching as his erection was exposed to the air.

He gasped loudly and shifted, lifting his ass, letting me tug his pants and underwear off. I slid my hands down his thighs and spread them, ducking my head and running my tongue down the length of his shaft. He wriggled and moaned, his hands fisting into the silk sheets.

God, I wanted him. My cock ached, straining against my pants. I stood, undoing my fly and letting my pants fall to the floor, followed by my underwear. I tossed a condom and small tube of lubricant from my pocket onto the bed, kicked off my pants, and kneeled back on the bed, between his legs.

He stared up at me from the bed, breathing heavily, his eyes half-shut. "Brian," he whimpered again. "Take me."

Fuck. How did he always know *exactly* what to say to make the fire in me burn even hotter?

I leaned over him, pressing our bodies together, our cocks grinding against each other. I pressed my lips behind his ear and murmured to him, holding back my own need. I

wanted him *completely* mine. I wanted him weak and trembling beneath me. I wanted him to beg. "You're mine," I murmured, kissing him behind the ear, where I knew his skin was sensitive.

Goosebumps raised up on his arms and legs, and he thrust against me harder. I groaned in response.

"Justin," I whispered. "Do you want me inside you?"

"Yes," he gasped, releasing the sheets and grasping my shoulders, rocking our hips together. Every thrust made my own cock ache more, and I could feel him throbbing against me.

"Do you want me to take you?" I whispered, reaching for the lube.

He didn't respond in words. He just moaned, nodding weakly.

I popped the bottle open and got some on my fingers, and pressed them to his tight hole.

He breathed in sharply, loudly, and pressed against my fingers eagerly.

Fuck, he was hot. I could barely restrain myself from simply thrusting into him already. He was wriggling beneath me, spreading his legs, and I had two fingers up his tight ass, spreading him, teasing him.

He was panting, whimpering. "Brian, please... please... I need you... please, Brian," he gasped in between the little noises he kept making.

My restraint was lost, and I ripped the condom wrapper open with my teeth. I didn't ask him to put it on me. He was too far gone. He probably would have ripped it, and I wouldn't have been able to stop now, condom or no condom. But I couldn't blame him, my own hands were trembling, and it felt like it took forever to slide the latex onto my cock.



Finally, with it on, I pressed myself against his entrance. I slid a hand under his hips, lifting him off the bed a bit, leaning over him. I stared into his eyes and slowly pressed into him, trembling from the effort of not thrusting into him in one fast motion. I didn't want to hurt him.

He let out a long, throaty moan, and stared right back at me. It was so fucking intense, I felt like I could barely breathe. He was tight and hot around me, and his hands gripped my shoulders tightly, and I realized I really had jumped in the deep end, and I really *was* drowning.

And I didn't care.

I was buried completely within him finally, and he lifted his head enough to give me a deep, slow kiss, and I sucked on his lower lip, sliding out of him and thrusting back in, almost just as slowly as I had begun.

He moaned again, shuddering under me. "Please," he gasped.

He wanted it faster? Harder? He wasn't going to get it that easy. I'd fucked him in as many positions as are possible, and a few I hadn't even been sure were. I'd taken him hard, fast, lying down, standing up, kneeling, on his stomach, on his back, on all fours... I'd fucked him before. This time I wasn't simply fucking him. I was *claiming* him.

This time I was going to look him in the eye, *really* look at him, and not hold back. This time I wasn't going to hide how much I wanted him, *needed* him. This time I was going to take him slow, and make it last, and when he came, it would be all for me.

His face was flushed, and I slid in and out of him, slowly increasing my speed, holding his hips off the bed, knowing I was grinding against his prostate with each deep thrust.

"Brian," he gasped. "Brian, please... I need you," he moaned.

I was dizzy, and our bodies were sweaty, and I kissed him again, finally getting faster, and faster, and then I wasn't thrusting in and out, it was just in, in, in, until all I could

feel was him around me, under me, clinging to me. He was gasping my name with each thrust, and his legs were wrapped around my waist.

When I felt his ass clench around me, and my balls tighten, I reached between us with my free hand, grasping his cock. It was slippery with pre-come, and it only took three strokes before he was so tight around me, before his head was thrown back, before his entire body shuddered beneath me and he shot all over our chests. I couldn't hold back any longer. I groaned his name, never taking my gaze from his face, and came hard, so hard that my vision blurred and I felt like the air had been knocked out of me.

I must have stayed like that, my hand around his softening cock, my lips parted, beads of sweat dripping from my body onto his, for five minutes before I finally came back to myself. I blinked slowly, finally inhaling deeply, and pulled out of him slowly.

He moaned softly, arching his back, his eyes almost shut. His entire body was flushed. He was slick with sweat. He was gorgeous.

I tied off the condom, my hands feeling weak and awkward, and tossed it into the trash next to the bed before collapsing next to him.

We were both panting, and neither of us said anything. We should have gotten up and taken a shower. We reeked of sex. We were coated in sweat and come and saliva.

Instead, I used a silk pillowcase to wipe off his belly and cock, and then my own, before shifting up onto the bed properly, my head on a pillow. I tugged his limp body up next to mine, wrapping my arms around him and holding him tightly against myself. He rested his head on my chest, and I pulled the sheets up over us. He curled up against me, his breathing finally returning to normal.

I shut my eyes. I couldn't think. I couldn't say anything. There was nothing to say. I believed him now. We were together. We were really together, and he was here. And he was mine.

**Make no mistake,  
You shan't escape,  
Tethered and tied,  
There's nowhere to hide from me.**

**All mine,  
You have to be**

.....

**"I've got a hunger, twisting my stomach into knots. That my tongue was tied off. My brain's repeating, "If you've got an impulse let it out." But they never make it past my mouth. Our youth is fleeting; old age is just around the bend. And I can't wait to go gray. This is the sound of settling."**

## **Chapter 21**

My eyes flutter open and I groan. The dream I had been having was the best of my life. I didn't want to wake up. I roll over onto my side and bump into the warmest, most soothing body I had ever felt. Then I see his face and my heart is so full it could burst. It wasn't a dream. Brian was here. Right next to me, snoring away. He will swear on his Armani suits and Prada shoes that he doesn't, but I tell you now, he does.

I sit up slowly and look around the bedroom. Our bedroom. I smile and let out the most satisfying sigh of my life. This was it. I had arrived. I take one more look at Brian, and slowly and gently get out of bed. I pad barefoot and naked down the stairs and into the kitchen. I run my fingers along the waffle maker and wish we had food here so I could cook for him the breakfast I should have made him 10 years ago after the wedding. God, how could I have been so stupid? I lost 10 years. 10 fucking years I could have been here, living here, in wedded bliss with Brian. But no, me and my goddamn fucking pride.

"God Dammit." I groan.

"It was only time Sunshine." His voice breaks me from my daze and I jump a mile in the air.

"Son of a bitch!" I yell and whirl around. Brian is standing there, sheet bundled around him, looking at me with a sullen look.

"Don't beat yourself up about it."

"I don't know what you're talking about." I tell him and open a cabinet. He has to at least have coffee in the house.

"You were thinking you wasted all that time. Not being here." I turn and look at him. Since when could he read minds?

"I...I just...10 years Brian. 10 years I wasted." He walks to me and brings me into him and wraps the sheet around the both of us.

"It wasn't a waste. And I told you then and I'm telling you now. It was only time. You said it yourself that night at the hospital with your dad. It didn't matter how long we were away from each other. Nothings changed." I lean up to kiss him and he tastes like...Christmas morning.

I smile to myself at the thought.

"What are you smiling about?"

"I thought you could read minds all of a sudden." I smirk at him and he raises an eyebrow at me.

"Hmm..you're thinking you want to give me a Christmas blow job." He devours my mouth again and I feel his cock harden on contact.

"Can I least have coffee first?" I ask against his lips.

"Yea but we gotta hurry." He tells me. I look at him with a confused look. He continues.

"I have to run and pick up some stuff before we go to Michael's. You know last minute gifts. So I'm gonna drop you off at your mothers before I go."

"But why can't I go with you?"

"Cause Sunshine. Daphne is meeting you right? To come to the party? Just go with them to Michael's and I will right behind." He kisses me softly. "I promise."

He is up to something I just knew it. I know that look. I know that devious smirk. I knew him. Period.

Thank god he actually had coffee. I made it, we drank it naked in the kitchen while we kissed, groped, and I finally gave in and gave him his Christmas blowjob in the middle of the kitchen. And then I got returned the favor in the shower, 10 minutes later.

We dressed in the clothes we had packed to come here with. Him, in nice dark blue jeans and a black button down shirt. God he was beautiful. He helped me button my own blue shirt I had gotten at Hugo Boss when I lived in New York. His eyes flash and a smile spreads across his lips as the last button is buttoned.

"What?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "Nothing." I grab his arm and pull him back as he tries to walk away.

"Tell me."

"You just...you look hot."

A huge smile spreads across my lips and I practically jump into his arms. Our tongues dance as I kiss him.

"No...no...stop...we...gotta...go..." He says in between lip tangles.

I groan and break the kiss. "Fiiiiine."

"God Justin, stop being such a queen. We have all the time in the world." He wraps his arms around me and kisses my forehead. He was right we do. I wasn't going anywhere and by the way he had his arms around me, I knew he wasn't either.

~~~~~

When my we pull up to Michael and Ben's my heart sinks a little because I don't see Brian's car. He isn't here yet. Where the hell is he?

As soon as I open their front door, the noise level inside the house almost deafens my ears.

"Justin!" Melanie yells and she engulfs me in a huge hug. She hands me a large manila envelope and smiles. "Done." I take it from her and smile gently.

"Thank you."

"You ready for all that?" She asks. I look straight in her eyes.

"I've been ready since the day I met him." Her eyes get soft and she kisses my cheek.

My mother, Daphne and I make our way into the house and make our rounds. Ted and Blake were snuggled on the couch together drinking wine and they smile at me as I walk past them.

Emmett is running around like a mad queen making sure the table was set right and the flowers were arranged the exact way HE wanted them. He waves at me and I smile.

I give Hunter a huge hug when I finally see him. It had been 10 years and he had grown into a man. A successful man from what I hear. He went to college and now works at a financial firm in Philly. He tells me he didn't want to leave PA. He wanted to be close to home. I told him I knew the feeling well.

Michael and Ben were bringing food out to the table when I finally see them and JR is close behind, following Michael around where ever he went. Daddy's little shadow.

When I finally reach the kitchen I see Lindsay and I stop. God. I didn't want to do this. Not today. She turns around and gives me a gentle smile. I try to smile back but I can't force it out.

"Justin, I know you're angry at me." She says.

"To say the least." I fold my arms over my chest.

"I owe you an apology. I should never said the things I said to you. You are an adult and can make your own decisions. It's none of my business what goes on between you and Brian."

My expression softens and I unfold my arms.

"I love him Lindsay. And I want to be with him."

"I know. And that's ok." She walks to me and hugs me. I wrap my arms around her. "It's more than ok."

"You moving in on my other parent now Sunshine? Jeeez." I hear Gus's voice behind me. Linds and I break our embrace and we smile at Kinney Jr.

"Merry Christmas Gus." I say to him.

"Merry Christmas. So where is my Dad?" He asks.

"Yea where is Brian?" Linds looks at me questionably.

"I honestly don't know. He said he had some last minute things to pick up."

"Presents? Jeeez you guys must have had some hot sex last night for him to actually get GIFTS." I punch Gus in the shoulder.

"Shut up."

I make my way back out into the living room and find my Mom talking to Ted and Blake on the couch and Daphne wrapped in deep conversation with Hunter. I take a deep breath and smile. This was my family. Where I belonged.

I hear the front door open and Brian emerges smiling from ear to ear.

"There you are!" I walk to him and he throws his arms around me and rocks side to side as he kisses my mouth, hot and urgent. I almost can't breathe we are kissing so deeply. When we finally end the kiss we turn around to find the entire crowd gawking at us.

"What...the..." Ted begins.

"I second that." Michael says.

Brian nuzzles his face into my hair and inhales. He can't stop smiling.

"Tell them." He whispers in my ear.

I look at him stunned. "Now?"

He nods and we face the crowd. His arm is around my shoulders and his head is pressed against mine. Holy shit.

"Ok well...um I have made some decisions. I sold my gallery in New York."

A gasp falls over the gang and I look at Lindsay immediately for his disapproving look. I don't find one. In fact as I glance around the room, I find not one disapproving look. All I find are smiles and love.



"I sold the gallery and with the money I enrolled back in school. I'm going to be a teacher's assistant at PIFA until I graduate and then I am going to find a full time teaching job. In Pittsburgh." I hold my breath.

'Yah's' and 'Woot's' and clapping fill the air as everyone stands to his or her feet to congratulate me. I beam. I couldn't believe how wonderful they were all being.

"And you Brian?" Michael asks smiling.

"Me? Well...I'm still the same."

"Ok, let me rephrase Michael's question. You and Justin?" Ben asks.

"Oh." He laughs. He looks at me and we both smile. "We are...we are together as we will ever be. He isn't going anywhere. I know that now. And neither am I."

'Awww's' escape our friend's mouths and Lindsay and Michael rush to us. I hug Lindsay while Michael and Brian share the same embrace. When we part I see my mother with tears in her eyes. I go to her and throw my arms around her.

"I'm so happy for you honey." She tells me.

"Thanks Mom."

"Well it's about fucking time you crazy kids got back together. I was tired of Dad being such a drama queen all the damn time." Gus lightens the mood.

Brian walks to his son and we all wait for the legendary smack on the back of the head. It doesn't come. Instead Brian pulls out an envelope out his coat pocket and hands it to his son. He hugs him and Gus surprised at first keeps his hands at his side. But Brian doesn't let go and Gus finally wraps his arms around his father.

We spend the next hour socializing. We eat, drink wine, and all the while Brian never leaves my side. His hand was either always intertwined with mine or his arm around my shoulder. We shared kisses and nuzzles. He couldn't keep his hands off me. And I didn't mind one bit. We finally get a free moment and I pull him into Michael and Ben's den away from the crowd. I had left the manila envelope Melanie had given me on the coffee table.

"I have something for you." I tell him. His eyes narrow.

"No presents." He tells me. "You gave me enough last night."

"Shut up." I hand him the envelope. He winces and opens it slowly. I bite my thumbnail nervous. I didn't know he was going to react to this.

He takes out the papers and reads slowly. His eyes soften and he brings his lips into his mouth. "What did you do?" He finally asks.

"Its OURS now. Not just mine. I put the house in both our names." I exhale slowly.

"Justin..."

"Shut up." I tell him again. "This is what I want. It was never just mine. It's always been ours. We can decide what WE want to do with the house now. Whether we sell it or live there, it doesn't matter. It will be OUR decision."

A small smile spreads over his lips and he nods, accepting it.

"There's more." I tell him a wide smile spreading across my face.

He shuffles the papers and reads more. His eyes widen and he looks up at me.

"Is this for real? I mean it says 'Official legal document' but this cant be real." He says.

"I had Melanie draw it up. The house papers are real. This one isn't. But I figure, it's the closest thing to being married as it comes."

He reads the paper. "Mr. Justin Taylor is now the sole property of Mr. Brian Kinney." He laughs. He looks at me and a devilish smile appears on his lips.

"So does this mean you have to do WHATEVER I say?"

I punch him lightly in the stomach. "Like I don't already."

"So let's test that theory. Get on your knees."

"Brian! No. There are children here."

"Shit that's what makes it hot." He tries to push me down and we wrestle for a few minutes laughing and kissing.

"Um, I'm sorry to interrupt, but Dad there is a delivery here for you?" We hear Gus's voice behind us.

"Oh. Ok." Brian smiles at me and takes my hand. Oh god. What has he done? I KNEW he was up to something.

He leads me outside and as soon as I see it, I stop dead in my tracks.

"What the..." There was a red convertible mustang sitting outside Michael's house. I look at Brian and he just smiles.

"You did not get me a mustang." I tell him.

"It's a 1970 Mustang Convertible." He corrects me.

"You cant...I wont..."

"I did. And you will." He kisses me. "You're gonna need a way to get to and from school and work. And I'm not driving your ass everywhere and you can't take my car."

"Brian, I can just take the bus."

He smirks.

"There are no buses from West Virginia to PIFA, sunshine." My eyes widen and I stare at him open mouthed. Did he...does he mean....

"You got him a car!" We hear Michael screech. We turn around to see the gang had piled outside onto the porch to see what the commotion was about.

"What the fuck is in West Virginia?" Gus asks.

\*\*\*

**I've got you under my skin  
I've got you deep in the heart of me  
So deep in my heart that you're really a part of me  
I've got you under my skin**

**I'd tried so not to give in  
I said to myself: this affair never will go so well  
But why should I try to resist when, baby, I know so well  
I've got you under my skin**

## Chapter 22

"What the fuck is in West Virginia?" Gus had asked, and the rest of this huge, ridiculous family all looked at me, waiting for my response.

Hmm.

I shoved my hands in my pockets and stuck my tongue in the side of my cheek, wondering what *exactly* to say.

"Yeah, Brian, what *is* in West Virginia?" Melanie asked, smirking at me.

Bitch.

I rolled my eyes and sighed heavily. "Our house."

I tried to ignore the gasps and shocked expressions on their faces. Talk about annoying.

"You bought him a car *and* a house?!" Michael asked, gaping at me.

Ted looked like he was going to faint from the idea of the debt I'd just put the company in, and everyone else looked like they'd seen a ghost.

I ran a hand through my hair, suddenly annoyed. What the fuck was the big deal? "No, we already *had* the house."

I waited for it to sink in, for them to realize what it meant. How fucking embarrassing. It was a good thing I was in a deliriously good mood, or I would have just left. This was crap. Of course, Jennifer and Daphne didn't look shocked at all. Damnit, he must have told them about it ages ago.

Just when I was starting to think I'd have to cuss them all out just to get them to stop giving me these shocked, pitying looks, Justin put his hand on my arm, and I instantly relaxed. I glanced at him and couldn't help but grin.

"So why aren't we having Christmas over there?" Michael asked, looking slightly irritated. "I bet it's bigger than our place."

I snorted. "Yeah, a bit."

Ted sighed heavily. "So *that's* where all that money's been going," he mumbled.

I shot him a dirty look, and he winced, turning to go inside. "Hey, is it time for the feast?"

"Ooh, the turkey!" Emmet dashed back inside the house and ran to the kitchen, and everyone piled back inside. Everyone, that is, except for Gus.

"Sonnyboy?" I arched an eyebrow at him.

He was giving me this intense sort of look, and it was making me nervous. "What the hell is it?"

"Do I get a car, too?" he asked, suddenly smiling widely.

I laughed quickly and patted him on the head. "Nice try. I don't even trust you with a bike. Take your birthday check and blow it on something your mothers wouldn't approve of, and be happy."

Gus gave me another calculating look before turning and going inside. I shut the door behind him and sighed. "Fuck."

Justin reached up to run a hand through my hair and I shut my eyes, enjoying the sensation. "Shouldn't you have gotten him a real gift? I mean, you got me a *car*..."

I opened my eyes and smirked. "At his age? He's probably glad to have money to throw around more than any stupid gift I'd pick out. Besides, I think \$500 is a decent amount."

Justin paled slightly.

"What?" I straightened up and walked to his car, circling it slowly.

"I just... my parents were pretty well off, but I didn't ever get \$500 cash, not even on Christmas." He followed me, resting a hand hesitantly on the car, and stroking it as he followed me around it.

"Well, he doesn't live with me, so I don't have to worry about what he'll buy, or what a brat he'll turn into from being spoiled, so I might as well." I smirked and watched him admire the car. "So, you like it?"

He grinned slowly and shook his head. "I can't believe you. Do I like it? Hell, yes, I like it. It's the car of my *dreams*. But it really is too much."

I nodded, and walked over to the driver's side door, opening it and gesturing him to get in. "Of course it is."

He laughed and slid into the seat, grasping the steering wheel and shifting in the seat. "You're going to spoil me, too, and I *do* live with you. Aren't you worried *I'll* become a brat?" He smirked at me from his seat in the car.

I shut the door and leaned over it, ducking my head to kiss him deeply. He looked so fucking hot in the driver's seat, just like I knew he would. When I pulled away, I pressed my forehead to his. "You're already a brat. But you're *my* brat."

Justin shut his eyes and grinned. "Mm."

We stayed like that for a moment. I knew I should move, get in the car, or lead him inside to eat with the others. But I didn't want to. He felt *good*, even just like this, and I don't like to stop doing things that feel good.

"AHEM," a voice said from the door. I finally lifted my head and looked over to see Michael smirking at us. "Dinner is served."

I straightened up and opened the door again, helping Justin out. "We'll take her out for a spin after."

We started towards the door, still open from Michael coming to get us, when he grabbed the back of my pants and yanked. I took a step back and arched an eyebrow at him. He put his other arm around my shoulders and leaned up, pressing his face to the side of mine.

"Does this mean *I* get road head now?" he said, his voice husky and deep. And then he bit my ear.

Fuck. I had to bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself from letting out the moan that was building in my throat. I hadn't seen him like this for ten years, and back then he was really too young to not just think of as 'cute' when he tried. So when I felt myself go instantly hard at the feel of his hand on my ass and his teeth on my ear, I was more than a little shocked.

Shit. Did I actually want him to *top* me?

Not that I'd never done such a thing, on rare occasion, and not that we hadn't, but it had never especially been my thing. But suddenly, the idea of trying it one more time didn't seem half-bad.

Or maybe it was shock. Yeah, probably.

I turned my head and rested a hand on his ass, pulling him into another deep kiss. This time, I let *his* tongue slide into *my* mouth, and I ran mine over it, sucking on it gently. I could feel his moan more than hear it.



When we parted a moment later, I nodded. "I might be able to arrange something," I said, hoping I didn't sound as desperately horny as I felt.

He grinned, eyes glazed over, and walked up the front steps and into the house.

It was going to be a long fucking meal.

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"So, when do we get to see your mansion?" Michael asked, gathering the dishes.

Shit. The conversation had stayed well away from Britin during dinner, but now that Jennifer and Daphne had left, the lesbians were in the living room with the kids examining all of their gifts, and Ted and Blake were back on the sofa making out, he brought it up.

I glanced at Justin and shrugged. Emmet, Ben, and Michael stared at us. "Give us about a month," I said.

Justin beamed at me. I grinned back at him. As pathetic as it was, I couldn't wait to pick out furniture with him. Of course, it wasn't for any *romantic* reason, or anything lesbianic like that. It was because I'm gay, and I like to have a fabulous place to live. It's one of the perks.

"Let me guess, you have to pick out the curtains, and dishes, and little dust collectors," Emmet said, giving me a wry look. "It's *just* like getting ready for a wedding. Should we all buy you blenders?"

I glared at him.

"I'm sure Brian knows exactly what furniture he wants already, and it's probably so expensive it's going to make Teddy cry," Michael said, looking amused.

I shrugged and grabbed the bottle of wine, pouring myself another glass.

"Actually, we're going to pick it out together," Justin said.

Everyone said 'awww' and I rolled my eyes. "We're going to pick it out together, from catalogues of my choosing." I took a gulp of the wine. "If it's not from Italy, it's not allowed."

Ben patted me on the shoulder and stood to help Michael with the dishes. "How romantic."

"It's not romantic, it's called having good taste," I grumbled into my glass. "I like to be comfortable."

"Like a spoiled housecat," Michael said.

"Yeah, but I don't have to lick myself. I have someone to do that for me." I smirked at Justin, who flushed slightly. Cute.

Emmet laughed and poured himself another glass of wine as well, elbows on the table, looking pleased. "Well, if you decide to throw a housewarming party, you know who to call! I'll bet it's a *palace*, I could decorate it with little shimmering lights, and-"

"It's not a *palace*, and it's not a *mansion*." I rolled my eyes, as if that were ridiculous.

"It's more of an *estate*, really," Justin said, looking smug.

Emmet looked impressed. "Oh, and I suppose there are stables, and a tennis court?"

Justin just smirked at him.

"No shit!" Emmet gasped, then reached across the table to pat me on the shoulder. I brushed his hand off. "Good job, Brian! I always knew you had good taste. What kind of horses are you going to have?"

I frowned at him. "No horses," I said.

Justin chuckled. "Right. He thinks animals *smell*."

"They do," I said, arching an eyebrow at him. "Do *you* want to clean up manure every day? Ugh." I shook my head.

"Then what are the stables *for*?" Michael asked.

I shrugged.

"To make him look even more wealthy and snobbish than he already is," Justin replied, kissing me on the cheek.

I smirked. He wasn't wrong.

"Well, I can't wait to see it," Ben said.

I nodded. "Yeah, I'm sure there'll be a party once it's done, whether I like it or not."

Emmet just smiled at me. "I'll start planning it right away."

"Joy," I replied, finishing off my glass of wine.

I stood and patted Justin on the ass before turning to go into the living room. JR was playing with a doll with her mothers, and Gus was slouched on the floor in front of the TV

playing some sort of violent video game that Michael had gotten him. I sat down next to him and watched.

"Thanks for the money," he said, staring intently at the TV.

I nodded. "You should probably spend it here. The exchange rate right now is shit."

He glanced at me quickly, and then shrugged. I couldn't get over the feeling that he was up to something. Then again, he was a teenage boy, which meant he was *always* up to something. I decided not to worry about it.

Justin came and sat down behind me, and started rubbing my shoulders. I grinned and shut my eyes, wondering what the hell I'd done to deserve a back rub. Then again, I had just bought him a car and told him we could live together again, so I guess he *did* owe me. Actually, he owed me even more than this. I should take advantage of the fact that he was *mine* now, 'officially', and fuck his brains out later.

...Or have him fuck me.

Shit. There was that shock again. Maybe I needed to drink more.

"Do you really have to go back to work tomorrow?" he asked.

I nodded, eyes still shut.

"But no one else is, are they?"

Ted laughed from behind us, on the sofa. "Yeah, right."

"There are important clients waiting for important presentations," I said, opening my eyes and staring at Gus' game again.

Justin sighed and nuzzled his face into the back of my neck. "I wanted to spend a day at home with you."

I felt goosebumps rise up on my arms, and images flashed before my eyes, of exactly what we would *do* with an entire day to ourselves. Then I blinked hard and shook my head. "Sorry, Sunshine. Work's work."

He sighed and went back to rubbing my back. "Well, Gus, your father is a workaholic."

Gus smirked at the TV, not looking away. "So what else is new?"

"Hey, why don't we do something tomorrow, Gus?" Justin asked, sounding cheerful again.

"Uh, like what?" Gus responded, sounding slightly interested.

"I don't know," Justin said. "Whatever we want."

Gus set down his controller, having beat a level, and turned to give Justin a long considering look. Then he grinned widely. "Sure, dad."

I rolled my eyes. Little brat was going to keep that up?

Justin chuckled. "Cool," he said. Then he gasped sharply and yanked his hands off my shoulders. "Shit," he muttered.

I turned around and glanced at his hands. His right hand was tensed and he was rubbing it, looking sheepish. I took his hand in mine and rubbed it gently.

"It still acts up, sometimes," he mumbled.

I nodded. Fuck. I don't know why I'd expected it to have gotten better. His doctors had said it would never fully heal. And here I was, letting him rub my fucking shoulders. I was such a dick.

"What's wrong?" Gus asked, frowning at Justin's hand.

I bit the inside of my cheek, gently massaging Justin's hand and feeling it slowly relax.

"I um... have some problems with it, sometimes," Justin said.

Gus gave us both a puzzled look, and then shrugged. He knew when he was asking too much.

I looked up and everyone else in the room was staring at us. I sighed and looked back at Justin. He looked embarrassed, and horribly uncomfortable. Time to get him out of here.

"We've got to go," I said, standing and helping him up carefully.

"Already?" Lindsay asked, looking disappointed.

"Look, I showed up, didn't I?" I arched an eyebrow at her, trying to look annoyed. "I've put up with all of you and this holiday bull long enough."

Michael rolled his eyes at me. "Yeah, I'm sure you two have more important business to attend to."

I smirked at him. "Well, you might be right." I rested a hand on Justin's shoulder and led him to the front door, grabbing our coats. We put on our shoes and I nodded at everyone. "Try to have fun without us."

The moment we were outside Justin let out a long, heavy sigh. "Thanks," he mumbled.

I took his hand back in mine and raised an eyebrow at him. He shrugged.

"It's a little better."

I nodded and led him to his new car, and hesitated. "Can you drive?"

"Yeah," he said quickly.

I sighed and leaned in, resting my forehead against his. I felt like an asshole about his hand, not only about it cramping up just now, but just... about all of it. I didn't know what to say, to tell him to be more careful, to not push himself... it would just sound shitty. So I just rested my forehead against his, our noses touching lightly, and put my hand on his hip.

"Brian," he said softly, reaching up to place a hand on the back of my neck. "I'm fine."

I straightened up and forced a grin. "So, what was that about road head?" I arched an eyebrow at him.

He laughed and rolled his eyes. "Maybe later. Right now, I'd rather just go home."

I was secretly relieved. The last thing I wanted was to distract him by sucking him off when he was already going to have trouble driving. I didn't care what he said, I could tell by the way he held his arm that his hand was still hurting. "Alright. Next time." I patted him on the ass and turned to go to my car, which was parked along the road. "Meet you at the loft?"

He smiled and slid into the drivers seat, and turned the key in the ignition. The engine purred softly, and he pulled out onto the road. I probably should have helped him put the top up, it was winter after all. But right now he didn't have far to drive, and I had a feeling he wanted to show off.

He honked at me and turned the corner, and I got into the 'vette and followed him home.

**I'd sacrifice anything come what might  
For the sake of havin' you near  
In spite of a warnin' voice that comes in the night  
And repeats, repeats in my ear:**

**Don't you know, little fool, you never can win?  
Use your mentality, wake up to reality  
But each time that I do just the thought of you  
Makes me stop before I begin  
'Cause I've got you under my skin**

.....

**"I just ran away from home, Now I'm going to dizz knee land. I just crashed my car again, Now I'm going to dizz knee land. I just tossed a fifth of gin, Now I'm going to dizz knee land. I just got cuffed again, Now I'm going to dizz knee land. Shot my gun into the night, I'm going to dizz knee land. I just saw a good man die, I'm going to dizz knee land."**

## **Chapter 23**

"Let me drive."

"What?"

"IIIIIII said, let me drive." He holds his hand out and smirks.

"No. Fucking. Way."

"Come on!"

"Do you even have your permit?"

"Sure."

"Liar."



"Give me the keys."

"No."

"Come on. Let me drive."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"YES."

"NOOOOOOOOO."

"Please?"

"Do you know what Brian would do to the both of us if he found out I let you drive this car?"

"I promise I won't tell him." I raise an eyebrow at him. He smiles. Just like his father.

"Fine. But if you hit anything I'm not coming to your funeral when Brian kills you." I hand him the keys and feel my stomach churn as we get into the car. He is beaming and bouncing the whole time as he starts the car.

"Seatbelt." I instruct him.

"I know." He buckles it and I hold my breath as he shifts into drive. We are gonna die.

~~~~~

We actually made it to the museum in one piece and I have to admit, he's an ok driver. I made him take all back roads so there were less cops to see a 15 year old driving a very RED old mustang. Even though he didn't look 15. He looked at 21. Unlike me. Who at 17 looked 12. And now at 32, still get carded for cigarettes. He is definatly Brian's son.

"Is this gonna be boring?" He moans as we head up the outside stairs of the museum. I punch his shoulder and he winces.

"This is my favorite place in the world." He raises his eyes and crooks his head to side.

"Oh yea? Really?"

"Ok Ok. Second favorite place." We laugh and I hold the door open for him.

I take a long deep breath as I enter. I hadn't been here in over 10 years. It still smelled the same. I close my eyes and take in the ambience. The air smelled of turpentine and paint.

"It smells in here." Gus wrinkles his nose.

"I love that smell." I say quietly.

We walk through the long halls of paintings and sculptures and I realize after a while my face hurts because I am smiling so much. This was who I was. I watched as Gus looked at each painting, pondering it and almost memorizing it in case I happen to ask him about it later.

When we get to the abstract section of the museum I sit on the bench in front of my favorite painting.

Gus sits down next to me and we stare at the painting for a long time before he speaks.

"Your favorite?" He asks. I nod.



"It's called 'Rubricate' by Scott Chiu. You see how the painting takes up 3 whole canvas's? And each canvas tells its own story but when you pull back and look at the whole painting you see a totally different story?"

"Um sure." I knew he didn't understand. Maybe he would one day. When he was older.

"Why do you like this one so much?" He looks at me. I don't take my eyes off the painting.

"Cause it reminds me of my life."

"How? It's just a bunch of paint splattered on piece of cardboard."

"No. It's more than that. Like in the first Canvas it reminds me of my life when I first met Brian and the rest of the gang. The middle one? My life in New York. And the third is like my life now. How it's going to be. But when you look at the whole thing, you can see how it all flows. How it's all supposed to be this way."

I realize I have tears in my eyes.

"I guess I can see that." Gus says quietly. I look at him and ruffle his hair. He needs a hair cut.

"So. Are you and my dad like...you know. Is this forever now?"

I smile. "Yea. I guess we are."

"So when is the wedding?"

I laugh hysterically. "Right!" I manage to get out between gasps for air. "Brian and I aren't getting married. He won't go down that road again. Besides we don't need to do that to prove this is forever. We both know. I'm his and he is mine."

He nods and stares back at the painting. "You guys are like out of a movie or something. A really corny movie, but a movie none the less."

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"You know lovers torn apart by careers and bad decisions, thrown back together 10 years later in destiny and find a way back into each others hearts." He clutches his chest as speaks in an over dramatic tone.

"That is the gayest thing I have ever heard." I tell him.

"Well its true. You two are ridiculous."

I jab him in the side with my elbow. He squirms. "But its ok. Cause like as corny as it is, it's like cool. It's meant to be. And I don't mind admitting that it's a really cool thing. Plus it's my Dad. And he's happy. And that's all that matters."

This kid truly amazed me at times. The love he had for his father astounded me. It made me sad for a minute because I knew I would never have the type of relationship with my dad as Gus had with Brian.

"You're a really good kid, you know that?" I pat his knee.

"Yea you tell Mom and Ima that. They never give me a fucking break. That's why I love coming to see my Dad so much."

"Cause he lets you get away with murder."

"No. That's not why. It's because he doesn't treat me like a kid. He treats me like a human. Like an equal."

He sighs and we sit in silence for what seems like forever.

"Come on. You wanna get out of here?"

"Yea. No offense but this is boring as shit for me." He tells me.

"I know. But I appreciate you coming with me. That was really decent of you."

We walk in silence back to the car and he stops a few feet from the car.

"Will you show me?" He asks.

"Show you what?" I was afraid where this was going.

"The house. In West Virginia."

"You wanna see the house?" I ask him. Why did he want to see the house?

He nods. I swallow and look at him questionably. He smiles at me and again just like Brian, I cant say no when he smiles at me like that.

"Alright."

"Can I drive?"

"No."

"Yes."

"Get in the car Gus."

"Dammit."

\*\*\*

When we finally get back to the loft its after 6. Brian was already home and just getting out of the shower as we come in. I had taken Gus to Britin and from the time he stepped inside and still to this moment, his mouth hung open in shock. I told him the plans for furniture and how I was going to have my own studio. He asked what we were gonna do with all the extra rooms. I told him we hadn't talked about it yet. His mind was working overtime. I could see it on his face. Another trait he picked up from Brian.

"And where have you two been?" Brian asks. He plants a firm kiss on my lips and he smells of soap and after shave. It takes all the self control I have not to rip his towel off from around his waist and take him right there. But we had a guest.

"Dad took me to the art museum. And to the house." Brian raises an eyebrow at me and Gus.

"The house?"

"Yea in West Virginia." Gus says matter-a-factly.

"Mmmm." Brian walks to the kitchen counter and grabs an apple out of the bowl. "And what did you think sonny boy?"

"I think I know which room is gonna be mine." He walks to his father and grabs the apple out of his hand.

"Excuse me?"

"My room. I know what room is gonna be mine. When I move in with you guys." Gus smiles at us.

"What?!" Brian and I yell.

"Sonny boy you are NOT living with us. You live in Canada. With your mothers."

"But you have that HUGE house now! Why can't I come live with you?"

"Gus you are more than welcome to come and visit whenever you want. And if Mel and Linds allow it, I don't see why you couldn't spend the whole summer here..." I look at Brian. He winces but finally his face softens.

"Justin is right. Summers are fine. Christmas is fine. But you cant live with me."

Brian pats Gus on the head and takes his apple back. Gus pouts, He looks at me with narrowed eyes, probably angry because I wasn't on his side. Honestly I wouldn't care if Gus lived with us. I thought he was awesome and I think it would be good for Brian and him. But I knew Mel and Linds would never allow it. Gus was a good kid. He was....

"Sunshine let me drive his car Dad."

He was a little fucking shit.

\*\*\*

**I'm stressed but you're freestyle  
I'm overworked but I'm undersexed  
I must be made of concrete  
I sign my name across your chest**

**Sweat it all out  
Sweat it all out  
With your bedroom eyes and your baby pouts  
Sweat it all out  
In our electric storms and our shifting sands  
Our candy jars and our sticky hands**

## **Chapter 24**

I'd had a long day. Everyone was in a shit mood from having to come back to work after Christmas. Even Cynthia had been cuntty all day, and the art department was clearly slacking off, because everything they'd submitted looked like shit. I'd spent half my day telling people to redo their work, and trying to organize everything necessary for the ten fucking clients I had to meet in the next week.

I was in a terrible mood. I was looking forward to coming back to the loft and spending some 'quality time' with Justin. If Gus was there, I supposed we could have dinner with him, before sending him back to the munchers. Then I had very specific plans about Justin and his ass.

So here I was, the headache I'd had all fucking day returning full force, at the words Gus uttered.



"Sunshine let me drive his car, Dad."

"What the fuck did you just say?" I asked, voice low. I pinched the bridge of my nose and shut my eyes, hoping I'd just misheard him.

"He let me drive his car to the art museum," Gus said.

I opened my eyes and saw him slouched on the couch, looking smug. That little fucking brat. I turned to give Justin a long, hard glare.

"What the *fuck* were you thinking?"

He winced and gave me a sheepish, guilty look. "He did just fine."

"That's not the fucking point!" I pointed towards the couch and he winced, walking quickly over it to sit down next to Gus. I strode over and stood in front of them, practically seething. "Do you have any fucking idea how much that car *cost*?!"

Gus was giving Justin a smug look. I pointed at him. "Don't think you're getting away with this. I'm going to tell Melanie."

His eyes went huge and his face paled. "N-no! Don't tell ima!"

I ignored him. A little fear was good for him. I turned back to Justin. "And you should fucking know better! Not only did that car cost more than you can *fathom*, but it's *vintage*. If you had to replace a single fucking piece of that car, it would cost about ten *times* what it would for mine!"

Justin grit his teeth and looked back up at me. "You shouldn't get me anything that's worth that much."

I shut my eyes tightly and rubbed them, exhaling slowly. "That's not the fucking point."

"Yeah, you didn't seem to mind *before*," Gus mumbled.

My eyes snapped open and I scowled at him. "Don't think I don't know how you convinced him to let you drive."

His eyes widened and he tried to look innocent. Yeah, right.

"Justin's not fucking stupid, Gus. He wouldn't normally let a fucking fifteen year old CHILD drive his fucking car."

Gus glared at me. "I'm not a *child*-"

I cut him off, ignoring him. "The only reason he'd let you, is because you know how to get your way."

He glanced away, scowling into the distance.

"He didn't *do* anything," Justin started to say.

"Of course he did," I replied. "He gave you one of his *looks*, and you folded." I rolled my eyes. "Where the fuck do you think he learned them?"

Justin flushed and scowled down at his own lap. Good. He was embarrassed. Well, he should be. Letting my fucking son use MY looks on him? I liked that almost less than I liked Gus driving the car in the first place.

"The point is, it's fucking stupid. You should know better," I snapped at Justin. "And *you* are in deep fucking shit," I said to Gus.

"What, *he* doesn't get punished?!" Gus said angrily, pointing to Justin.

I raised an eyebrow at him. "He's not my fucking *son*, Gus. *You* are."

"Oh, yeah? Then what the fuck is he?!" Gus spat at me. Little brat was looking for some way, *any* way to distract me from kicking his ass. Fuck him, but it worked a little.

I stared at him for a second, then sighed and ran a hand through my hair. Justin was looking up at me expectantly.

"Don't change the subject," I muttered.

Gus rolled his eyes at me, and I couldn't deal with it anymore. "That's it, you're getting the fuck out."

He scowled and got up, stomping towards the door in a way only teenagers can.

"I'm calling your mothers later, so do yourself a favor and tell them before I get a chance to!" I shouted after him, and he slammed the door after himself.

Justin was still giving me a guilty look, and I sighed heavily and sat down on the couch next to him, shutting my eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said softly.

"Sorry's bullshit. Haven't you learned that by now?" I replied, feeling exhausted.

I could feel him inch closer to me on the sofa. He rested a hand on my arm lightly, as if he was afraid I'd bite.

Fuck.

"If you'd gotten in a wreck, or... if something had happened to either of you," I said, opening my eyes and giving him a tired look.

His eyes widened, like he was surprised.

"What, do you think the fucking car is all I give a shit about?" I sat forward, resting my arms on my knees and shook my head at him. "I can replace a fucking car."

Slowly Justin's lips turned up into a grin, and he scooted over to sit next to me, resting his forehead on my shoulder. "I won't do it again."

I snorted. Fuck right, he wouldn't.

"He's a good driver. You should be proud."

"Right." I got up and walked to the kitchen, considering the bottle of Beam that I knew was under the counter.

I felt Justin's hands against my back, and he pressed up against me. "You're mad."

I sighed and turned, wrapping my arms around his waist, pulling him close. "Yeah."

"At me," he said. It wasn't a question.

"A little," I replied.

"Would a back rub help?" he asked, looking up at me and grinning.

Bastard knew I couldn't stay mad at him long. I cocked my head. "Maybe."

His grin widened. "What about a blowjob, too?"

I arched an eyebrow at him. "Well..."

He licked his lips slowly, and then gave me an evil look. "Of course, Gus is right. I really should be punished."

Fuck.

I was kissing him before I realized it. My tongue in his mouth, my hand sliding down his back to his ass. I squeezed it roughly and he pressed his body against me and moaned into my mouth.

I walked us slowly towards the couch, him walking backwards, pressing against me, placing kisses down my jaw and neck. When we reached the couch I sat and yanked him down across my lap, face down.

He yelped. "Brian!" He tried to get back up. I pinned him down firmly with one hand in the middle of his back.

"You *said* you deserved to be punished," I said, resting my other hand on his ass lightly.

"Yeah, but-" he started to say, but I lifted my hand and dropped it again, heavily, onto his ass. He gasped.

"You really shouldn't make me worry," I said, slightly startled at how low and raw my voice sounded. I was a lot hornier than I'd thought.

He wriggled on my lap, and I felt my body respond quickly. I'd already been half-hard, but now my cock was erect and straining against my pants, and his body was pressed against it.

"Brian," he gasped. I struck his ass again, this time harder.

"Yes?" I asked, massaging his ass gently for a moment, before landing another blow.

He just shook his head, eyes shut tightly.

Now I was spanking him properly, a strike, and then a moment for him to recover, and then another strike, and a shorter moment. Despite any protests he may have had, he was now wriggling in my lap, and I could feel his hard-on pressing through his jeans and grinding against me.

"Mm, looks like you're enjoying your punishment a little too much," I said, sliding a hand up under the back of his shirt. His skin was slick with sweat, and he was panting.

"Brian," he said, but it came out as a whimper.

I slid him off of me, onto the sofa, and positioned him on all fours. "Stay like that," I said.

"But," he tried to say, but I shook my head. He stared over his shoulder at me, and flushed an even deeper shade of red. I smirked and reached around his waist, undoing his pants, and tugging them down.

His ass was red and tender looking, and I slid my hand down it gently. He winced.

"Is it sore?" I asked.

He hesitated, biting his lower lip, then looked back the other way, so I couldn't see his face. He was embarrassed. "A little."

"Mm, well you were a very bad boy," I said, chuckling. "I don't think you've learned your lesson yet."

"Brian, please," he whimpered, and by the way he said it I could tell that he didn't *really* mind the idea.

I grasped his ass and spread him, and ran the tip of my tongue down his lower back, and then down towards that little hole that was so tempting, so enticing. I'd originally planned just to make him give me head, but now... I circled the tip of my tongue around his entrance, slowly, achingly slowly.

He gripped the sofa cushions with fisted hands, and his breath came in small gasps.

Well, I was sure I could get a better response than that. I spread him wider, and pressed the tip of my tongue into him, slowly.

He moaned, bucking back against me.

That was better. I pulled away slightly and ran my tongue down lower, to where his balls started, and licked just behind them. He was letting out all these little gasps and moans, and all of them sounded suspiciously like my name.

That was enough. I didn't have the patience to tease him anymore today. I needed to be in him, *now*.

I reached into the couch cushions and found the lube and condoms that I'd put there. Popping open the lube and getting two fingers wet, I pressed one into him slowly, still licking that spot teasingly. His ass opened for me easily. He really *was* enjoying this. I pressed another finger into him, and spread him carefully.

He just moaned and pressed back against my fingers.

I couldn't take anymore.

I unzipped my pants, tugging them just far down enough to release my aching cock. I ripped open a condom and slipped it onto myself with my free hand, and then removed my fingers. He whimpered when I took them out.

"Don't worry, I've got something else to put in you," I mumbled, positioning myself behind him so I could press my lips to the back of his neck. I pressed myself against him, and slowly pushed in. Fuck, he was tight.

"Brian," he gasped, and thrust himself back, impaling himself on me suddenly.

I moaned, grasping his hips, and trying to steady him. "Fuck," I hissed, dizzy with the sudden burst of pleasure. "Justin..."

"Please," he gasped. "Don't... don't go slow."

I couldn't make any more words, so I just pulled out, and thrust back into him, hard and fast and rough. He moaned with every thrust, and I kept going, faster, harder, until my hips ached but I barely noticed. My fingers dug into his hips, and I bit the back of his neck, sucking. I wanted to leave a mark.

He moaned louder, and reached under himself, and I could tell he was stroking himself with every thrust. Knowing that was just too much, and I growled, biting down harder on his neck and thrusting a few more times, before feeling my balls tighten quickly, and I came. He tightened around me, whimpering and moaning my name, and stroking himself faster.

It was a full minute before the haze wore off my mind, and I realized at some point I'd grasped his wrist and kept him from stroking himself further. He was gasping and making these little noises in the back of his throat, and struggling against my grip.

I groaned and pulled out of him, tugging off the condom, tying it off, and tossing it into the nearby trash. I grabbed his hips, more gently this time, and rolled him onto his back.

His eyes were glassy, his face was flushed, and his lips were swollen. He needed to come.

"Learned your lesson?" I asked, leaning over him.

He nodded weakly and arched towards me.



I smirked. "Good boy," I said. I grasped his cock, wet from pre-come, and stroked him firmly. Once, twice, three times and he was gone. He arched his back and moaned my name, his hands grasping my forearms and squeezing, his gaze never leaving my face.

I waited for his body to relax and his cock to soften before removing my hand, and wiping him off, and then myself, with a discarded sock. He grinned slowly, high on afterglow and lust.

I collapsed onto the couch next to him, and pulled him half on top of me, so that we'd both fit. I nuzzled my face into his hair and held him tightly.

"Mm," he murmured, nuzzling his face into my chest.

I shut my eyes and breathed, slow and deep, enjoying the scent of his body and our sex.

"I didn't mean to make you worry," he finally said, after a few minutes had passed.

I opened my eyes and looked down at him. He was tracing his fingers up and down my chest slowly. I nodded. I didn't want to bother speaking. It seemed like it would take too much energy. My whole body was warm and buzzing pleasantly, and I thought I might like to just fall asleep here, except I was suddenly starving. But the kitchen seemed so *far*, and I didn't think there were any groceries, anyway.

"I love you," he whispered against me.

I nodded again. Now wasn't the time. I couldn't say it yet. I would, later... maybe. But not now.

I was worried things were about to go quickly into the dangerous waters of mush and fluff, when the phone rang. He sighed and lifted his head.

"We should answer it," he said.

I shrugged. I didn't care. The only person who I answered phone calls from when I felt *this* good and lazy was in my arms.

He reached off the side of the couch towards the coffee table, where the phone was. He lifted it and glanced at the caller ID.

"It's Melanie's cel phone."

I arched an eyebrow and took it from him. "I guess I should answer. It's probably about young Gus."

Justin shifted, trying to sit up, but I pulled him back down against me. He giggled and nuzzled his face into my neck, and I answered the phone.

"Yes?" I said, trying to sound bored.

"What did he do?" Melanie asked. She sounded tired.

"Excuse me?" I asked, running my fingers through Justin's hair. It was soft.

"Gus. He said he was in trouble, and that you were probably going to call me and tell me what he'd done. He *also* said you were overreacting and not to trust anything you said."

"That's not what I said!" I could hear Gus shout in the background.

I snorted. "Right. Well, he spilled fucking soda on my rug."

There was a moment of silence. "Seriously, Brian? What the fuck is your problem?!"

I rolled my eyes. "Well, if *you* don't think it's that big of a deal, let it go. I just got laid, so I'm not *angry* anymore."

Melanie sighed, and then sounded almost amused. "Tell Justin hi," she said. I heard the phone click off and I chuckled.

"Spilled soda, huh?" Justin mumbled into my neck.

"Well, I didn't really want the boy to face the wrath of the super-dyke," I responded, petting his head more. His hair really *was* soft.

I could feel him grinning against me. "You're a good dad."

I didn't reply. I just kept playing with his hair.

"I'm hungry," he finally said, practically whining. "Is there *any* food here?"

"No," I said, nuzzling my face into his hair. It was soft. It smelled *good*.

He sighed and grabbed the phone from me, finally sitting up. I frowned and sat up as well, suddenly feeling cold without his body pressed against mine. I grabbed him around the waist and tugged him into my lap.

"I'm ordering Thai food," he said, leaning back against me.

I nodded, eyeing the red mark on the back of his neck. I kissed it apologetically. I hoped it didn't hurt. He just chuckled, so I guess it didn't.

"Next time I do something to piss you off," he said, "I'm just going to pull down my pants and bend over. I like this way of dealing with things better than fighting."

I grinned and hugged him tightly to myself, placing another kiss on his neck. "Is that a promise?"

He just laughed and wriggled in my lap. "I have to get up to get the number for the Thai place."

I shook my head. "It's on speed dial." I nuzzled my face into the back of his neck again.

He shivered. "That tickles," he mumbled, scrolling through my speed dial list.

I smirked, but I stopped nuzzling him. "I want pad thai."

"I know," he said. "With extra green onion, peanuts on the side."

He still fucking remembered how I liked my pad thai. Even someone as anti-romance as me thought that was pretty fucking sweet. I grinned and bit his earlobe gently to let him know.

He laughed and swatted at me. "What's that for?"

"Nothing," I said. No reason to tell him I was having such lesbianic thoughts.

"Okay, I'll just-" he started to say, when the phone rang again.

I rolled my eyes, snatching it from him. I pressed the button to answer, and held it to my ear. "Melanie, if you ruin my afterglow, I'll-"

"I... I'm trying to reach Justin," a low voice said.

What the fuck? I blinked and frowned. "Yeah? And who the hell is this?"

"His father," the voice said.

Oh. Great.

I sighed and handed the phone to Justin. "If you want to hang up on him, you can."

Justin blinked at me in confusion, and took the receiver. "Hello?"

I watched as the happy glow he'd been basking in faded, and his back tensed. "Oh. Um... sorry, I didn't hear it. How did you get *this* number? ... Oh. Right. Mom. ... The day after tomorrow? Uh... well... sure. ... Okay."

I lifted my arms from his waist and rubbed his shoulders gently. "Well?"

He hung up and tossed the phone onto the couch next to us. "He wants to see me the day after tomorrow."

I arched an eyebrow at him. "He's out of the hospital?"

"Yeah," Justin said, leaning back into my touch. "Fuck."

"You don't have to go," I said.

"But I want to. I think I want to. Probably." He glanced back at me, his face full of anxiety. "Will you-"

"I'll go with you," I said. He didn't have to ask. I would have gone even if he didn't want me to.

He smiled and sighed. "Thai food?"

I nodded. "Order it. I'm starving."

While we waited for the delivery, I rubbed his back, and tried to get him to relax, and thought about how I would kill Craig if he fucked things up. I wasn't going to let him hurt Justin again.

**I knew you were mine for the taking  
I knew you were mine for the taking  
Your eyes light up  
When I walk in the room**

**This was so unexpected  
I never thought I'd get caught  
Play boomerang with your demons  
Shoot to kill and you'll pop them off  
BANG! BANG!**

.....

**"Like a fool I went and stayed too long, now Im wondering if your loves still strong. Oo baby, here I am, signed, sealed delivered, I'm yours. Then that time I went and said goodbye, now I'm back and not ashamed to cry. Oo baby, here I am, signed, sealed delivered, I'm yours. Here I am baby, Oh, youve got the future in your hand. Signed, sealed delivered, I'm yours."**

## **Chapter 25**

I drop my brush into the paint can and step back to take one final look. It was finished. It was the first painting I had finished in over a year, and I think it was the one I was the most proud of to date. My inspiration, my muse, my love for painting was back. It felt good to paint again. To let the colors and brush take control. It had been a long time since I had felt this good about my work. That I wasn't just painting to fill a wall on a gallery. I was painting because I wanted to. Because I needed to. I painted out of love.

I hear rustling coming from the living room and I let out a loud sigh.

"Gus I thought you said you wanted to help me with this?" I turn around to find him sitting on the floor surrounded by stacks of CDs.

"What the hell are you doing?" I ask.

He looks nervously around the piles of CD's and shakes his head.

"Um, nothing just you know, looking at you guys' CDs."

"Uh huh. Well I'm done now. So much for your paint lesson." I wipe my hands on my jeans and smile one more time at the painting. I was pleased.

I begin to pick up the drop cloth and bring my brushes to the sink so I could wash them. Brian had told me he didn't mind if I painted in the loft but I knew if I left a mess or spilled paint on ANYTHING we would have another recap of yesterday. Even though I didn't mind how it ended. I smile to myself and finish rinsing my brushes. I hear the stereo click on and 'The Temptations' fill the loft air.

I turn around slowly.

"What the fuck is this?"

"I found this CD in Dad's collection. Mom and Ima dance to this song all the time. I think it's "their song". He rolls his eyes as he says it. Wait, Brian had this CD? My Brian?

"Weird..." I walk toward the living room to see what other CDs Brian has that I don't know about. I pick up the CD case that Gus was playing.

"Greatest Motown songs, 1950's through the 1970's. He really owns this CD?"

"Justin have you um-" I look at him with an eyebrow raised. Oh God what was he asking me now?

"-Danced with another guy?"

"I used to dance with Brian all the time."

"No, I don't mean at Babylon. I mean. Like slow dance. I have a dance at school coming up and there's this boy. Ryan. And I want to ask him. I think he likes me. But I don't know. And if we do go, like together--"

"You want to dance with him." I finish for him.

He blushes and nods. "So have you? Ever like, danced with someone. A guy I mean? Like maybe my dad?"

I freeze.

Yes, Gus. I have.

I just don't remember it.

FUCK.

"Yeah, I have." I can't bring myself to say anything else.

"I know how to dance...it's just....I don't know. I mean, when you dance with another guy who leads?" I laugh at him and ruffle his hair.

"Do you want me to show you how to dance?"



He turns beat red and shakes his head. "Uhhh no. That's ok."

"Come on." I grab his arm and take him to the middle of the shag rug in the living room. I take the remote for the stereo and skip a few songs until I find one we can actually dance to. I recognize the song. Stevie Wonder. I still couldn't believe Brian owned this CD.

"Just let the music guide you, ok?" I wrap his hand in mine and lay my hand on his hip gently. He looks nervous. As am I. This was Brian's son, but in this moment, he felt like mine. I remember dancing with my mom at 14, her teaching me the same thing I was teaching Gus right now. I felt my heart start to beat faster.

We start to sway to the rhythm of the music. Every time I went to go left, he tried to twirl me right.

"Gus, I'm leading."

"Why can't I lead?"

"Cause I'm older. And I said so."

"God, you're bossy."

He finally gives in and lets me lead. I feel him start to relax and a smile starts to creep across his lips. He looks more and more like Brian everyday.

Our feet found their own stride together and he kept looking down to inspect them.

"You gonna keep your eyes on your feet the whole time you dance with your boyfriend?" I tease him.

"Ryan is not my *boyfriend*." He exclaims. "Yet." He smiles.

I try to dip him and he tenses.

"Calm down." I say to him.

"God this is so gay." He laughs nervously and I try again. He allows me this time but I barely get him to dip over my arm. He was resisting.

"Ok, we'll try the dip another time." I pull him back up and let him relax again before we start back into the twirling. His eyes were glazed over. He was thinking.

"When did you dance with my dad?" He asks his shoulders relaxing and letting his feet take control again.

This time I tense up. He senses it. He looks at me with hazel eyes.

I clear my throat. "At my prom."

His eyes widen. "My dad went to a PROM!?"

Yeah, kid, I was shocked, too when they told me.

"How was it? Was it...well I'm sure you were beside yourself with joy." Where did this kid learn to talk like this?

My mind races. I didn't want to scare Gus. I mean, the kid was just starting to realize he was bi, and if he cared enough about this Ryan kid to want to take him to his dance, how could I tell him about the prom and the bashing and assholes like Chris Hobbs and shatter him? Scare him? I couldn't. This kid was like my own son.

But on the other hand, I knew how Brian wanted him raised. With the truth. And even though things like that happen, you need to stand up for yourself and fight back and

never give up.

Keep going no matter how much it hurts.

I release my hand from Gus's and flex my gimp fingers.

No matter how much it hurts.

Gus looks at me curiously. "Dad... what?"

I look up at him. "I was attacked at my prom. Brian came, danced with me, and in the parking garage after he said goodbye to me, Chris Hobbs bashed me in the head with a baseball bat. I lived, obviously, mostly due to Brian because he was there and saved me, but now because of it, my hand cramps up because of the neurological damage."

His eyes are soft. He looks like he may cry. He shakes his head to almost rid the thoughts I just gave him. He swallows. And swallows again. Then he hugs me. He lays his head on my shoulder and squeezes his arms around his body.

"I guess that explains a lot."

"About what?" I ask him.

"About you and him. About why you are who you are to each other." He smiles gently. "I told you, you guys are like out of a fucking movie or something."

I laugh at him, pull back and put his hand in mine and we start to dance again. He looked concerned still, but he also seemed more relaxed than before. I took my chance and dipped him and his body bends over my arm. He giggled. Just like a little boy.

I pulled him back up and his smile was so bright, it may have outshined mine in that moment.

Another song had started to play and we were laughing and fooling so much we didn't even notice the last song had ended. We keep dancing and this time I let him begin to lead. He is not too bad. I'd get him in prime dancing shape for his dance.

The song that played, I had heard before. Where...

Holy.

Shit.

Memories seeped into my brain. Dancing in this same spot in the loft. With Brian. Daphne by the stereo. Playing this song. That's where the CD came from.

Fuck.

My shoulders tense and I hope Gus doesn't notice. He doesn't. He is too concentrated on leading me.

***You can dance, every dance with the guy who gives you the eye let him hold you tight...***

I smile. I don't know why I am smiling, but I can't stop.

Gus notices that.

"This song is so fucking corny. Can you imagine anyone dancing to this old crap? I hope they don't play it at the dance."

"I don't think it's corny." I tell him.

"Well, I think it's corny. You're the only exception. Anyone else you ask will say the same thing. *Corny*."

Suddenly the loft door slides shut and I hear his voice. Deep but and with a hint of sadness.

"I like to think of it as ridiculously romantic."

\*\*\*

**Baby don't you know I love you so**

**Can't you feel it when we touch**

**I will never never let you go**

**I love you oh so much**

## **Chapter 26**

I slid open the door to the loft. I was tired. Another long day at work was over, and I was thankful to be going home to Justin. Shit, it was going to take a long time for the novelty of that to wear off. I'd been going home alone for ten fucking years. Knowing he'd be there when I got home was... strange. But it was good. It was more than good.

So here I was, standing in the doorway, and a familiar song was playing. I froze in place. Justin and Gus were dancing.

"This song is so fucking corny. Can you imagine anyone dancing to this old crap? I hope they don't play it at the dance," Gus was saying as Justin led him around the floor.

"I don't think it's corny." Justin said softly.

Fuck.

"Well, I think it's corny. You're the only exception. Anyone else you ask will say the same thing. Corny."

I snapped out of it and sat down my briefcase, and slid the door shut.

"I like to think of it as ridiculously romantic," I said.

Justin turned to stare at me. He paled slightly, as if I'd caught him doing something wrong. Gus was giving us both a confused look.

"Sunshine's teaching me to dance, dad!" Gus said.

I nodded a bit, and walked over to the CD player, and paused it. Silence filled the loft.

"Brian," Justin said softly.

I turned and arched an eyebrow at Gus. "Looks like you could use a lot more practice."

He flushed and scowled at me. "Hey, it's not as easy as it looks!"

"Let me show you how it's done. Try to keep up." I skipped the CD back and pressed play again, and the song started. Justin was staring at me, wide-eyed. I approached him and placed a hand on his hip, and grasped his other hand with mine. "May I?"

Justin bit his lower lip, and I grinned a little, and began to dance. It came just as easily as it had the first time. I led him across the floor, keeping my eyes locked on his.

You can dance, every dance with the guy who gives you the eye let him hold you tight...

I was vaguely aware of Gus standing nearby, watching us, but I'd already forgotten that I was supposedly teaching him. Right now, all I knew was Justin's body near mine, and the way his eyes looked. Vulnerable. Worried. And strained.

"Relax," I said softly, spinning him around the room carefully.

"I don't-" he started to say.

"It's okay," I said. I grinned as much as I could. I didn't want him trying to remember anymore. It was too fucking long ago, and I'd given up on him ever remembering it. Instead, I'd just hoped I'd forget.

I hadn't.

He slowly smiled, and relaxed, and we were really dancing now. It was easy, surprisingly easy, to dance with him. Even after ten years apart, our bodies knew each other. He knew which way I'd step next, and I knew when he was ready for me to dip him.

And here we were, him in my arms, leaning him back, and he flushed, staring up at me.

I was vaguely aware of the music still playing, and Gus watching us, but it was a distant awareness.

I lifted him slowly back up, and instead of leading him into the dance, I pulled him against myself, and kissed him deeply. He wrapped his arms around my shoulders and I had mine around his hips.

Images flashed before my shut eyes. Justin's face when I showed up at his prom. Justin's face as I danced with him, his smile bigger than I'd ever seen it before that evening. Justin's face when I led him out to my car, tugging him along. Justin's face when he turned, and the bat hit him, and –

I pulled away, breathing heavily. The music had stopped. The song was over. I blinked hard and released him, walking to the kitchen.

Gus was staring at us, looking worried and a little freaked out.

"Dad?" he asked.

I licked my lips and yanked my tie loose, grabbing a glass from the cabinet. I needed a fucking drink.

"It's okay, Gus," Justin said.

"But," Gus mumbled. "What..."

"I'm fine," I said. I sounded anything but. "You should go, sonnyboy, it's almost dinner time. Your mothers will be waiting."

I was facing the other way. I couldn't look him in the face. I didn't want to explain why I was so pale, why I looked like I'd seen a ghost. I didn't want to explain why, fifteen fucking years later, my hands still trembled when I thought about that night.

"Um... sure," Gus said. I heard him gather his thing and go to the door. I heard it slide open. I glanced over and tried to grin at him. His eyes widened, and he left. The door slid shut.

I sighed heavily, running a hand through my hair and taking a big gulp of Beam.

Justin walked up behind me and pressed his face into the back of my neck, wrapping his arms around my waist.

I sighed heavily. "Fuck."

He shook his head against me. "I'm sorry."



"Don't be," I said, taking another gulp.

"Brian," he said softly, hugging me tightly. "You still..."

"What?" I asked, sounding a little harsher than I meant to. I turned in his arms and faced him, staring into his face. "I still freak out when I think about that night?"

He looked worried. I hated it when he looked at me like that.

"I won't ever remember, will I?" he asked.

I shut my eyes, and the images flashed before them again. I opened them quickly. His eyes were glassy and wet.

Fuck.

"Don't fucking cry," I said gruffly. I sat the glass down and put my hands on the back of his head.

He shook his head and blinked hard. "I'm not."

I pressed my lips to his again, kissing him gently this time. He responded, pressing against me. His lips were soft and warm.

I broke the kiss and pressed our foreheads together. "That night..." I started to say. Fuck, what was I doing?

He stared at me with those wide blue eyes, and I couldn't not say it.

"That was when I started to..."

Fuck.

I couldn't finish the sentence. After this long, I still couldn't say it.

He grinned slowly and looked happy again. "Really?"

I nodded. I was a fucking coward. Even after all this time, I couldn't say it.

I love you.

I love you.

"I..." I tried to say.

He shook his head. "I know," he said.

I sighed. I'd find a way to say it soon. I had to. He may have given up on it, he may think it wasn't important anymore, but it was. It was important to me.

"I love you, too," he said.

Fuck.

His hand was on the back of my neck now, and he pulled me into a kiss.

All I could think, while my hands slid down his back to his ass, pulling him to press tightly against me, was that he deserved better. He deserved a lot fucking better than this. He came back after ten years, and he was even hotter than ever. Even more beautiful than ever. And here I was, the same asshole I was when I pushed him away. He deserved better than an emotionally stunted asshole who not only couldn't tell him he loved him, but almost got him fucking killed.

We found our way to the bed, and I undressed him, kissing every inch of his body. I went slowly, making him moan softly. I kissed him and licked him and sucked him, until he was aching for more. Then I entered him, slowly and carefully.

I couldn't say it, but I could show it.

When he came, he moaned my name. When I came, I moaned his.

"It wasn't your fault," he said afterwards. He was lying on top of me, his hands folded under his chin, staring at me.

I stared up at the ceiling. "Yeah," I said.

He was trying to think of something to say to make it better. He was trying to find a way to 'fix' it, to fix me. I felt bad, because there was nothing he could say or do that would change things. The worst part was that I knew he believed it. He really believed it wasn't my fault.

"Gus has a crush," he said.

Thank god. He was changing the subject.

"Yeah?" I asked, resting my hands on his back, looking back down at him.

"Mm. Some kid at his school. He wants to take him do a dance."

I raised an eyebrow at him. Maybe he hadn't changed the subject after all.

"Should I have told him not to?" he asked.

"Why?" What the fuck kind of question was that?

"Because... won't you worry?" he asked, his forehead wrinkling in concern.

Oh. "No," I said. "He's in Canada. Besides, things have changed."

He nodded, relaxing again. "He looks so much like you," he said, grinning.

"A little," I said, running a hand up and down his back slowly. His skin was soft.

"A lot," he corrected me. "It's a little creepy sometimes."

I smirked at him. "Well, when I get too old for you, you can always go after the younger model."

He made a face and sat up. "That's disgusting."

I snorted. "Well, the age difference isn't any worse."

"Ugh, Brian," he said, sounding horrified. "He's like... a kid. And besides, he looks like you, but he's not you." He grinned again. "You're much better looking. He has Lindsay's genes pulling him down."

I laughed, feeling better. I hated to admit it, but a very small part of me had wondered... but that was stupid. "Lindsay's hot. For a woman."

"Yeah, I wouldn't know," Justin said, standing up. "I'm gay."

I sat up, wondering what was so urgent that he had to stop keeping me warm. "What's that supposed to mean?"

He turned and walked to the kitchen. I watched his ass as he walked. Perfect.

"Just that I never fucked her," he said.

I snorted. "Yeah. Well, I was young and stupid." I got up and followed him reluctantly. The bed was comfortable, but not as much when he wasn't in it. "And I seem to recall you fucking a certain female friend of yours."

He was pulling a bottle of water from the fridge, but I could see him flush even from behind. His neck and ears went red.

"Is that how it happened between you guys?" he asked, turning back around.

I leaned against the counter and shrugged. "Not really." I frowned at him. "Since when did you know about that, anyway?"

"Since Lindsay and Melanie love me, and tell me all sorts of things," he said. He smirked at me.

Uh oh.

"Like?" I asked, scowling at him. I grabbed the bottle from him and took a swig.

He laughed. "Oh, it depends. Lindsay used to tell me how much you looooved me."

I snorted and drank more water, glancing away.

"Melanie would just tell me you were an unreliable asshole. She'd tell me about all sorts of times that you did shitty things to her."

I glanced back at him, handing the water back. "Like what?"

"Like about how when she first got together with Lindsay you kept following them around so they didn't have a real date for ages. She thought you were jealous." He smirked at me knowingly.

"What the hell did I have to be jealous of? I just liked pissing Melanie off." I rolled my eyes.

"Right." He grinned and walked over to me, placing a hand on my chest and staring up at my face. "Lindsay also told me that you got really drunk in college once, and tried on a bunch of her dresses, and ended up passing out outside, and the campus cops had to escort you home."

I choked a little, coughing into my fist. When the hell did she tell him about that?!

He chuckled, raising an eyebrow. "Don't worry, I'm sure she exaggerated. Not everything they told me was right, anyway."

I caught my breath and frowned down at him. "Yeah? Like the part about me being an asshole?"

His expression softened and he smiled at me. "The part about how I would be better off without you, that I should find someone my own age, that I was better off leaving..."

I stuck my tongue in my cheek, trying to think of something to say. I wasn't sure they were wrong.

He leaned up and kissed me softly. I wrapped my arms around his hips and he broke the kiss, pressing his nose to mine, grinning. I couldn't help but grin back.

"I love you, Brian." His eyes sparkled.

I swallowed hard. I still couldn't fucking say it. So I just grinned at him and kissed him again.

Distantly I heard the door to the loft open, but I ignored it. He was soft and tasted good, sort of a mix of both of us, and who would be walking in without knocking, anyway?

"Whoa, come on!" Gus said loudly. "Aren't you done yet?! It's been two hours!"

I frowned, breaking the kiss and looking over at him. He had his hands over his eyes.

"What the hell are you doing back here?" I asked.

Justin laughed against me and quickly walked to the bedroom to get dressed. I slapped his ass as he passed me.

Gus didn't move his hands. "Uncle Mikey made pork chops, and I wouldn't eat them, since she's such a Jew, and then everybody was all awkward. And I hate pork chops, so I didn't eat anything."

I rolled my eyes. "Knock next time."

"Yeah, thanks." He peeked out and scowled. "Get dressed already!"

I arched an eyebrow at him and shrugged. He'd seen me naked plenty of times. I sat around without clothes on half the time. It was more comfortable. Of course, I didn't really want him seeing Justin like that, either.

"Just do it! God, you're embarrassing!" He shouted, covering his eyes again. "And take me out to get some pizza!"

"Why the hell would I do that?" I asked, walking to the bedroom to get dressed.

"Because I'm hungry and I'm your son and you can't let me starve. Besides, from the smell in here, I bet you guys were too busy to have dinner."

"Pizza sounds good," Justin said, walking back down towards Gus, fully dressed again.

"Of course you'd think that. You can eat anything," I called after him, pulling on my pants.

"Come on, dad!" Gus said. "A few pieces aren't gonna make you fat."

I slipped on my shirt and walked into the living room, buttoning it up. "That's what you think."

Justin grinned at me. "I dunno. Pizza sounds good to me."

Well. "Alright," I said. My willpower was clearly weakened by afterglow.

Gus smiled widely at Justin. "Hey, cool! You should convince him to buy me a car, too!"

Justin laughed and patted Gus on the head. "I don't think I'm that good," he said.



I smirked and got my wallet, slipping on my shoes. He was wrong. At this point, he could probably convince me to do just about anything.

The funny thing was, I didn't really mind.

.....

**"Well the key to my survival, was never in much doubt. The question was how I could keep sane, trying to find a way out. Things were never easy for me, Peace of mind was hard to find. And I needed a place where I could hide, some where I could call mine. They say that time is a healer, and now my wounds are not the same. I rang the bell with my heart in my mouth, I had to hear what he'd say...."**

## **Chapter 27**

We had been sitting outside my Father's house for almost 20 minutes in pure silence.

Brian had driven me, holding my hand the entire time. My hands were sweaty but he didn't seem to mind. At first I wasn't sure if Brian coming with me would be such a hot idea, but the idea of Brian NOT being with me made me even more anxious. I needed him and he was letting me lean on him.

"Maybe I should stay in the car." He says quietly.

"No." I answer quickly. "Please come in with me."

He just nods. I sigh.

I know I need to go in. But for some reason I can't get myself to open the car door. Brian is still holding my hand.

***"I couldn't stand to hear the crying of my mother  
And I remember when, I swore that that would be the  
Last they'd see of me, and I never went home again."***

"Ok. I'm ready." He gives my hand one last squeeze and we get out of the car.

He has to ring the doorbell my hands are shaking so badly. Why is this so hard? I literally told him off in the hospital, but that's when I thought he was dying. But he is very much alive and I am very much terrified.

The door opens and my father stares at me for a moment and then his gaze falls on Brian.

"I invited you Justin. Only you." He says sternly.

"When you invite me, you invite Brian. It's a package deal. If you really want to see me and talk to me, Brian comes inside too."

He lets out a sigh and steps aside so Brian and I can come inside. I had been here before. And it still felt as cold as it did over 10 years ago.

He motions for us to go into the living room and Brian and I sit on the couch and he grabs my hand immediately. My father sits in his recliner and folds his hands across his lap. Smug bastard.

***"He sat me down to talk to me, He looked me straight in the eyes..."***

"Justin, I wanted to see you because I wanted you to know that I gave a lot of thought to what you said in the hospital." He looks almost scared.

I nod.

"You were right. You have become a successful man. And I know nothing about your life. But I have to remind you, you chose that path with us just as much as I did. You made

the choice not to be a part of our lives when you told us you were never coming home again. And you decided to have your life be with him." He sends daggers Brian's way with his eyes. Brian says nothing.

***"He said: You're no son, you're no son of mine, You're no son, you're no son of mine. You walked out, you left us behind. And you're no son, no son of mine."***

"But Mom is a part of my life Dad. She accepted me for who I was, you didn't." I'm starting to breath heavier. Brian squeezes my hand.

"Just I just don't get it! And him? I mean he's more than 10 years older than you. You still have your whole life ahead of you. I just don't get it."

"What is there to get Dad? I'm gay." He cringes at the word. "I'm gay Dad. And I love Brian. I tried to be without him. I really did. I tried to have another relationships, a couple times. It didn't work. It always comes back to him. This is it. This is my life. This is who I am going to be with. And your right. I do have my whole life ahead of me. I'm going back to school. I'm going to teach. Right here in Pittsburgh. And I'm going to be with Brian."

"He doesn't even love you Justin!"

"Who said I didn't?" Brian finally speaks, his eyes dead set on my father's.

I smirk at Brian. It's the closest he will get to actually saying it.

"Well do you? I mean look what your doing to my son. He goes to New York to get his life back, to be something, and here he is back again. With you. So you'd better love him." Is my father actually sticking up for me?

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't Craig." Is all Brian says. I smile at my father.

My fathers face softens and I feel myself start to relax.

"I want you a part of my life Dad. And I think you want that too. But with that you have to accept everything that I am. And that includes who I love and who I am going to spend my life with."

He looks between Brian and I and sighs. "So this is it huh? After all this time, it still ends up back to the two of you."

"Yes Dad."

He smiles and turns his attention to Brian. "I knew you were trouble from the first time I saw you. But I guess even with all my attempts to get rid of you, I guess I'm stuck with you now."

Brian's face remains stone cold. "I guess you are Craig."

I look at Brian confused. My dad is trying here, even making a joke, and Brian wants nothing to do with it.

My father stands and walks over to us on the couch. He sticks his hand out toward Brian. He is offering his hand to shake. A sign of acceptance. A sign of decency. A sign of respect.

Brian won't look up. He doesn't even acknowledge my father standing there.

Brian stands and brushes past my father.

"I'll be in the car Justin. Nice to see you Craig." Without another look our way, Brian is out the front door.

I sit there for a long time staring after him. I look at my father who is shaking his head.

"He is a rude man." My father tells me.

"He is protective of me Dad. This isn't easy for either of us. You practically tried to kill him. And all the shit you've put me through? I know your trying and I appreciate that, but Brian doesn't forgive and forget as easy I can." My father nods, like he almost understands.

We speak for a few more minutes and he hugs me goodbye before I leave. He tells me he would like to have dinner with me after the New Year. He tells me to bring Brian.

I get in the car and Brian starts it and pulls away without saying a word to me. We drive in silence all the way home. He is thinking. I can tell. His forehead is wrinkled and he has a pained look on his face. I reach out for his hand, almost afraid he wont take it. But he does, without hesitation. His fingers are soft and he wraps them around mine, holding on tight.

Don't worry Brian. I told you, I'm not going anywhere.

~~~~~

"Ohhhh god....BRIAN!" I unload my seed into his mouth and down his throat. He sucks and licks all of my come out of me and when he finally pulls my cock out of his mouth, it is clean. My head falls back on the pillow and I try to steady my breathing. He climbs up my body, trailing soft kisses on my skin until he reaches my lips. He kisses me, deep and hard and I taste myself on his tongue. He loves to do that. He loves to make me taste myself.

"That was so fucking hot. What did I do to receive such greatness?" I ask him as he rolls over onto his back. I rub the back of my hand on his naked thigh.

He shrugs and fumbles for a cigarette on the bedside table. He lights it and inhales slowly. "Figured you needed a release after today." He exhales as he speaks.

"Me? You seemed more worked up than me." I don't look at him. I'm staring at the ceiling. He doesn't say anything. The only sound I hear from him is his inhaling and exhaling of nicotine.

"He tried to shake your hand to let you know he was accepting us. Accepting you."

He snorts.

"He is trying Brian."

"A handshake isn't going to make up for what he did to me. Or you."

This time I don't say anything. He was right. But Brian held onto things. He let things live inside him and build a home there. He never forgets. And he never forgives. There was so much about him, his past, his own parents, that I know nothing about. Things I would never dare ask. Things that made him the way he was. Things that made him be the way he was toward my father today. Things that even now, 15 years later, still are the reason he keeps me at a distance.

"Tell me about your parents." I cringe as soon as I say it. I wait for the yelling. I wait for the anger.

"No."

I turn my head to look at him. He is staring straight up, expressionless.

"I want to know about your past Brian. I want to know everything. Good and bad. Happy or sad-"

"Enough Justin. Stop with the lesbionic bullshit." Here's the anger.

"Brian you have to let me in. You can't keep me at a distance forever. I came back. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I've given everything I have to you. Why cant you just do this one thing for me Brian?"

He is tense. He is rolling his tongue on the inside of his cheek. His eyes are closed.

"Some things aren't worth knowing Justin. It doesn't matter if I tell you. It won't change anything. I'll still be who I am. Talking to you about my feelings won't do anything except piss me off, so drop it ok?" He puts out the cigarette in the ashtray and rolls over to face me.

"You tired?" He asks. I nod. It's so like him just to check out of a conversation like that. Bastard.

He pulls me to him and wraps his arms around me. He nuzzles his nose into my hair. He has been doing that a lot lately. His breathing is slowing down and I know he is starting to drift off to sleep.

" I love you Brian. I wish you would tell me. I wish you would tell me things." I whisper to him. I am certain he is asleep. He probably didn't even hear me. I snuggle up closer to him against his chest and take in his scent. God he is so beautiful.

My body gets heavier and he nuzzles even closer to my hair and breaths me in. As I drift to sleep I hear him whisper to me ever so gently against my ear.

"Someday Sunshine. Someday."

\*\*\*

**Breathe, breathe in the air.  
Don't be afraid to care.  
Leave but don't leave me.  
Look around and choose your own ground.**

## Chapter 28

Cel phones are all the same. On some of them you can surf the net, some of them can take pictures, and all of them can be programmed to play the most annoying fucking music known to man.

A cel phone pitch is easy. Besides, the client on this particular campaign was Japanese, and I didn't want to deal with the formality. I'd had plenty of practice with Japanese clients, and I knew I'd still have to shmooze him afterwards, but at least I could skip the pitch. That's the benefit of owning your own company. You can push the work you don't like off on someone else.

Unfortunately, the pitch was over, and the client had signed the paperwork, and that meant it was my turn. That's the shitty thing about owning your own company. You have to deal with certain things, no matter how big of a pain in the ass they are.

"Mr. Morimoto," I said, bowing at the waist to just the right height to indicate my respect. God, I hated this crap. Why couldn't they just fucking shake hands like the rest of us?

Morimoto bowed in response, just a little lower than me. That was a good sign. "Mr. Kinney," he said, with only a slight accent. "I'm very pleased with your company's work."



I nodded and led him into my office. Of course he was. "I'm glad to hear it. I put my best men on the job. Morimoto Phones will be the next big thing."

Whatever. His shitty little phones were pieces of crap. But I could get people to buy them, and that was what was important.

He smiled at me and looked around my office. He was short, which was typical, but he wasn't fat and old like a lot of the clients I met with. No, he was in shape. And he was young. Hmm. I'd never quite managed to read Japanese guys. Was he gay? Would I get away with a little fuck in the bathroom?

Nah. Best not to fuck the client, no matter how hot their ass is. Besides, I was still sated from this morning. Justin had woken me up with-

"And what is this?" he asked, pointing to the large painting that hung across from my desk.

It was one of Justin's, of course. "Just a little something I picked up in New York last year," I said. I went to my phone, wondering what kind of dinner I should take him to. A client with this much money, I took out myself. Probably steak. They didn't have good steak in Japan.

"It's quite breathtaking," he said.

I looked back up and arched an eyebrow at him. He was still staring at it. "The artist isn't half-bad either."

He laughed and cocked his head, peering closer at it. "I'm a bit of an art enthusiast. This painting is something different."

I smirked, feeling a sense of pride growing in me. Well, why the fuck not?

"To be honest, I don't know much about art," I said. "But I know what I like." I stood by him and stared at the painting. It was one of Justin's better pieces from New York. I'd gone there on a business trip, and I had stopped at a gallery I knew carried his pieces.

Most of his things at the time were really dark and heavy, but this one was a little brighter, warm. There was a lot of orange. "Orange is the new blue," I said.

Morimoto laughed. "So, you know the artist?"

I nodded, glancing at him. "You could say that."

"Ah, she is your lover?" he asked, grinning mischievously.

Well, what the hell. "*He* is."

He blinked at me, looking startled, and then laughed again. "Americans certainly have no problem with stating the truth bluntly!"

I snorted. "Well, I don't, at least."

"Will he be joining us for dinner?"

I arched an eyebrow at him, considering. "I wasn't planning on it."

"Well, I am very impressed with his work. I'd love to see more and discuss it with him. Would it be possible?" Morimoto asked, looking eager.

I shrugged. "I'll call him and see if he's available." I walked to my desk and sat down, grabbing the phone and dialing while Morimoto ogled the painting more.

"Sunshine," I said. "Doing anything for dinner?"

"I was just going to have a sandwich or something," he said. "I thought you were taking a client out tonight."

"Mm, well, he'd like to meet you," I said.

He laughed. "Why? What kind of business does he run?"

"He likes your art," I said. "I think he wanted to meet the greatness behind the painting."

I could hear him thinking. He didn't know I had another one of his pieces. Well, he did now. "Brian," he said hesitantly.

"Meet us at Morton's in an hour," I said.

"Morton's?! Are you sure?! A steak there costs more than-"

"Just do it," I said, cutting him off. "And wear something nice." I hung up and smiled at Morimoto. "He'll be meeting us."

\*\*\*

I'd made reservations, of course. And the hostess knew exactly what wine to bring to the table. It was good to have relationships with the local upscale restaurants. It meant you'd get in quickly, and impress the client with your excellent taste.

Not that I like steak. If I'm going to have that much meat in my mouth, it had better be a cock. But the clients liked it, and I could order pasta.

Morimoto was sitting across from me, sipping his wine. I looked over the menu, as if I hadn't been here a million times.

"Sorry I'm late," I heard Sunshine say.

I glanced up and grinned. He looked hot. When the fuck did he get such a nice suit?

Morimoto stood and bowed, just a little. Justin stared at him for a second, and then laughed and bowed back, awkwardly.

When they both sat down again, I grinned at Justin, eyeing him. He smirked a little at me. He knew he was hot, which just made him hotter. I was going to have to be careful when I ripped that suit from his body later. I wanted him to wear it again.

"So, Mr. Taylor," Morimoto said, looking eagerly at Justin. "I hear that that gorgeous piece of orange modernism in Mr. Kinney's office is one of yours."

Justin blinked at him, then turned and stared at me for a second before answer. "Y-yes. That's right."

"I was wondering, what inspired it? I'm usually not fond of such brightly colored art, but your piece has me intrigued."

God, they were really going to talk about art. How fucking boring. Oh, well. Now I wouldn't have to pretend to be interested in whatever the fuck Morimoto was going to talk about during dinner. I sat back and sipped my wine, watching Sunshine talk to him. He was even brighter when he talked about something he loved. Like art. And me.

Fuck. What a stupid fucking thing to think.

I really wished I could stop grinning like an idiot.

"Well, it wasn't based on anything in New York," Justin was saying. He leaned forward, but didn't rest his elbows on the table. His parents had done well with him on that, at least. Of course, coming from a wealthy family, it was probably to be expected.

"Well, what *is* it based on?" Morimoto asked.

Justin hesitated and glanced at me before answering. "A memory," he said.

Morimoto nodded. "A memory of what?"

Justin's lips turned up into a smug grin. "I'm sorry, I don't like to tell people the details. It changes the way they look at the painting."

"Well," Morimoto said, looking slightly disappointed. "It looks passionate, warm... overwhelmed."

Justin just nodded, and glanced back at me quickly.

Oh.

"That's just about right," Justin said, smiling at Morimoto again.

"I'm hoping you brought more of your art for me to look at," Morimoto said, looking disgustingly hopeful.

Justin laughed and pulled a black book out of his bag. "This has some prints of some of my pieces. It's not the best quality, but..."

Morimoto was already going through the book, staring at each piece of art the way I stare at asses in Babylon. I took the chance to reach under the table and rest a hand on Justin's thigh. He jumped just a bit, then glanced at me and grinned. He was flushed, and it wasn't just because I was touching him. He was excited. He loved having his art admired.

Morimoto laughed and pointed to the book, holding it so they could both see it, and I couldn't. "I see," he said.

"Oh, shit," Justin winced, giving me a guilty look. "That's not... I mean, I thought I took that out of there," he mumbled.

What the fuck.

I leaned forward and grabbed the book from them and snorted. Of course. It was a sketch. Of me. With precariously low jeans. I cocked my head and arched an eyebrow. "Well, it's not exactly how I generally present myself to a client, but..."

Morimoto looked suitably embarrassed and shook his head. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have insisted-"

I handed it back and shrugged. "At least I'm not naked."

Justin was blushing and giving me nervous looks. Well, he *should* be worried. Luckily for him, he was too gorgeous in that suit for me to really get pissed at.

Besides, he'd drawn that sketch in New York, about six months ago. It wasn't only reassuring, it was hot.

Morimoto was flipping through the pages again, and didn't seem to find anything else embarrassing. When he finally shut the book, the food had come, and I ate my pasta while they ate their steaks. I don't know where Sunshine puts all those calories.

"I'm getting married next month," Morimoto said.

I glanced at him. "Congratulations," I replied, trying to sound sincere.

"Are you...?" he asked, glancing between Justin and I.

Shit.

"That's not exactly legal," I replied. That was the easy answer.

Morimoto nodded quickly, probably noticing how tense Justin had gotten. "I've been trying to find a suitable gift for my fiancée," he said.

What was he getting at?

"Our relationship," he said, ducking his head and looking a little ashamed. "It hasn't gone very smoothly. I am constantly away from home for work. It has been difficult. But finally, we're getting married."

Justin kept glancing at me nervously, as if the conversation was upsetting me. Why should it? Why the hell would I be stressed out just because someone was talking about getting married?

That would be stupid.

So why was I getting so tense?

"I would like something to give her... something to express..." he hesitated, searching for the right words. "Kondo..."

"What does that mean?" Justin asked.

"It means 'this time'... I want something to show her that this time, we will be together." He gave Justin an intense look. "How much would you require to commission a painting?"

"O-oh!" Justin sat up straight and shook his head. "I couldn't, really."

"Please," Morimoto said, bowing his head. "Your art is the first thing that has been good enough for her. She would love it, I know."

"W-well," Justin stammered, glancing at me.

I shrugged. If someone wanted to commission his art, I didn't see how that could be a bad thing.

"I'd have to talk to you about... what size you'd want it to be. Of course, shipping it back to Japan will be expensive," Justin said slowly.

"Of course, of course, we can decide on the size, and the price is not the problem. Please, how much would you ask for it?" Morimoto asked.

"Well, I'm not sure... generally it depends on the size of the painting, how well received it is at the galleries," Justin said, chewing on his lower lip. I put my hand back on his leg. He needed to *relax*.

"Would \$5,000 be enough? I was thinking it could be about this size..." Morimoto said, gesturing and indicating a space about five by five feet.

"Five... five *thousand*?!" Justin asked, practically choking.

I squeezed his leg. Keep your fucking mouth shut, Sunshine. Never let them know they're offering too much. This guy can afford it.

"Of course, if that is not enough..." Morimoto started.

"N-no, that would be... acceptable," Justin said.

I smirked and sat back, going back to eating my pasta. Good for Sunshine. I was proud of him.

"Of course," Morimoto said after they'd discussed the details of the painting further. "I have to tell you, you would be very well received in Tokyo. I would be happy to introduce you to other businessmen like myself, who are always looking for new art for their collections. You could be very big in Tokyo." He smiled at Justin.



I felt like I'd swallowed a huge rock. My throat hurt and my stomach felt heavy. I dropped my fork onto my plate.

Not again.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Morimoto," Justin said, smiling at him. "I appreciate the offer."

"Well, please keep it in mind. Tokyo is becoming a hub for art, and I would be pleased to introduce you!"

I couldn't eat anything else. I felt dizzy. I felt sick.

Why the fuck was this happening again?

I knew where this was going. I knew it would from the beginning. It always fucking did.

I was such an idiot.

We finished dinner, I paid, and we bowed again. Justin got the information on the painting, and Morimoto said he'd be sending him half of the money the next day, and the rest once the painting was completed. I thanked Morimoto for his business.

We drove back to the loft in separate cars. I arrived before him, probably because I was speeding like crazy, and went immediately to my stash and lit up. I needed something to calm my nerves, and I didn't want to get drunk. Pot would have to do.

"Brian?" Justin entered the loft and shut the door behind him. He looked around, finding me lying on the bed.

"Sunshine," I said, coughing a little.

He knelt on the bed and gave me a worried look. "Is something wrong?"

"Why the fuck would anything be wrong?" I asked, avoiding his eyes.

He stared at me a long time before lying down next to me. "I can't believe it. \$5,000 is so much. I'd better do a good job."

"You will," I said. I was certain of that much.

"This time, he said." Justin rolled onto his side and grinned at me. "Sounds like us."

I shut my eyes. I didn't want to think about it.

.....

*"Strange infatuation seems to grace the evening tide, I'll take it by your side. Such imagination seems to help the feeling slide, I'll take it by your side. And every time you vent your spleen, I seem to lose the power of speech. You grow me like an evergreen, You never see the lonely me at all. I...Take the plan, spin it sideways. I...Fall. Without you, I'm nothing. Without you, I'm nothing. Without you, I'm nothing."*

## Chapter 29

There have been two things in my life that has always come easily. One is painting. The second is loving Brian. Both just flow out of me with ease and nothing else in the world matters.

So when I started the painting for Mr. Morimoto I knew it wouldn't take me long. The theme, "Kondo", was a symbol for his relationship just as it was for Brian's and mine. This time. This time things would be different. This time was forever. This time I'm not letting go. This time I'm not leaving him again.

So because painting and loving Brian was so easy for me, it took me 3 hours to complete Mr. Morimoto's painting. I poured all the love, lust and trust I had for Brian into this painting. Oranges, yellows and light blue have filled the canvas. It was filled with hope. Each stroke painted a picture of Brian and I.

Our commitment. Our respect. Our hopes and dreams. Our past and future. I was so honored that Morimoto even asked me to do this painting. I was worried at first I

wouldn't be able to express what he wanted in the painting. He had admired and loved the painting he had seen in Brian's office so I tried to capture the same feeling I had when I painted that so I could paint his. And it worked. I have the same feelings now that I did then. They never left me. It just grew with time. After all, Brian was right. It was only time.

I hear the loft door open and my stomach does flip-flops. It's the same reaction I always had, even 10 years ago, when Brian used to come home. I would hear that door slide open and it was the best part of the day. I had waited all day for him to come home and see the painting. I was so proud of it, proud of us.

I practically skip over to him and throw my arms around him as he hangs up his coat.

"Hi!" I kiss him hungrily on the mouth. He barely kisses me back.

"Hey." He brushes past me and heads toward the kitchen. What the fuck was his problem?

"How was work?"

"Same shit different day." What the hell?

"I finished the painting." I say my mood getting less and less happy as the seconds pass.

"Mmmm." He opens a bottle of water and takes a drink.

"What the fuck is your problem?" I demand.

His eyes get wide for a moment, shocked at my outburst, but then his face twists in the Brian Kinney 'I don't give a shit' face I had grown to know all too well.

He shrugs. He begins to undo his tie and walks slowly toward the bedroom, right past the painting. He doesn't even look at it.

"Are you mad that I'm doing the painting?" My voice is gentle. I wanted him to talk to me so I decided getting angry wasn't the best way to achieve my goal.

"Why would I be mad?" He asks not turning to look at me and hanging up his suit jacket.

Fine. Forget it. If he wants to be in a fucking mood, let him be. I'm not going to let him ruin....

"Unless you count the reason that you're doing it again."

I stopped dead in my tracks on the way back to my painting.

"Doing what?" I ask.

There is silence for a long time and I feel him walk up behind me. I feel his breath on my ear and goose bumps go up my spine.

"What you always do." He whispers. He walks back to the kitchen and pours himself a glass of beer. Fuck.

"And what is it that I always do Brian?"

He downs his drink with one gulp and slams the glass down on the counter. I jump at the sound, astonished it didn't shatter into a million tiny pieces.

"Leave."

My heart stops and my mouth goes dry. What the fuck was he talking about?

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"You know damn well what I'm talking about! Your art Justin. Your second big break. So go. Go knock them dead in Japan Sunshine. Get your shit and get the fuck out."

A lump lodges in my throat and I feel myself start to hyperventilate. No. Not again.

"Brian, I-I-I'm not going to Japan. Why the hell would you think that?"

"Why the fuck wouldn't you go? You're better off." His face is starting to turn red. I could see the anger in his eyes.

Stay calm Justin. This is what he does. Just stay the fuck calm.

"Brian, I told you-"

"You're not leaving. This is forever. Right. I've heard that before." His words cut through me like a knife.

"I'm staying in Pittsburgh Brian." My voice is calm even though I am sweating and my heart is racing.

"Why the fuck would you want to stay in PITTSBURGH?" He storms over to me and gets in my face.

I cringe.

"Because I want to be with you." It's almost a whisper.

"You don't sound so sure now Justin." He is inches from my face, eyes narrowed on me.

Now I'm mad. I shove him backwards as hard as I can. He stumbles and almost falls.

"I am sure you fucking asshole. I have never been so sure of anything in my fucking life. Look at the painting." He stands still. "I said fucking look at it!"

He sighs and turns slowly and looks at my painting. He raises an eyebrow and turns his head back to me.

"Do you see it?"

He nods.

"No do you really see it?" I demand.

"What exactly am I supposed to be seeing Justin?"

"Us! Kondo. This time." He snorts and goes to pour himself another glass of beer.

"This time I'm staying."

He snorts again and downs his drink. I can't take anymore. I'm so tired. I head toward the bedroom. I was going to shower and hopefully when I got out he would be calmed down.

"Why the fuck did you even come back?! Can't you see what a fucking mess you make me?! It's fucking stupid! I can't go through this shit again!"

I turn slowly around to him. Don't cry Justin. Stay calm.

"I came back to be with you. I spent 10 years of my life without you and I barely made it. I know I fucked up Brian. I know I hurt you. I live with that reality everyday. I won't leave you again. I can't. I want to spend the rest of my life making it up to you." He won't look at me. He is staring down at the counter.

"You are in every piece of art I do. Every hope and dream I have for myself, you are right there with me. Without you..." My throat tightens and I feel tears stinging in my eyes.

"...Without you I'm nothing."

"Why? Why would you want to be with ME?" He is broken. I never knew until this moment how little of an ego he really had.

"Cause. Your everything I have ever wanted. Everything I never even knew I wanted. You're my everything. And I love you."

He finally looks up at me.

"You're a fucking idiot. I'm fucked up Justin. You're better off...without me."

I shake my head. "Actually I'm not. If you're fucked up, I'm fucked up too." I walk to him and put my hand on his arm. His body relaxes.

"I can't lose you again." He whispers.

I smile. "Try as you might Brian Kinney you're not getting rid of me. You're stuck with me. Forever."

He turns his head and stares over my shoulder at the painting.

"This time." He says. I nod and lean into him.

"This time. " I whisper.

I wrap my arms around his waist. "Brian..."

"Jesus Christ Sunshine." He pulls me to him and kisses me. His lips engulf mine, his tongue making a home in my mouth. His hands caress my body. His fingers tangle through my hair pushing my mouth into his harder.

"Brian..." I moan against his mouth. He kisses me harder, breathing into me all his senses. I needed to show him. I needed him to finally realize.

"I'm yours Brian. All yours." He groans and pulls my paint-stained shirt up and over my head. He traces soft kisses on my neck and shoulders. I unbutton his shirt and slowly lower it down over his muscular shoulders. His tanned body glistens with the beginning of sweat. He gets hotter everyday.

"Show me I'm yours." I whisper. He pulls back and looks deep into my eyes. Hazel meets blue. They create the most vibrant color when they are locked together.

"Tell me." He says as he pushes me backwards toward the bedroom. I know what he wants to hear. I know what he wants. I'll tell him anything. I'll tell him every second of everyday if he just touches me this way.

"I'm yours Brian. All of me. Forever." He lays me down gently on the bed and brushes his lips to mine. His hands wash over my body so gently.

"Mine." He whispers.

I nod into him and devour his mouth. He slowly peels the rest of my clothes off and strips off slowly the rest of his clothing. He kneels above me, running his hands over my body. He doesn't take his eyes off mine. His face is full of emotion. So many emotions. Some I can pin point and some I cant. I see lust. I see fear. And as a small smirk creases his face, I see the emotion I had waited 10 years to see.



Love.

I reach my hand up and touch his face. His eyes close and he nuzzles his cheek into my hand.

"I love you." I tell him. He nods into my hand. "Make love to me Brian. Take me." His eyes open and he lays his body on mine. He kissed and touched me for what seemed like hours. His hands touched every inch of my skin. I had never felt so close to him.

He lifts my legs and I wrap them around his waist. I love when he fucks me like this. He knows I like to watch his face as he enters me. And even though he would never admit it, it's his favorite position too.

He sheathes and lubes his cock and with the excess on his fingers he enters me. I squeeze my eyes shut and moan his name. He knows just how to touch me. He knows my body better than I do. I open my eyes and he is staring at me, mouth half open.

"Justin..." He wants to tell me. He wants to utter those words to me. But I know he won't. He may never again. He doesn't have to say it though. I can feel it.

His fingers leave me and I suck in my breath at the loss. I feel the tip of his cock at my entrance and I let out my breath slowly. Our eyes are locked and I try to tell him through my blue eyes how I feel. What I want. 'I want you inside me' I tell him with my eyes. He hears me.

He enters me slowly and gently. Even after all the times he has been inside me, my hole is still tight around his 9-inch cock. I had to admit even though I was away from him for 10 years; I never let anyone fuck me. It didn't feel right to have anyone else inside me but Brian.

"Brian..." I say as he thrusts slowly inside me. He looks down at me. He is listening.

"No one...I never let anyone..." It's hard for me to get the words out. In a way I was embarrassed. Who knows how many men he had fucked while I was gone. He may think it was pathetic I didn't have anyone else's dick inside me in 10 years.

His eyes glisten over and I realize he knows what I am saying. His face softens and he leans down and kisses me gently. He thrusts harder into me, and leans his forehead on mine.

"Mine. All mine." He whispers into me.

He understands. And I give myself to him.

He makes love to me for hours. He would come, put on another condom and enter me again. I kept him hard with every moan, every whisper of I love you. Every time I came I screamed his name. It just made him harder and come again and again.

He rolls off me and lies next to me after his last orgasm. We are both exhausted, physically and emotionally.

He discards the last used condom and snuggles up close to me. I couldn't stop smiling.

"Stop grinning." He says smacking my ass lightly.

"I cant. Its permanent."

"Well I guess there are worse things than seeing you smile." He kisses my cheek lightly.

"I can't believe its fucking new years already again." I say.

He is silent for a minute and I know it means he is thinking. That is always dangerous.

"And this year your back in good old Pittsburgh." He snorts. "I bet New York is amazing for New Years."

I roll my head and look at him. "It was ok. The rush was nice. All the buzz around this time of the year. Christmas and New Years. But..." I cuddle up closer to him. "...I could never really get into it."

"Why's that?" He asks rolling his tongue in his cheek.

"Cause I knew the next year would be exactly the same." He turns his head and looks in my eyes. He purses his lips together.

"I wouldn't be here. With you." I kiss him gently and he smiles against my lips.

"So Sunshine, what do you want to for New Years now that your back?" He asks rolling over and running his fingers through my sweat drenched hair.

I smile.

"I want to go to Babylon and dance with you all night. And when the clock strikes midnight, and it turns January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, I want to kiss you. And then I want you to take me back here and fuck me until it turns January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016." He laughs and wraps his arms around me tight and pulls me as close to his body as humanly possible.

I feel his lips and hot breath on my ear and I close my eyes at the tingles that shoot through my body.

"You must be able to read minds, Sunshine. That's exactly what I had in mind."

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**When an irresistible force such as you  
meets an old immovable object like me  
you can bet as sure as you live  
something's gotta give, something's gotta give,  
something's gotta give.**

**When an irrepressible smile such as yours  
warms an old implacable heart such as mine  
don't say no because I insist.  
Somewhere, somehow,  
someone's gonna be kissed.**

### **Chapter 30**

We'd eaten bacon, eggs, and pancakes for brunch. Justin had cooked, despite my protests about keeping my dainty figure, and I hadn't bothered to argue anymore. Besides, it had smelled delicious.

We ate on the sofa in our underwear. Kinnetik was closed for the day. It was New Years Eve, after all. We watched reruns of I Love Lucy despite my protests, because Justin wanted to, and I even admitted to enjoying it a little. After all, I'd grown up on it, it was always on at Michael's place. Debbie had loved loud-mouthed red-heads. Wonder why.

Then we watched Rio Bravo on AMC. Despite Justin's protests, he ended up enjoying it. Show me a fag who doesn't want Dean Martin or Ricky Nelson. Sunshine was going to have to get over his "no cowboy movies" policy if we were going to be together.

Then he fell asleep with his head in my lap, and I took deep, slow breaths to calm my nerves.

I had plans for this afternoon. We were supposed to meet the guys at the diner for dinner, and then go to Babylon for the big New Years Eve bash I'd had arranged. I never took too much of a hand in running Babylon, that was what the manager was for, but I made sure that this party was going to be something special.

Still, that left three hours between now and then, and I knew that if I was going to put my plan in motion, I'd have to start soon.

Justin had promised me last night, in words, in action, that he was mine. He'd promised me that he wasn't going anywhere, that he belonged to me.

Now it was my turn.

Fuck it. I wanted to do this. I'd wanted to since Christmas. Now it was time. I stared down at him and felt myself get hard.

I ran a finger lightly down his neck, how I knew he liked it. His skin goosebumped under my hand. He shivered. I did it again.

"Brian?" he mumbled, opening his eyes slowly.

"You can nap later, Sunshine," I said.

"Mm." He sat up and grinned at me. "Oh?"

"I have plans for you right now, and you're going to have to be awake for them," I said. I tugged him into my lap and kissed him, deep and slow.

He wriggled up against me, kissing me back. I could feel him getting hard, pressing against my stomach.

Fuck.

I pushed him off of me and we stood up, and I put my finger in the waistband of his underwear, and tugged him towards the bed.

He hesitated and waited for me to push him down onto it, but instead I sat down and tugged him after me. He tried to climb into my lap, but I lay down and pulled him on top of me.

He hesitated, and we lay like that, him on top of me, staring at each other. I was breathing heavily. He looked confused.

Then I spread my legs enough for him to drop between them.

That was all it took.

His eyes glazed over, his lips turned red, and his breathing got heavier. He ground his cock through his underwear and mine, against my ass.

He still wasn't sure.

But I was.

I moaned. Hell, I *groaned*. It felt fucking *good*. I put a hand on the back of his neck and yanked his head down, kissing him hungrily, deeply. I sucked his tongue into my mouth and ran mine over it. But that wasn't enough. I wanted more than that of him inside of me.

His hands were on my shoulders, then my chest, then the kiss was broken and his lips were following his hands. He sucked on my left nipple and pinched my right. He kissed and licked and nibbled his way down my chest, down my stomach. He dipped the tip of his tongue into my bellybutton.

I groaned again and arched my back.

"Fuck," he moaned. He looked up at me and he looked hungry. He looked horny and hungry and like he wanted to fuck me more than anything.

I arched an eyebrow at him. What's taking so long, Sunshine?

He yanked off my underwear, and I lifted my hips to help him. His hand was on my cock, then his mouth, and I moaned, arching into him.

My eyes were shut, but I could hear him slipping out of his underwear, and reaching for the lube and condoms. His mouth never left my cock.

I heard the lube pop open.

I felt one hand spreading my ass.

Then I felt *cold*. Cold, fucking cold lube right *there*. I tensed, sucked in a breath hard, and held it.

He lifted his head. I opened my eyes. He was staring at me.

I felt myself relax. I wanted this. I wanted *him*. Brian Kinney always gets what he wants.

The tip of his finger slid into me, then the first knuckle, then up to the second. I knew I was breathing erratically, and I tried to calm down, to breathe slow and deep, to keep myself under control.

But that was the point, wasn't it? When I topped, I was under control. At least, a kind of control. I controlled the pace. I controlled the person I was fucking. I controlled myself, at least a little.

Right now, with his finger up my ass, Justin was in control. It was terrifying.

It was hot.

I caught my breath, finally relaxing again, when he slipped another finger in.

I groaned. It felt *tight*. It stretched. I could feel everything, his fingernails, his knuckles... I wasn't used to this. It was going to hurt, no matter how much he prepped me.

I didn't care.

He scissored his fingers inside of me gently, slowly getting them farther apart, and deeper, and then he brushed against that place inside of me that wasn't used to direct stimulation.

I moaned again, and this time it was his name, and this time it was louder.

I was distantly aware that my hands were fisted in the sheets, and that I was covered in a sheen of cold sweat. All of that was being drowned out by the intense aching in my cock, the throbbing in my ass, and the look of lust on his face.

"Fuck me," I groaned.

He inhaled deeply, sharply, and brushed against it again.

"Fuck," I hissed out through gritted teeth. "Justin."

With his free hand, he slipped on the condom. I watched, and I couldn't help but spread my legs further, arching my back a little, pressing against those fingers that were still inside of me, but not against *that spot*.

"Fuck me," I said again, this time louder. I wasn't some fucking pussy bottom who'd beg. No, I wasn't begging. I was *demanding*. "Fuck me *now*."

He was flushed, and now *he* was breathing in light gasps, and his hands were trembling.

Then his fingers were pulled out, and I exhaled sharply, licking my lips quickly. My mouth was dry. Why the fuck wasn't he *inside* me already?!

Then his hands were on either side of me, and my hands were on the back of his neck, pulling him down to stare at me, and my legs were spread, and my back was arched, and his cock was pressing against my hole.

And then he was inside.

I felt my whole body tense up at the sensation. He hesitated, just inside me, and I forced myself to relax. The tip of his cock slowly slid into me, and I felt it when it got past that first ring of muscle. I groaned and tightened around him again. One hand slid to his back, the other I dropped to the sheets. I had to hold onto something.

It stretched. It stung. It probably would have even hurt, if it didn't feel so fucking good. I wanted this. I wanted him.

We were breathing heavily, deeply, trying to maintain some kind of control. I tried not to shove him into me, knowing that I would regret it later if I did. He tried not to thrust into me, despite his whole body trembling with need.

It took minutes for him to completely settle within me, and then he hung there, completely buried in me, and stared. His lips were dry, his face was flushed, and I could feel his pulse in his cock, deep inside of me.

The moment seemed to last forever. Our eyes were locked.

Then I tensed myself, squeezing his cock, and he moaned my name.

It was a blur after that.

He'd pull out and thrust back in, and it wasn't slow, but it wasn't as fast as it could have been. Instead, it was sure, direct, purposeful thrusts, each one meant to press right against my prostate.

And each one did.

At some point I lifted one leg, angling him just right. After that, I forgot everything.

I forgot that Brian Fucking Kinney only bottoms on invitation, and even then he doesn't enjoy it that much. I forgot that Brian Fucking Kinney doesn't moan people's names, especially not with their cock up his ass. I forgot that Brian Kinney doesn't say "fuck me, fuck me, Justin" over and over and over.

All I knew was the feel of his cock, his hard, throbbing cock, being thrust into my ass, the feel on his breath on my face and neck, the feel of his lips on mine, as he kissed me.

And then the feel of his hand on my cock.

I moaned. I fucking shouted. I called out for him.

Then I came.

White light and white hot heat went through me, and I felt it through my whole body. My eyes were open but I couldn't focus them. I couldn't see anything. I grit my teeth and exhaled sharply as the pleasure arched within me, down my spine, into my balls, and then out.

He moaned my name. He thrust a few more times, more erratically, and then he came, too.

Despite the condom, I could feel it. I could feel him throbbing inside me, I could feel the heat from his come filling the condom.

I shut my eyes and tried to breathe.

When I opened them again, he was still crouched over me, tying off the condom. He tossed it into the trash, and used his discarded underwear to wipe me off. I couldn't find the strength to move, so I just let him do it. Then he wiped himself off, and tossed the cloth aside.

And then he collapsed next to me, panting.

I lay there, staring at the ceiling, feeling how fucking *open* I felt. And how empty.

"That's what it feels like for you," I heard myself say. My voice sounded fucked. My throat was raw. I must have really been yelling before.

"Mm?" he barely managed to say. His eyes were half-shut and he was in a daze.

"When I fuck you," I said. I forced myself to roll onto my side to face him. I rested a hand on his waist. "That's how it feels?"

He bit his lower lip, then nodded.

"I wondered," I said.

He just stared at me.

I shut my eyes. I couldn't look into his any longer, or I'd never catch my breath.

"I love you," he whispered.

I felt myself grin. For once I didn't feel guilty about not saying it back. If what we'd just done hadn't shown him how I felt, nothing fucking would.

"I hope you realize that this isn't going to become a habit," I mumbled. "Brian Kinney only bottoms on occasion."

I could hear the amusement in his voice when he responded. "Lucky me. Justin Taylor prefers it that way."

I opened my eyes and stared at him for a long moment.

"But once in a while," I said, "it feels pretty fucking good to do it the other way." I inhaled deeply, and then sighed.

He smiled and rolled into me, our bodies hot and sticky with sweat, and pressed his forehead to mine. "Mmmmm."

I nuzzled my nose to his and wrapped my arm around his waist, holding him against me.

"You're fucking hot," I said.

"I must be," he replied. His eyes were shut. He looked like a cat who'd just had a bowl of the best fucking cream in the world.

"You hadn't bottomed for anyone since you left?" I asked softly.



He didn't open his eyes. "Nope," was all he said.

I pursed my lips and thought about it before saying what I thought I should probably tell him. "Me either."

His eyes opened again, wide this time, and then he shut them tightly.

He could have said 'no big deal, you don't usually anyway,' but he didn't. He could have brushed it off. But I think he knew. Sometimes even Brian Kinney wants to be fucked. The problem was, my standards were much higher when I was the fuckee.

My standards were Justin Taylor. No imitations, no replacements. Just him.

I meant to tell him that. I meant to find a way to say it, so that he'd know... so he'd know that I was his as much as he was mine.

Except I was pretty sure he understood already.

We fell asleep like that. We didn't wake up for an hour.

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We'd arrived hours late to the diner, because we'd overslept, and laid in bed too long after we woke up, and took a long shower, and basically because I was stalling.

My ass hurt. I knew I had to force myself to walk normally, and not to wince when I sat, and to act completely normal, as if I hadn't just let Justin top me.

So when we arrived at the diner and everyone else had already given up and moved on to Babylon long ago, I didn't really mind. We got the pink plate special, and we ate quickly before moving on to Babylon.

The lights were flashing, the glitter was falling, and the whole place smelled of men. It was heaven.

No, not quite. There was a better place to be, but one couldn't spend all of one's time in Justin's ass. He'd probably want to get up and eat or pee or something stupid like that after a few hours. So Babylon was the next best thing.

"Well, look who it is!" Emmet said, waving us over as we walked in.

"Where the hell were you?" Michael asked, looking annoyed.

"Fucking," I replied. We joined the boys on the sidelines, overlooking the dance floor.

Justin smirked at me. I chuckled.

Michael sighed and shook his head. Ben grinned at him. "At least they're here."

"Of course we're here, I wouldn't miss Babylon on New Years," I replied.

"Just think," Ted said, leaning against the railing next to us. "In a few years, Gus will be joining us."

I nodded. "He could have this time, but his mothers would have killed me. They leave tomorrow, and they wanted to spend New Years with fellow munchers."

"Poor Gus," Justin said.

"Well, maybe next year he'll be here with us!" Michael said. "I mean, *you're* here, with *Brian*, and we never thought *that* would happen."

Justin just smiled.

I wrapped an arm around his waist and tugged him close to myself. I wanted to be close to him. I wanted to feel his skin against my hands, and to be able to smell him.

"I'm glad you're both happy," Ben said.

"You *are* happy, aren't you?" Blake asked, grinning at me.

I smirked and nodded, my gaze not leaving Justin's face. "I am."

Justin's smile widened and he beamed at me, and I remembered once again why Debbie had named him Sunshine.

"To be honest, sometimes I didn't think you'd even live this long," Emmet said.

I rolled my eyes at him. "That's because you're a drama queen," I replied.

Michael smiled at me and shook his head. Well, he knew better. Sometimes I hadn't thought I'd live this long, either.

Turns out persistence and determination can pay off after all. That's another lesson my Sunshine taught me.

"So?" Ted said. "There are a lot of hot guys out there, just waiting to see who Brian Kinney fucks *this* New Years."

"They say,," Emmet began., "if Brian makes you come before the clock strikes twelve, you turn back into a pumpkin, but if you can hold out, you get to stay a princess forever!"

"I think you've got your fairy tales mixed up," Justin said, laughing. "So?" he asked, giving me a slightly nervous grin. "Who's going to be the lucky man this year?"

"Yeah," Michael said, nodding towards the dance floor. "There are a lot of hot guys out there, and you've only got a few minutes to decide."

I glanced over the dance floor, pretending to consider, then finally my gaze landed on Justin, beside me.

"Hmm. I think you'll do."

Justin smiled at me. "You don't have to--"

"I want to," I replied.

Justin flushed and his smile widened, and I couldn't help but smile back. Fuck, but I was giddy. It was an unfamiliar feeling. Usually I only felt this way if I was high, or fucking, or driving really fast. Adrenaline, giddiness, that rush... I felt it now, and all I was doing was looking at him.

Suddenly, the music faded and a drag queen, dressed in sparkling silver and white with a huge clock on the front of her dress, appeared on a platform that was raising from the floor. "It's almost time, kiddies! Get ready to count!"

The boys, my friends, were all turning to their partners, (Emmet had a particularly attractive and large, muscular man at his side.) I put an arm around Justin's waist and pulled him close.

The countdown began.

**10!**

I leaned in and pressed the tip of my nose to Justin's.

**9!**

He smiled at me and lifted his hand to the back of my neck.

**8!**

Our lips brushed briefly, lightly.

**7!**

We kissed again, this time deeper.

**6!**

My tongue was in his mouth.

**5!**

The kiss deepened, and he moaned.

**4!**

I broke the kiss and looked at him.

**3!**

"Justin," I said.

**2!**

He cocked his head at me, smiling.

**1!**

It was about fucking time that I said it.

"I love you."

Glitter exploded from the ceiling in silver and gold, the music started up again, and everyone cheered. The noise was deafening, the glitter was blinding, and I barely noticed any of it.

The look on Justin's face was far more important.

His eyes were wide and his lips were parted, and he looked shocked.

I arched an eyebrow at him, briefly concerned that he might *actually* not say it in return.

"I love you, too..." he whispered.

Fuck, yes.

I pulled him into another kiss, this one wet and deep and passionate.

I gave that kiss a full minute before breaking it to pull him to the dance floor. We'd dance a few dances, and then I'd take him back to the loft. This was going to be a year I wasn't going waste, and I wanted to start it right.

**So en garde who knows what the fates have in store  
from their vast mysterious sky?  
I'll try hard ignoring those lips I adore  
but how long can anyone try?**

**Fight, fight, fight, fight, fight it with all of our might,  
chances are some heavenly star spangled night  
we'll find out as sure as we live  
something's gotta give, something's gotta give,  
something's gotta give.**

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**"Our life together is so precious together. We have grown, we have grown.  
Although our love is still special, let's take a chance and fly away somewhere  
alone. It's been too long since we took the time. No one's to blame; I know time  
flies so quickly. But when I see you darling, it's like we both are falling in love  
again. It'll be just like starting over, starting over. Why don't we take off alone,  
take a trip somewhere far, far away? We'll be together all alone again, like we  
used to in the early days. Don't let another day go by my love, it'll be just like  
starting over, starting over."**

### **Epilogue**

The newly fallen snow on the ground squished under our shoes.

He held my hand as we walked.

Even though I knew how sad this was going to be, I couldn't help but smile.

I had everything now.

We stopped in front of the familiar headstones.

Well, almost everything.

"Hey Deb." I run my gloved hand over her engraved name.

Still clutching my hand, Brian remains quiet.

I clear my throat. I had so much to tell her.

"Well Deb, here we are. The Brian and Justin show. Back with a vengeance." I hear Brian snort next to me. I squeeze his hand.

"You'd be proud Deb. I started school again. I'm going to be a teacher. I'm still painting. I'll never stop that. And Brian and I-" I look at him and his eyes shift from the ground up to look at me. He smirks.

"-we have a house now. In West Virginia. About half-hour from here. It's so beautiful. I wish you could see it." I feel my heart start to ache.

"We even started to buy furniture." I shift my weight from one foot to another and scratch my head.

"Gus and I got to spend a lot of time together while he was here on his visit. He's such a great kid. They left a few days ago to go back to Canada." I see Brian wince. As much as he doesn't want to admit it, he was going to miss Gus.

"I'm finally happy Deb. It took...god...it took almost 15 years but I'm finally where I belong. This is it Deb. It's forever this time. I'm not going anywhere ever again. I'm sorry it took so long..." I start to sob instantly, tears streaming down my face. Brian's arm goes around my shoulder and pulls me close to him.

"I feel like it took me forever to get here." I repeat the same words I said to her just a few short weeks ago when I came to see her. When I saw Brian again for the first time in 10 years. I look up at Brian. At my future. At my life.

"You're right. She would be proud." He whispers in my ear. I nod into him, letting the tears fall. He smiles as he wraps both arms around me.

"You have anything you wanna say before we go?" I ask gently. He pulls back and stares at Deb and Vic's grave. He rolls his tongue in his cheek and I rub his chest through his leather jacket.

He lets out a huge sigh and I watch as his breath glides into the cold January air.

"Deb...I....FUCK." He kneels down in front of Deb's grave.

"I'm happy too." I hear him whisper softly and he lays his palm against her name.

He stands and returns his arm around my shoulders.

"And Vic, I hope your having the time of your life, wherever the hell you are. I'm sure you are. You always could find a way to have a good time anywhere." I smile and lean into him.

He clears his throat and closes his eyes. "I miss you both." He says forcefully and then looks away. I know how hard this was for him. Brian Kinney doesn't visit people's graves. Brian Kinney doesn't tell people he misses them. Well unless it's me. Brian Kinney thinks it's bullshit to 'talk' to people like this.

Well Brian Kinney used to think and not to do a lot of things.

Just then his cell phone cries in his pocket and he fumbles his leather-covered fingers in his jacket to find it. He smirks, as he sees the caller id.

"Yes, mother of my spawn?" He balances the phone on his shoulder as he reaches inside his pocket for a cigarette.

I laugh and kneel down to arrange the daisy's I had brought for Deb on her grave.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" He lights his cigarette and takes a long drag.

I stand back up and stare at him questionably.

"You're his mother. Tell him no."

Long drag. Eyes widen.

"I told him no. I told him no fucking way!"

I touch his arm. Oh god. What happened?

"How is this my fucking problem? Go find him."

His face turns white and his mouth drops open and ever so gently, he snaps his cell phone shut.

He is silent and he brings his lips into his mouth and closes his eyes.

"Brian? What's wrong?"

He shakes his head and lets out a low moan. He drops his cigarette butt onto the ground and stubs it out with his expensive Prada shoe.

"Brian?"

He opens his eyes and looks at me and shrugs.

"Gus ran away. He told Linds and Mel he didn't want to live there anymore. He told them he wanted to live with me and they told him absolutely not and he took off."

"Oh my god Brian! Are they looking for him? Jesus!"

"No need. They know where he is." He runs his fingers through his hair and grabs it, frustrated.

"They do? Where?"

He drops his hands to his sides and lets out an exhausted sigh.

"On a bus. Headed here."



## **Time after Time**

Sequel to Kondo

**~Gratitude is the realization that we have everything we need, at least in this moment.---M.J. Ryan~**

### **Prologue**

I poured some beam into a glass and listened to the yelling that was coming from the living room.

"What the fuck were you THINKING? Are you out of your fucking MIND?"

I walk to Brian and hand him the glass. He looks at me, and for a moment his face softens. There is a look of understanding between us. I always know what he needs.

"I could use some too." Gus mumbles, his eyes staring intently at the floor as he sits in front of us on the couch.

"You shut your mouth. You are in deep shit trouble." Brian tells his son. Gus says nothing.

"Bri...give him a break." I say softly. Brian cocks an eye brow at me.

"A break? A break? The little shit ran away from home, took a fucking BUS 10 hours here, and now just EXPECTS me to let him live with m...us!" I smile.

"I think its sweet." I tell him.

He opens his mouth to protest but he sees the smirk that is on my lips and he quickly closes his mouth. We both turn our heads to look at Gus. He is staring at us, face flushed, and eyes red. Brian had been yelling at him for at least an hour now. He was pretty beaten down. I sit down on the couch next to him.

"What happened, Gus?"

He lets out a huge sigh and leans back on the couch. "I just...I couldn't stay there anymore. They were always on my case about shit. I couldn't do anything. And they were snooping in my room."

I look up at Brian and he is wincing.

"So you thought you could just come here, live with us and we'd let you get away with anything you want!" Brian yells.

"Take it easy, Brian." I tell him.

"Why can't I stay with you! You're my father!" Gus is hysterical. I place my hand on his shoulder and squeeze. I look up at Brian with a pleading look. He sighs and finally sits down next to his son. He hands Gus the glass of beam. Gus looks at him with wide eyes and slowly takes the glass from his father's hand. He takes a tiny sip and makes a disgusted face. Brian and I both laugh.



"Gus, your mother's will never let you live with me." Brian tells him.

Gus lets out a huge sigh. "Maybe if Justin talked to them." He looks at me with a pleading look. My eyes shift to Brian. His lips are pulled into his mouth and his eyes are half closed. He is silent for a long time, before he finally speaks.

"Fine."

Gus's head snaps to look at his Father's direction. "What?"

Brian lets out a huge sigh. "I said FINE. You can live with us. If Mel and Linds agree...you....can live with us in the new house."

A huge smile spreads across my lips and it took everything I had not to jump over Gus and throw my arms around Brian.

"Really!?!? Are you serious???" Gus exclaims.

Brian nods and takes his drink back from Gus and downs it.

"SWEET!" Gus's face looked like the fourth of July. Brian stands up and walks to the kitchen to pour himself more liquor. I wrap my arm around Gus's shoulder and pull him to me.

"I told you." I whisper in his ear. He smirks at me.

"Yea, you were right. He caved." I tussle his hair and we get up off the couch. Gus walks to his father and stands in front of him. Brian leans down at him, his tongue rolled into his cheek. Gus throws his arms around Brian.

Brian's eyes widen and he looks at me for help. I smile. His arms slowly go around Gus.

"Thank you." I hear Gus whisper into his shoulder. Brian closes his eyes. "Yea."

Gus lets go of Brian and shoves his hands in his pockets.

"Alright, now go get in trouble or something. Have fun while you can cause once we move in, there are going to be rules." Brian tells him.

"Rules? What kind of rules?" Gus's eyes widen.

"I'm not sure yet. but I'll think of some." Brian smiles at him.

Gus nods and heads toward the door. "I'll be Uncle Mikey's store."

"Be home for dinner!" I yell to him. Brian smirks at me. Yea, I was going to the mother and wife in this arrangement.

"Ok, Dad." Gus smiles and throws open the loft door. "Oh, and by the way. Fuck now, because I don't want to hear you while I'm asleep on the couch tonight." The loft door slams shut.

"Little shit." Brian mumbles and takes a swig of Beam right from the bottle. I laugh and walk to him. I grab the bottle from his hand and set it down on the counter.

"You did a good thing, Brian." He narrows his eyes at me at first, then softens. He wraps his arms around me and I nuzzle into his chest.

"So much for us being alone." He mumbles into my hair.

"Doesn't matter. Britin is big enough. We will be alone a lot."

"We'll make sure his room is the farthest one from our bedroom." I laugh at him and kiss his neck.

"Ok, Dad." He winces.

I let go of him and walk to the other side of the counter. "Come look at the couches I picked out." He peers over my shoulder at the magazine, his hands placed firmly on my hips.

"Red, huh?" I nod and look at him over my shoulder.

"Mmmm." He flips the pages on the magazine and rubs his fingers on my waist.

"I don't think you should sell the loft." I say as I fold down corners on the pages of the furniture I like. He grabs my hand and turns me around.

"No?" He asks, with a serious look in his eyes.

I shake my head. "No. You can't get rid of it. There's too many memories here." I look into his eyes and he smiles.

"But we are going to make new memories...." He trails off, placing soft kisses on my face.

"I know, and we will. But I mean what if you end up working real late, or you're late coming home from the club? It would be crazy to drive all the way to Britin. You could just stay here."

He smiles and kisses me firmly. "Ok."

I brush past him and begin to walk to the bedroom. I needed a shower.

"So you're really staying this time?" I hear him say. I turn to find him leaning down across the counter, his fingers resting under his chin. He is tracing imaginary circles on the counter with his finger. He is fucking adorable.

"Yes, Brian. I told you. I'm staying. This time, and every time after that. And every time you ask me, I'll tell you the same thing. Yes. Time after Time."

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*On reflection, one of the things I needed to learn was to allow myself to be loved. – Isha McKenzie-Mavingani*

## **Chapter 1**

I had to step over not one, but two bookbags as I entered the house. There was not just the usual pair of beat up sneakers, but two, flung near the door. I almost tripped over a skateboard that I didn't even know Gus owned, and cursed under my breath.

What the fuck was going on? You'd think that after two *fucking* months of living here, Gus would learn to take his fucking shit to his room.

"Justin?" I called out, setting my briefcase down and loosening my tie. It had been a long day. We had a new account coming in tomorrow for some swimwear company, and I'd had to go through every model in the book to find a lineup for the representative to pick from. Idiots. They should have just let me pick someone. After all, if anyone has good taste in hot young blond boys, it's me.

"In here," Justin called out from the kitchen.

I followed his voice, glancing into the living room to see if Gus was there. He wasn't. "Why the fuck does Gus have *two* bookbags set up to trip me today? Isn't one enough?" I asked, entering the kitchen.

Justin's back was turned to me, and he was stirring something in a large pot. "He has a friend over."

"A friend, huh?" I walked up behind him and put an arm around his waist, pressing against him. He smelled like himself, but also like garlic and oregano. Delicious. "Making one of Debbie's old recipes?"

He turned his head and smiled at me, placing a quick kiss on my lips. He tasted like marinara sauce. "Yeah, I thought I'd cook something special, in honor of our guest."

"So who is this kid?" I asked, letting go of Justin and going to the fridge for a bottle of water.

"Just a boy from school. It's good that he's finally making friends," Justin said. He began to hum something tuneless and unrecognizable under his breath while he stirred the sauce. I remember a time when his humming annoyed the shit out of me. These days, it's just comforting.

"It did take him a while to adjust. With my good looks, you'd think that he'd be more popular," I said, opening the bottle and drinking it, enjoying the view of Justin's ass in those jeans he always wears when he paints. There was a yellow paint stain across the ass, which just drew more attention to it. I loved those pants.

"Oh, he's popular enough. He's already gotten a few love letters," Justin replied, turning to the meat that was browning in the pan next to the sauce. "I think the problem is that he's not interested in any of them."

I snort. "Well, maybe they're from girls." When he moved, his jeans gripped his ass more tightly, and I licked my lips.

"You know he's bisexual," Justin replied, glancing back at me. He smirked and wiggled his ass, knowing that I was leering at him.

"Yet as far as I know, he's only gone after men. Maybe he'll keep it up." I stepped forward and kissed the back of Justin's neck, burying my face in his hair. God, he smelled good.

"Mm," Justin said, smiling and turning back to the food. "Well, this one's a boy," he said. He sounded almost amused.

"And?" I ask, nuzzling my face into his hair.

"Oh, you'll see," Justin replied.

"Hey, dad!" Gus said, walking into the kitchen. He went to the fridge and began digging around.

"Stop right there," Justin said, pointing a spatula at him. "Dinner is almost done. No snacking."

Gus scowled and shut the door to the fridge firmly. "*Fine*, but hurry it up. We're starving."

I arched an eyebrow at him and nodded. "So? Where is he?"

As if on cue, the boy walked into the kitchen. He was a little shorter than Gus, and was pretty cute, if you liked that sort of thing. He had dark brown hair, darker than Gus', which was messy and slightly wavy, and in need of a cut. His eyes were brown, and his skin was pale, and he had faint traces of freckles across his nose.

"Hey, Joey," Justin said, smiling. "Go ahead and sit down, the food's almost done."

I arch an eyebrow at the boy, who is staring at me openly.

Gus went to get plates and set the table. The lesbians had trained him well. "Oh, that's my dad, Brian," Gus said offhandedly.

Joey grinned nervously and nodded. "Hi, I'm Joey. I'm in Gus' class."

This kid was reminding me of someone. But who?

"Charmed," I said, sitting down at the table. Yeah, we ate at a table, now, but only when we had guests (which was far more often than I would have liked.) The rest of the time we would sit in the living room on the throw rug and Gus would watch TV and I'd nibble on Justin's neck. I was looking forward to a dinner like that today, but it looked like that wasn't going to happen. Damn.

"Uh, yeah," Joey said, sitting down across the table from me.

"Oh, dad, where's that box of comics?" Gus asked, setting the table.

"Which one?" I asked, rolling my eyes.

"The one with all the old stuff," Gus said, sitting down.

"Probably in one of the spare bedrooms, with all the other boxes you still haven't unpacked," I said, watching Justin bring the food to the table. Spaghetti with meat sauce, and from the smell I could tell that it was indeed one of Debbie's recipes. Damn, but sometimes I missed her. Not that I would tell anyone.

"Cool," Gus replied, turning to Joey. "I think the Captain Astro comics are in there," he said.

Joey's eyes lit up and he smiled widely and suddenly I knew where I recognized him from. Michael. "Is that the one you were telling me about?"

"Yeah," Gus replied. "Uncle Mikey loved those. He gave me a bunch of his extras. But we have to take good care of them 'cause they're rare and crap."

Joey nodded, a serious expression on his face. "Of course," he said. Then he smiled again, eyes practically sparkling at Gus. "Thanks for having me over."

Gus shrugged and started scooping spaghetti onto his plate. "Yeah, sure."

I had to bite my tongue to keep from laughing. Yeah, this kid was *just* like Michael, crush and all.

"So, Joey, why are you spending time with my stupid son?" I asked, smirking across the table at him.

"Oh, um," he stammered for a moment. "He sorta beat up this kid that was... sorta beating *me* up."

I snorted and started scooping spaghetti onto my plate. Damn Justin and his damn carbs. I was going to have to spend extra time on the treadmill after this.

Gus shrugged. "It wasn't a big deal," he said.

Justin smirked at me knowingly. "Like father like son."

I rolled my eyes and ate. "Just don't get suspended for fighting, or your mothers will want you shipped home."

"I won't," Gus said. "Anyway, I won't have to anymore. After that fight, no one's gonna mess with him."

Joey beamed at Gus in adoration and ate his spaghetti. "It was *really* cool."

I swallowed a laugh. This was fucking pathetic.

"Just don't make any enemies," Justin said, giving Gus a look.

I frowned and put my hand on his knee under the table. He glanced at me and grinned.

"Yeah, sure," Gus said. "It's no big deal. Tons of kids get into fights."

"Just remember, your tuition is costing more than you can imagine, so don't fuck up," I reminded him.

"Well, then, you shouldn't be making me go to a stupid private school," he snapped back.

Hmm. He really hadn't wanted to go to private school, but I could afford it, and I knew first-hand how shitty public school was. Of course, St. James was out of the question, even if Justin did insist that things had changed. No son of mine was going to go to a religious school. So we'd put him in a private school in ml:namespace prefix = st1 />West Virginia, closer to the house.

Shit, did I just actually think 'no son of mine'? Fuck. I need a drink.

I got up to get myself a glass of wine and poured one for Justin as well.

"But it's okay, since we can hang out now!" Joey said, smiling widely.

Gus grinned at him. "Yeah, I guess. At least we can suffer through it together."

"How are you getting home tonight, Joey?" I asked. I wasn't going to give the kid a ride, I was tired and I wanted to get Justin into bed and naked as soon as possible.

"My mom's gonna pick me up in a couple of hours," he said, his eyes never leaving Gus.

"Okay, finish your dinner, and try to keep it down," Justin said.

"You, too," Gus replied, smirking at us.

Justin had the decency to blush faintly. I just smirked back. "No promises."

Joey blinked at us, clueless and naïve.

Oh, yes. This was going to be *hilarious*.

**"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do." Eleanor Roosevelt**

## Chapter 2

I awoke to the sound of my cell ringing annoyingly on the bedside table. I groan loudly and fish around for it not opening my eyes.

"Mmmfh?" I mumble into the phone when I finally get it open. I refuse to open my eyes.

"Don't tell me you're STILL in bed, Sunshine." Brian's voice is chipper. I don't understand how he can be such a morning person.

"Leave me alone." I grumble.

"I did leave you alone this morning. I let you sleep and I took Gus to school."

"I was up late, Brian. You know that." The past few nights had been spent pouring over my textbooks for my final paper for my Fundamentals of Education class. Last night Brian even had to carry me to bed when he found me fast asleep on top of the keyboard in the office.

"I do know." His voice is soft now. Ok now I feel bad.

I sigh and finally open my eyes to look at the clock. 10:39. Shit. I really should get out of bed.

"Listen, get up, get some coffee, work some more on your project since you don't have any classes today and then get your sexy ass over here and have lunch with me." I can tell he's smiling. It makes me smile too.

"Ok." I yawn and sit up in bed.

"Be here by 1:30. I should just be finishing up with Madison Surf wear then."

"Did you find a model?" I climb out of bed and pad barefoot downstairs to the kitchen.

He groans. "No. All the pictures I emailed to him of the best models we have he didn't like. So he's coming in at 11 to look at some more portfolios."

"Mmmkay." I pour myself some already made coffee into my mug. Brian is so good to me. He always makes sure the coffee is made for me on days like this. I'm honestly not sure how I got so lucky.

"Do you want to go out to lunch or do you want me to bring something?"

"Just bring something. We can eat here and then I can have you for desert." I can tell he has a wide grin across his face.

"Mmm. Sounds awesome. I'll see you soon." Two beats. "I love you."

Pause. "Bye Sunshine."

I flip my cell shut and drop it on the counter. I bring my coffee into the office and turn on the computer. I was almost done with my paper, which made me happy because tomorrow was my birthday and there was no way in HELL I was working on my birthday.

I bury my face in my hands and sigh. 33. 33 Fucking years old. Now I know how Brian must have felt all those years. Even though I really don't hear him complain much about his age anymore. Or the fact that speckles of gray were starting to come through his brown locks. I smile to myself. He was still beautiful.

Not that we had anything planned for my birthday. This was my first birthday being back together, so it was special to me, but I'm sure he didn't have anything planned. If he remembered at all. I don't get worked up about those kinds of things anymore with Brian. He has shown me in better ways how much he loves me. I don't need a cake or a fancy dinner or flowers like I used to think I did years ago. All I needed was him.

I put the last finishing touches on my paper, shower quickly and head toward Kinnetik, my cock already twitching at the thought of Brian fucking me on the couch in his office.

I'm not sure how I got so lucky.

~~~~~

I stroll into Kinnetik, brown paper bag full of Thai in hand. I head to Brian's office and wave at Cynthia as I pass.

"Madison Swimwear is still in there with him." She says with a nervous smile.



"Are you kidding me?"

She shakes her head. "They still haven't found the '*perfect*' model." She uses quotation marks with her fingers and rolls her eyes as she says perfect. I laugh and walk around the corner. Brian's office door is open and I see an older gentleman dressed in jeans and a button down Hawaiian shirt sitting across from Brian at his desk.

"Mr. Madison, I'm really not sure what it is you're looking for." I hear Brian say. "I've shown you every model we have and then some."

"Mr. Kinney the image I am trying to have set in this campaign is of a hot and sexy male who doesn't KNOW he is hot and sexy. I don't want cockiness. I don't want some chiseled, buff, conceited model. I want a boy next door, an average every day male." Mr. Madison leans back in his chair and gives Brian a challenging look.

"Well then with all do respect Mr. Madison, we might as well go stand out on the street to find what you are looking for."

I silently walk in and raise an eyebrow at Brian. He smiles when he sees me and mouths 'sorry' to me as I head toward the couch. I see Mr. Madison's head whip to look at me. I sit on the couch and begin to flip through the latest issue of 'Heat'. I see out of the corner of my eye Mr. Madison get up from his chair and slowly walk to me. He is staring. I look up.

"You." He says.

"Huh?"

"You. I want *you*."

I give him a confused look. "Excuse me?" I mean he wasn't bad looking but he was older. Older than Brian. He turns to look at Brian and points to me.

"This is the model."

Brian chuckles and walks around his desk over to us.

"Mr. Madison, he isn't one of our models. This is my partner, Justin Taylor."

"I don't care who he is, HE'S the model. He's the one I want."

My mouth is hanging open at this point. Me? A model?

"Justin is an artist, Mr. Madison. He's never modeled in his life." Brian is looking at him like he is crazy.

"Like I said. I don't care. He is the image I have been looking for." He folds his arms and gives Brian a LOOK. "It's him or no one."

Now it's Brian's turn for HIS mouth to hang open. He looks between Mr. Madison and myself.

"I...I...I'm not a model. I'm sure they are WAY better looking models...."

"No. This is exactly what I was talking about. You have no idea how good looking you are. You're perfect for this ad." Mr. Madison interrupts. All I can do is stare.

"I'll make sure you are paid the exact same amount any other model is paid. Right, Mr. Kinney?" Mr. Madison raises an eyebrow at Brian.

Brian swallows and nods. He is in just as much shock as I am.

"So?" I am asked.

"Um, sure I guess. If you're sure." What the FUCK?

"Good." Mr. Madison walks to the chair he was sitting in and gathers his brief case. "We have a 6pm deadline tomorrow to get the proofs to Heat and Surf America magazines. I'll need you here by noon tomorrow."

"I...well tomorrow is my birthday..." I begin to say.

Mr. Madison smiles. "It won't take long. You'll be done in time to go home and celebrate with your partner here." He looks at Brian. "I'll see you tomorrow Mr. Kinney." With that he is out the door before Brian and I can get another word in edge wise.

Brian and I stay silent for what seems like an eternity.

"Well, I've always told you you were hot, Sunshine." He sits next to me on the couch and places a hand on my knee.

"So, I'd be in like magazines? And billboards? In just swimwear?" I ask him, my voice shaky.

He pales. "Yup."

"And you're ok with this?"

He raises an eyebrow at me. "Why the fuck wouldn't I be?"

"Well, for one, millions of men and woman are going to see me everyday."

"Men and woman see you everyday NOW, Justin." He tells me.

"I-I know. But, this is different. And what the fuck do I know about modeling?"

"Justin, you can get up in front of an entire club filled with horny men and dance in your underwear but you can have pictures taken of you in swim shorts?" He is smirking at me. I relax slightly.

"I know, but... this is different. *I'm* different."

He wraps his arms around me and nuzzles his face into my hair. "You need to have more confidence, Justin. You're hot. I've been telling you that since the first day I met you. You were hot then and you're still hot now." He kisses my head. I close my eyes and smile.

"Ok."

"You're gonna be fine. And I'll be there in case you get nervous."

I giggle. "Or in case someone tries to grope me."

He laughs and buries his nose in the crook of my neck. "If they're hot, I may join in on the groping." I climb onto his lap and kiss him deeply. His tongue massages mine and I moan into him. This whole idea of me modeling is turning him on. How do I know? The enormous hard on pressing against my leg. He tugs on my hair as we kiss and I shiver.

"Did you bring lunch?" He asks against my swollen lips.

"Mmm hmmm. But I was thinking we could do desert first." I lick his lower lip. His eyes glaze over with lust and before I know it I am flipped onto my back on the soft leather couch.

"I think that can be arranged, Mr. Taylor."

I'm not sure how I got so lucky.

\*\*\*

*He that is not jealous is not in love. ~St. Augustine*

### Chapter 3

Justin had wanted to stay up late and paint, but I'd convinced him (using persuasive speech, and also my dick) that he should go to bed at a decent time. Now I was glad I had. Getting him out of bed was still nearly impossible. (This time I had to use persuasive speech and my *mouth*.) However, despite his moaning and bitching about getting up at the crack of 7 AM, we arrived to Kinnetik only a few minutes late.

Cynthia greeted us as we passed her desk and went into my office. She handed me the usual pile of memos and warned me that the Madison Surf people had already called to check on the status of the photo shoot.

People needed to have more confidence in me. Kinnetik didn't win awards *every year* by fucking up something as simple as swimsuit ads. I sat at my desk and flipped through the memos Cynthia had handed me to make sure there was nothing urgent.

"Hey... Brian," Justin said.

I glanced up and saw him standing on the other side of my desk. He was chewing on his lower lip and tapping his left foot anxiously.

"Yes?" I arched an eyebrow at him. He was so cute when he was nervous.

"I don't know about this," he said.

"You'll be fine," I replied, standing up and walking around the desk to him. "Don't queen out."

"I turn 33 today," he said, getting two fingers under my tie and staring at me with those beautiful blue eyes of his. "Shouldn't they have someone younger?"

I smirked and ran a hand through his hair. "You do realize that you don't look a day over 28, right?"

He flushed and shook his head. "Don't try to flatter me into doing this. I won't. I'm not going to."

I rolled my eyes and tugged on some of his hair gently. "You *will*, or your *partner* will lose a large account, and will have to spank you for being bad."

The room seemed to brighten as he smiled at me. "In that case I really won't."

I snorted and shook my head. "You're doing it. You'll be fine. Just pretend you're back at Babylon, getting paid to shake your ass."

He rolled his eyes. "I already told you, I've changed, it's not the same thing."

"You're right. This is far less demeaning. Besides, you love the attention," I replied, pinching his cheek and walking towards the door.

He sighed heavily. "Fine. But you'll owe me--"

"A million blowjobs?" I asked.

"Yeah," he replied, smiling.

When we arrived to the photo shoot room, the camera men were already setting up, and the backgrounds were in place. I preferred to do outdoor shoots on location, but Madison Surf was run by a bunch of cheap old men, so we'd done what we could. All in all, I didn't think your average person would be able to tell the difference.

"Is this him?" the photography manager asked me.

"Justin Taylor, meet the man behind the photos, Mr. Scheid," I said, nodding at him.

"Hi," Justin said, sticking his hand out to shake Scheid's hand, but of course the asshole turned away and went back to his camera. Justin glanced at me nervously.

"He's anti-social, but he knows how to use a camera," I explained.

Justin grinned nervously and nodded.

"Get him ready," Scheid said, motioning for one of his assistants.

"You'll be fine," I told Justin, and took a seat behind the cameras. I normally didn't interfere with photo shoots unless I thought there would be a problem, but I couldn't just abandon Justin to the sharks. Besides, this was going to be hot.

Justin followed the young photography assistant to the dressing room to change. I hoped they had something in blue. He looked good in blue.

"Hey, Bri," Ted said, walking over to me.

I glanced at him and frowned. "Shouldn't you be at your desk, Theodore? And it's *Mr. Kinney*."

"Sure, Bri," he replied. "But I didn't want to miss Justin's big premier."

I rolled my eyes and sighed. It was a good thing Theodore was so good at what he did, because otherwise I wouldn't have put up with him.

"Is he nervous?" Ted asked.

"A little," I replied. "He'll be fine, though."

"And you're not jealous?" he asked, giving me a suspicious look.

"Why the fuck would I be jealous?" I asked. "Jealousy is for lesbians."

Ted laughed. "That's just like you. Your incredibly hot boyfriend is about to be leered at not only by everyone in this room, but people across the country, and you're not even the slightest bit bothered."

I shook my head and him. "Theodore, unlike you, I don't restrict Justin or myself to a boring, pseudo-hetero monogamous lifestyle. So why the fuck should I care if he's seen in some little swim trunks?"

Ted shrugged. "I'll never understand it," he replied. "After ten years of being apart, you'd think you'd be sick of tricking, and appreciate what you've got."

I glanced away, tongue in cheek. Well. So maybe I hadn't been tricking as often in the past few months. And so what if I'd only done it when Justin was there to share the trick with? He was hotter than anyone I could pick up at Babylon. It wasn't being anything near monogamous. It was just having good *taste*. Fucking around didn't mean anything. And if I wanted to, I could go do that. Just because I hadn't fucked anyone but him unless he was with me fucking them, too, didn't mean anything.

"Oh, there's the other models," Ted said.

Three men walked into the room, each one more muscular and hot than the last. All three of them were dark skinned. One was Hispanic, one was black, and one that might have been Italian. All three of them were gorgeous, and couldn't have been a day over 25.

"What the fuck is this?" I asked, glancing at each one's ass as they went into the changing rooms.

"Well, they're for the gay shots," Ted clarified. "You said you wanted to do some normal ones, with just the main model, and some more erotic ones, for the gay ads."

Had I said that? When did I say that? I didn't remember saying that. "Oh," I mumbled. "Why are they all so..."

"So hot?" Ted laughed and shrugged. "They wanted guys that could compliment how pale and petit Justin is. So we got them."

Tongue in cheek, I watched as the lights were turned on and Justin came out of the dressing room. "Oh." He was wearing blue swim trunks that hugged his ass perfectly. God, I wanted to take them off of him with my teeth.

"Alright, take your places," the photo director said loudly.

Justin walked onto the set and stood there nervously. "Uh, what exactly should I do?"

Scheid waved an arm at him. "Relax! Don't just stand there! Try to look hot!"

Even from the back of the room I could see Justin blushing. He took a deep breath and slowly relaxed, and the cameras started to flash.

"Okay, now put your leg out... that's right, just like that," Scheid said. He continued to direct Justin as they took more photos. Justin standing in place, hands on his hips; Justin holding a surf board; Justin sitting with his legs spread and that *look* on his face that he always gave *me* when he wanted me to fuck him *particularly* hard.

Speaking of hard... I glanced down at my pants and shifted, trying to hide the large bulge that was already there. Damn. I glanced around the room at everyone else. They were staring, some of them were leering, but they were being professional. Of course they were, they worked for me. And this was no big deal. So he looked hot, so what? I didn't care.

"Okay, now for round two," Scheid said. "Get the oil."

"Oil?" Justin asked, as one of the female assistants approached him with a bottle in her hands.

"These are going in the adult magazines, so we need you to look slick," Scheid explained, sounding exasperated. "Just let her put it on you."

"Oh, um, okay," Justin mumbled, as the girl began rubbing the oil all over him.

My cock twitched in my pants. Fuck. I was glad it was a girl rubbing that shiny shit on his body. If it had been a guy –

Wait. If it had been a guy it would have been *hotter*. Of course. Just hotter.

"Okay," the girl said. "He's covered." She stepped out of the way of the cameras just in time for the other three models to come on set. Each of them was wearing red swim trunks. They didn't look nearly as good in them as Justin did.

"Alright, boys, strike a pose," Scheid said, sounding bored. "At least *try* to look sexy."

I stared as the three men approached Justin. At first he looked nervous, then he relaxed again, and they posed around him.

At first they just stood together. Then they were told to stand closer. That was okay. That was fine. It was hot. Justin's body was all shiny and covered in that oil that they'd rubbed on him, and his nipples were hard, and his hair was in his face, and he was looking at the camera with *that look* again.

I was going to have to get copies of these for myself.

Then one of the men put a hand on Justin's shoulder.

I felt my entire back tense. Why the fuck was I tensing? I didn't care. I don't care. It's just a fucking photo shoot. I'd seen Justin *fuck* other guys, it didn't matter to me.

And I kept telling myself that, as all three men crowded around Justin, putting their hands on him, pressing against him, giving him looks that were far too good to be faked. They wanted him. Who wouldn't? Not that I cared. I didn't care.

"What's with the amateur hour? I want to see something more interesting," Scheid called out.

Then one of the men put his hand on Justin's ass.

I jerked out of my seat and stood there, watching as another one tugged the swim shorts down just a little off Justin's hip. He stared at the camera with a knowing look. And... fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Was he getting *hard*?! Those shorts didn't leave much to the imagination. There was definitely a *bulge* in the front of them. He was getting *hard*.

Wait. Why was I standing? Why was I freaking out? It didn't matter. It *didn't* matter. Why should I care? I didn't care. I didn't.

Then I looked around the room.

Everyone – *everyone* – was staring. The room had gone silent as Justin posed with the other men, every time getting closer, every time exposing a little more skin. My gaze finally landed on Theodore.



Theodore, who was staring, open-mouthed at Justin. Theodore, who if I wasn't mistaken, had a bulge of his own. What the FUCK.

FUCK. THIS.

"I think that's enough," I said, walking quickly to Scheid.

He stared at me. "Mr. Kinney, we've only done the first set. We have to do this with at least two other types of suits."

I forced myself to relax, to breathe, to not freak out. Why the fuck *would* I freak out? I didn't *care*. Why should I care? I was just tired is all. I just wanted to send Justin home so I could get back to work.

Then I realized that everyone in the room was staring at *me*. Fuck.

"Fine," I replied. Every cell in my body screamed out for me to grab Justin and pull him away. I ignored it. It was an unfamiliar, fucked up feeling, and clearly I just needed to go jerk off and have some coffee and I'd be fine. I glanced at Justin, ignoring the way my cock twitched and something inside me roared to rip those bastards' filthy hands off of MY Sunshine.

My? Mine?

Fuck. Maybe I was coming down with something.

"I'll be in my office," I said to Justin.

He smiled and nodded.

Fuck.

I walked out of the room, stopping near the door to give Ted a threatening look.

He tore his gaze from Justin to me, and then swallowed hard and went back to his office. Fucking asshole.

I made it to my office and sat down to work. I had phone calls to make. I had important clients to see. I had to go to the art department and make sure they weren't fucking up the boards for the presentations I had to give.

But all I could see was *those hands* on *his* body.

Maybe I really was getting sick. That was the only explanation. It was some kind of flu. Some kind of weird flu that makes your whole body tense, and your chest ache, and makes you want to punch those *bastards* in the face for touching *MY* Sunshine.

Fuck.

**"Telling the future by looking at the past assumes that conditions remain constant. This is like driving a car by looking in the rearview mirror." --Herb Brody**

## **Chapter 4**

Ok, so I would be lying if I said it wasn't hot. That having those hot guys hands all over my greased up body didn't make my dick instantly hard. I'm a man. And a gay man at that. So cut me some slack.

And I'd also be lying if I said I didn't feel hot. I've been told my entire life, by everyone, that I was hot. By Brian, tricks, friends. Everyone. But this was different. I was hot enough to be a model? No way. But, maybe I was. I'm not getting a big head about it. I'm just surprised. And flattered. And it made me feel hot.

The hot lights, the hot clothes, the hot men, all made me feel more confident than I had in a long time.

Coming home from New York, as much as I needed and wanted to do it, was one of the hardest thing I had ever done. To admit to myself, Brian and everyone else around me that I had failed. I know what they would all say. It wasn't failure. In all honesty I had become the big fat fucking success they all thought I would become. Had my own gallery. Made money off my art. Made a name for myself there. And no one begrudged me when I came home. It's like they all understood. But it didn't make it less of a failure in my eyes.

The shoot took longer than expected. Scheid needed this one particular shot for "Heat" magazine, which was a 1 million dollar spread, to be perfect. And the perfect shot? One model behind me, his arms wrapped around my chest and the other at my feet arms wrapped around my leg. I was looking down at him, my blonde hair in my face with a look of utter lust. It's not like I was acting. This was hot. They guys were hot and like I said, I felt hot.

So when I finally cleaned all the fucking oil off my body and got dressed it was past 4. Daphne had left a frantic message on my voicemail saying she was so sorry but she had an emergency at work and wouldn't be able to meet up with me to give my birthday present. When I went to Brian's office to let him know my plans with Daphne had fallen through I found he was gone.

"Ted?" I asked as I walked into his office.

He flushed slightly and cleared his throat. What was up with him?

"Yea, hey Justin."

"Where's Brian?"

"Oh he left like an hour ago. Said he had some things to take care of." Ted continued to work on his computer and not look at me. Why was he being so fucking weird?

"Oh. Did he tell you to tell me anything?" I frowned slightly. Why didn't he wait for me?

Ted shakes his head. "Nope. Just said he had things to do."

I stand there for what seems like forever, tracing my fingers over the edge of Ted's desk. I shouldn't be surprised. I mean, he's Brian. Of course he had things to do. He was CEO of Kinnetik and the owner of Babylon. His day never really ended. But...it was my birthday.

But Brian Kinney doesn't do birthdays. I knew this. And I had accepted it. I had expected to come home around 6, make dinner myself like I always did, watch TV with Gus and then have him fuck me into the mattress until I passed out. Just like any other day. It was just another day. I was only 33. But I thought he would at least want to celebrate my big photo shoot. My big modeling debut. But he had things to do. Which was fine. I'm fine. It's fine.

I leave Ted's office in a fog. I am in such a fog in fact I don't even notice Raul, one of the models coming right at me. We bump right into each other and he laughs as I almost fall to the ground.

"Hey! In your own world much?" He asks.

"Oh sorry, just thinking." I smile at him. Damn he was hot.

"Hey all of us are headed over to that Japanese Steak house for dinner. You wanna come?"

I shake my head. "No, its ok thanks."

"Oh, come on. I heard a rumor it's your birthday." He beams this smile at me. Did I mention how fucking hot he was?

"It is. That's true." I smile at him.

"Then come on! We'll celebrate you're big debut." He raises an eye brow at me waiting for an answer.

Well it's not like Brian expected me home anytime soon. He knew I was meeting Daphne. And I'm sure if he got hungry he could order something. If he was home at all. And Gus was fine by himself. It was my birthday anyways. My day. And Brian would never want me to pass up 3 hot guys.

I agree to dinner and he gives me a seductive look as we exit Kinnetik. God he was hot.

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It was past 9 by the time I pulled my car into the driveway. I was humming as I entered the house and I found Gus standing in the foyer, arms folded and a smile spread from ear to ear.

"You are SO in trouble." He tells me.

"What? " I ask as I hang my jacket up.

He points toward the kitchen. I walk slowly giving him a weird look. I see Brian, dressed in his hottest most expensive suit he owned. What the hell....

"Brian? What's going on? Gus said..."

"WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN???" He screams glass of beer in hand.

Oh fuck. He's been drinking.

"Huh?" I ask. I'm not really sure what is going on right now.

"I asked you WHERE the FUCK were you?? How fucking long does it take to get a present from Daphne?? The shoot was over at 4! It's almost 9:30!!!" He's pacing now.

"Well Daphne called and said she had an emergency at work and couldn't meet me. So I went to dinner with the guys from the shoot." I smirk. "And I got a present after all."

Oh shit.

That did it.

His eyes widen and he clenches his hand around the glass so tight his knuckles get white.

"You went to dinner with the models? Well I hope you fucking enjoyed yourself while I was here waiting." He says through gritted teeth.

"Waiting for what?" I am seriously confused right now.

"You could have fucking called you know!" He's back to pacing now.

"Huh? Brian....since when...."

"Since when?" He interrupts. "Since when? Since I've been waiting here since 5 o'clock for you to come home. Since I got dressed in the suit YOU love the most on me. Since I made sure your suit was pressed and ready. And since IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY AND I WAS GOING TO TAKE YOU TO DINNER AT MARIO'S!!!" The vein in his neck is straining. Fuck.

Mario's was one of the most elite restaurants this side of West Virginia. They are always booked and you either need to know someone important or fuck someone important to even get a.....

"Do you know WHAT I had to DO to get this reservation!!!??? I've had it for WEEKS!!"

Yup. That's what I thought.

Oh shit. Oh fuck.

"Brian, how the hell was I supposed to know you wanted to take me to dinner? I got done with the shoot and you were GONE!"

He is out of breath and he slams the glass down on the counter and leaves the kitchen. What. The. Fuck.

I follow him into the dining room and find him leaning against one of the chairs. I spot Gus leaning against the wall, watching with a smirk on his face.

Then I see them. Perfectly arranged in a huge oversized vase in the middle of the table.

Sunflowers.

I laugh. Please don't ask me why I laughed. Because I honestly couldn't tell you why. "What the fuck are those?" I ask.

He whirls around. "THEY WERE FOR YOU!!"

Gus snorts and he shoots him a look of death. His eyes widen and he books it up the stairs.

I can't move. I can't breath. Brian bought me flowers. FLOWERS. BRIAN.

"You bought me flowers? Why?"

"Are you fucking kidding me? NOW you don't WANT flowers??" Oh he is pissed.

"No, I mean..." This wasn't going well.

"Well just forget it. Forget dinner. Forget the flowers. Forget the night I had planned. I really hope you had fun sunshine. I hope he was an AWESOME fuck."

Is he fucking serious?

"Brian, this is nuts. I mean I'm sorry I was late. I'm sorry I didn't call..."

"Sorry's bullshit." He interrupts.

I sigh. "Brian....This is totally out of character for you. I mean your acting really weird. You just walked out of the shoot today. You left work and didn't even tell me you were leaving. And now you're freaking out because I was magically supposed to know you had this whole night planned."

"It's your FUCKING birthday Justin! Why the FUCK wouldn't I do something for it!?"

"Because!" I throw my arms in the air. "Because it's not what you do! Brian Kinney doesn't celebrate birthdays. So how was I supposed to know you wanted me home? You should have just told me! You wouldn't have had to tell me your plans or anything. You could have just said, 'come home so I can fuck you senseless' and I would have never gone."

"Doesn't matter now. You had your fun for your birthday." He starts to undo his tie and walk away from me.

What the hell?

"Brian, what is with you? I mean you're the LAST person I would think would want me to pass up on 3 hot guys. And you were acting totally weird today during the shoot. If I did something to make you mad...."

"Mad? WHY THE FUCK WOULD I BE MAD??" He screams.

"I don't know! But that's they way you are acting! Your acting totally fucked right now and I have no idea why! Just tell me what the fuck is the matter! Why the hell your so...."

"CAUSEIDON'TWANTANYONETOUCHINGYOU!!!!!"



..."angry."

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*Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn't learn a little, at least we didn't get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn't die; so, let us all be thankful. – Buddha*

## **Chapter 5**

Everything happened so fast.

I remember standing there, having just blurted it out, and Justin was staring at me, and there was a long silence, and I didn't know how to explain what I'd just said to him since I couldn't explain it to myself.

Then the phone rang.

We ignored it. We stood there, staring at each other, me in my fucking suit and him looking freshly fucked, and those fucking flowers on the table, and I was just starting to decide what I was going to say to him, when Gus walked in the room.

He was pale. "It's Uncle Ben," he said.

That was all he had to say. I took the phone from him, and Michael was on the other end, and he was crying.

"He's in the hospital," Michael managed to say.

"I'm leaving now," I replied.

I didn't have to explain anything to Justin, the look on his face meant he already knew. I went upstairs and changed quickly, and we drove to the hospital. Gus insisted on coming. I didn't have the energy to argue. It took a half an hour to get to the hospital. It should have taken at least forty-five minutes. No one complained about my speeding.

When we got there, Michael was sitting in the hall, outside Ben's room. All I could do was hug him. Michael was pale and his eyes were red and when I held him he trembled. But all I could do was hug him. I couldn't fix it.

"Is there any word?" I asked.

He shook his head. "He just passed out," he said. "First he had a fever, and then he just... passed out. There hasn't been a change..." His voice was strained as he tried not to sob.

"Should we call anyone?" Justin asked softly from behind me.

Michael shook his head and buried his face in my shoulder. "I already called Hunter. He'll be here tomorrow night."

Debbie would have been here. Debbie would have been here first thing, and held Mikey's hand, and made sure that he wasn't alone.

But Debbie was gone. Debbie was dead.

"What about the girls?" Justin asked.

Michael lifted his head and stared at Justin over my shoulder. "I haven't yet..."

"I'll call them," Justin said.

"Fuck," Michael whispered, burying his face in my shoulder. "He was fine just this morning."

I hugged him tighter. He didn't need this. *Fuck*, but he didn't need this. I wanted to tell him everything would be okay. I wanted to promise him Ben would be fine. I couldn't. He might not be.

"I'll stay with you," I said.

Michael sniffled and I realized distantly that he was probably getting snot all over my shirt. I didn't care. "No, you have to work-"

"Fuck work," I replied. "I'm staying." I pulled away from him enough to glance over my shoulder at Justin.

He just nodded.

"But... your birthday," Michael mumbled, forcing a grin.

Fuck. That's right. It was still Justin's birthday. I wondered what I should do.

But Justin quickly stepped over and put a hand on Michael's shoulder. "It's fine." He looked at me. "I'll take Gus home soon. But..."

I nodded. We needed to talk. I released Michael and glanced at Gus, who came over and hugged him instead. At times like this, Michael needed to be held.

And fuck, what about Gus? Ben was "Uncle Ben" to him, and "Dad" to Gus' sister. Gus was probably freaking out, too.

I followed Justin down the hall and around the corner to get some privacy. I ran a hand through my hair and wished not for the first time that you could smoke in hospitals. "Justin-" I started to say.

He held his hands up. "Don't. This is more important. Ben is family, and he's *in there* and he..." He winced and shook his head. "You need to stay. Michael needs you."

There he went again, reminding me what a fucking strong, incredible, selfless person he was. I felt like an asshole. "About earlier," I started to say.

"It's okay," he replied. "We'll talk about it later."

I nodded and put a hand on the back of his neck and pulled him into a kiss. I hoped that it could show him how I felt. How fucking scary it was that Ben was in there, and might be dying, and how fucking scary it was to see Michael like this, and how I'd been too close to death too many times in my fucking life.

I think he understood, because he put his arms around me and when the kiss broke, he told me he loved me.

"You too," I said. I couldn't do more than that. If I said it, I'd break. I had to keep the walls up, keep strong, for Mikey.

Justin understood. He always did. He smiled and kissed me again. Then we all sat down outside Ben's room. Justin was on one side of me, holding my hand, and Michael on the other, his head on my shoulder. Doctors kept entering and leaving Ben's room, but they didn't tell us anything useful.

It was pneumonia, they said. Fucking pneumonia. It was moving fast, and he was hooked up to machines just so he could breathe. He was unconscious, and showing no sign of waking up. Weren't the drugs supposed to keep him from catching shit like pneumonia? I could hear Ben himself explaining it to Hunter. "The drugs don't always work like they're supposed to."

At 1 AM, when there was still no change, Justin took Gus home. I hugged Gus, and kissed Justin, and they left.

Then I sat with Mikey, while the doctors went in and out of Ben's room, all night long, waiting for a change.

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At 7 AM I called Cynthia to let her know I wouldn't be coming to work. She started to give me crap about missing meetings, until I told her why. Then she said she'd take care of it. I really should give her another raise.

Ted and Emmet showed up a little while after that. Cynthia had told Theodore, and he'd told Emmet, and here they were.

"Why didn't you call us, sweetie?" Emmet asked, hugging Michael.

"Sorry, I didn't... I just..." Michael tried to say.

Ted put a hand on Michael's back and gave me a worried look. "It's fine, Michael. We're here, now."

"They don't know if he's going to make it," Michael choked out, trying not to cry. I didn't know how he was managing. If it had been Justin –

Fuck. Justin.

Michael was occupied by Emmet and Theodore, so I stepped away and called Justin on my cel phone. He answered immediately.

"Is there any change?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Nothing."

"Fuck," he said softly.

"Do you have time to bring me a change of clothes?" I asked.

"You're not coming home?" He sounded upset. I winced.

"It's either stay, or leave him in Emmet's capable hands," I replied. Fuck. That was supposed to be funny. Only it didn't sound it.

"You have to rest," he said softly.

"I'll rest when Mikey can rest," I replied. "He needs me."

There was a pause before Justin responded. "You're a good friend."

"He's a better one," I replied.

"I'll be there in a couple of hours. Do you need anything else?" he asked.

I sighed. "Just to see you."

I could tell that he was grinning just a little after that. "I miss you, too."

I hung up and returned to Michael's side, and listened as he told Ted and Emmet everything he knew, which wasn't much.

"Do you need anything?" Emmet asked.

Michael shook his head.

"I'll go to the diner, get some lemon bars," Emmet said. "Those always help in a crisis."

"Why don't you go to my place and catch a nap?" Ted asked Michael.

Mikey just shook his head.

Ted shrugged at me. "I'll cover for you," he said.

I nodded. "Call me if anything comes up."

"If you want to go to my place to take a nap, or get a shower, or anything, Michael has a key," he said.

"Thanks, Theodore, but I'll be staying here," I said.

"I know," he replied. "But I have to offer."

Ted and Emmet left, and Michael called the munchers. I sat and listened as he finally spoke to JR himself, and reassured her that dad was going to be okay, and not to cry anymore.

I hated that shit. Lying to kids like that is bullshit. What if Ben died? How would he explain that to a little girl? Then I realized that he wasn't saying it for her. He was saying it for himself. So I kept my mouth shut.

The rest of the day was broken up by visitors. After Michael cried for an hour, Emmet brought lemon bars and meatloaf. After Michael held my hand so tightly it hurt, Justin brought me a change of clothes. After Michael drank another cup of coffee just to stay awake, Blake came by with Ted and brought us dinner. After Michael told me that he and Ben had been planning a vacation to the country next week, and I heard the pain in his voice, knowing that it wouldn't happen now, and might not ever, Lindsay and Melanie

called again, to check in. Every heart-wrenching, painful fucking moment blurred into the other, until the only way I could tell time was passing was by our visitors.

When Lindsay asked what I was going to do if Ben didn't wake up tonight, or tomorrow, or the next day, I told her I'd do what Mikey did. If Mikey wanted to stay and sit here, I'd sit with him. She gave me some crap about needing rest and what about Kinnetik and Justin, and I reminded her that a long time ago, he'd sat with me. Then she shut up.

At 10 Mikey fell asleep, his head in my lap. I tried to stay awake, but I must have passed out, because a nurse woke us up four hours later.

"He's not out of the woods yet, but he's awake," she said. I called everyone and let them know, while they moved Ben to a new room in a less critical ward.

Ben wasn't allowed visitors yet, besides Michael and Hunter, who arrived shortly after Ben was in his new room.

After a teary reunion, complete with medical masks to keep Ben from catching anything else, Michael hugged me and told me to go home to Justin and get some sleep. I promised him I'd be back the next day. Ben may have been awake, but his fight was just starting if he was going to survive.

When I got home, Gus was already in bed. Justin had told him the good news when I'd called, and he'd collapsed almost immediately. The poor kid had barely slept since the night before. I knew the feeling.

Justin helped me undress, and I kissed him, slow and deep. I wanted to fuck him. I wanted to kiss him, and suck him, and be inside him, and feel *alive*, but I was too fucking tired. I fell asleep the moment my head hit the pillow.

"The present contains nothing more than the past, and what is found in the effect was already the cause."--Henri Bergson

## Chapter 6

It had been 6 days. 6 days since Ben had been admitted into the hospital. 6 days since my 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday. 6 days since I had spent more than 5 hours with Brian. And those 5 hours were spent sleeping next to him in our bed. He was next to me, warm and inviting. But I had never felt more alone.

I spent those 6 days taking Gus to and from school. Painting and going to classes. Doing homework in between laundry and making dinner. Helping Gus with his homework and putting the dishes in the dishwasher before heading to bed myself. Alone.

Brian had been spending all of his time when he wasn't at Kinnetik, with Michael at the hospital. I understood. I really did. Michael was his best friend. His link to his past. In a lot of ways, Michael was more important to Brian than me. I had been to the hospital a few times. I hugged Michael and sat with Brian and held his hand. Made him eat because

I knew he hadn't in days. And it was always the same. Ben was out of his coma, but his fever was still 103 and he couldn't breathe without a respirator. They weren't sure he was going to make it. This might be it.

Michael cried all the time. Every time I had been there in those 6 days he was crying. And Brian was hugging him. I felt invisible. As selfish and twat-like as that sounds I did. I felt like how I used to feel 15 years ago. It was the Brian and Mikey show. And I was an outsider. I know it sounds ridiculous. In my head I'm screaming, "How could you be so insensitive? Ben is DYING! Michael is YOUR friend!" But in my heart all I can feel is this unsettling ache. I couldn't quite put my finger on it. But leave it to a kid to make me realize.

"I know what you're thinking." Gus said to me tonight at dinner as I poked at my salmon. I looked up at him with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh?"

He finished chewing and nodded. "Uh, Huh. You think he's gonna fuck him again."

I nearly choked to death on my rice and I had to take a large gulp of my wine before I could answer.

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

He gave me a weird look.

"Dad. You think he's going to fuck Uncle Mikey again." He told me matter of factly.

"No, I don't." I sipped my wine. I had a funny feeling I was going to drink the whole bottle tonight.

Gus laughed. "Listen, I may be 15 but I'm not stupid. I know you. Better than you think I do. And I also know my Dad."

I looked at him, pushed my plate away and folded my hands on the table.

"Fine, Dr. Gus. Tell me your diagnosis."

He smirked. "You think because Dad is spending all this time with Uncle Mikey because of Uncle Ben they are going to fuck again. Because the LAST time they did was when Grandma died. You think the pain brings them together." He popped bread into his mouth and chewed with a smug look on his face.

That little shit.

He was right.

I got up quickly and started to clear the table.

"I don't know what you are talking about." I said quietly.

"Of course not. But just...do me a favor, ok?"

I looked at him from across the counter as I loaded the dishwasher.

"Don't do that thing you do where you hide your feelings so you guys don't fight. If you're mad, tell him. If you're jealous tell him. Don't bury it and then have it come out 2 years from now and have it end up being a fight about everything and nothing all at once." His eyes were pleading and I realized in that moment how much Gus needed me and Brian. How I had no idea what he had gone through at Mel and Lind's but now, the pieces were starting to make the puzzle whole.

"Ok." Is all I answered.

~~~

To say I was in utter shock when Brian came in the door at 8:30 that night would be an understatement. It was a whole 5 hours earlier than he normally comes home. Usually he's quiet as he comes into the bedroom at 1am, taking off his clothes in the dark and slowly and gently getting into to bed so he doesn't wake me. No need, Brian. I'm always awake. He touches my back and kisses me in between my shoulder blades on those nights. I stay still. I'm not sure what hurts worse. Him touching me or not touching me.

But tonight he came in and immediately went for the bottle of beam in his office. Gus looked at me, knowing tonight isn't a good night to be his normal sarcastic and witty self and headed upstairs. I stood in the doorway of his office and lean against the doorframe.

"Nice to see you too." I mumbled.

He turned to me, swallowing a shot and I'm not sure what I saw more of in his eyes. Guilt? Anger? Hurt? Resentment? They all flooded his face and I winced at the emotions.

"Did you want something?" he asked.

"Yeah. I think we should talk."

He sighed loudly. "Not tonight, Justin. I'm not in the mood."

"Brian, we need to talk about this. We haven't spoken one word about what you said...."

"Did you fucking hear what I said!? I. Don't. Want. To. Talk. About. It. NOW." He abandoned the glass and started drinking right from the bottle.

"How's Ben?" I asked.

He tensed. "No change."

I nodded and slowly walked to him. He tensed more. It made me sick to my stomach. I stopped.

"You don't even want me near you now?" My voice shook.

He wouldn't even look at me.

"I want you to know something. And I don't care if you don't want to hear it right now. I need to tell you." My voice was soft. I wanted to touch him. I wanted to hold him. But I didn't dare. We were teetering on the edge.

I continued. "I didn't have sex with that model the night of my birthday. We didn't fuck. He sucked me off in the bathroom. That's it."

I saw his knuckles go white around his bottle of beer. His breathing got heavier.

"Why the fuck would you think I'd give a flying fuck about that?" His voice cracked.

"You know why."

He snorted. "Well I don't. You can do whatever you want Justin. We aren't monogamous. I never said we were and I'm not going to say we are. Because we aren't."

"But you said...." You wanted to scream. He said he didn't want anyone else touching you. He said it. He stood right in front of you and FINALLY said the words you had wanted him to say for 15 years. That he was jealous. That he wanted to be the only one I was with. I always knew it. But he had finally said it.

"I was drunk." He walked to the large window and stared out into the darkness.



And that is when I lost it. That is when everything I had been keeping inside for 15 fucking years poured out of me, through tears and words.

"Were you drunk when you fucked Michael?" I demanded.

He whirled around. "What the fuck did you just say to me?"

"I asked if you were DRUNK when you FUCKED Michael?" I was in his face now, shaking.

This is what Gus was talking about. I had no idea what we were fighting about. Nothing. And everything all at once.

He didn't answer me, he just glared.

"Did you take his pain away Brian? Did you make him forget?" I felt sick to my stomach and I was shaking so bad my voice was quivering.

"You wanna know if I'm fucking him?" His voice was monotone. He actually looked calm for a minute.

"Well it would make sense since you haven't touched me in a week. Since you're never home." I was being mean. I was being unreasonable. I know this. But at that moment, I didn't care.

He grabbed me by my shoulders and shoved me against the wall. He was inches from my face. I could feel his breathe on my lips and he was looking at me with the one emotion I fear the most. Disgust. I'd seen this look only one other time before. 13 years ago. On one fateful night where he told me through kisses and gropes and a throw to the floor that he knew. He knew the truth.

He brought his lips into his mouth and I waited. I waited for the explosion.

But it doesn't come. When he finally spoke his voice was calm and he put his hand on the side of my face.

"I'm not the one who *cheats*, Sunshine. YOU are."

\*\*\*

*Speak when you are angry – and you will make the best speech you'll ever regret. – Laurence J Peter*

## **Chapter 7**

"I'm not the one who cheats, Sunshine. YOU are."

I shouldn't have said it. If I didn't want to fight, if I wanted to fix things, I shouldn't have said it. I should have told him I was sorry I wasn't home a lot, that I missed him, that I thought about him constantly, and that I was only with Michael because...

Because Michael had sat with me, fifteen years ago. He'd held my hand, and cleaned the blood off my face, and made me eat and sleep, and took care of me. He was there the entire time Justin was in that coma, sitting with me.

But Justin didn't know that. He didn't know I'd been there at all. That was the way I wanted it. So I didn't say that.

Instead, I called him on it.

How the fuck dare he accuse me of *cheating* on him?!

I'd *never* lied to him.

Well. Maybe I had. I told him I didn't care, that I didn't love, plenty of times. Those were lies.

But I'd never lied to him about something like *this*. I'd never *cheated*. I always did what I said. I'd never given him a single fucking reason to not trust me.

So it stung. It felt like he'd stabbed me in the gut when he said it.

*"Did you take his pain away Brian? Did you make him forget?"*

It stung. It burned. I felt myself start to tremble with anger.

"What did you say to me?" Justin asked. His expression was hard, his voice was cold.

Fuck.

"I said, I'm not the one that *cheats*," I spat at him.

He jerked away from me, walking across the room, a hand in his hair. I just stood there, staring at him, waiting for his reply.

"If you're referring to Ethan," he started to say.

I tensed all over at the name.

"That was over a *decade* ago," he said, his voice rising. "I was a KID."

"And you *cheated*," I replied. "I *never* have."

"No, you just *fuck around*. You fuck *anything* that *moves*!" he shouted.

What the FUCK did he just say?! Those were words I'd heard from people before. But never, ever, ever from him.

Fucking *asshole*.

"What about *you*?! *You're* the one getting head on his birthday when *I'm waiting here*!" I shouted.

"Then why did you wait?!" he shouted back.

"FUCK IF I KNOW," I yelled.

"What do you want from me?!" he yelled.

"To stop being a jealous little brat!" I shouted back. His jaw dropped, but I didn't let him continue. "To stop accusing me of *bullshit* like *cheating* on you! I've *never* done that! Besides, as *you* so kindly reminded me, we're allowed to fuck who we want! So what if I *did* want to fuck Michael?! I could, and you can't say SHIT."

"THEN DO IT!" he yelled. I could see him trembling from across the room. "DO IT!"

"What the FUCK is your problem?!" I crossed the room in strides and got in his face, still yelling. "Michael is my BEST FRIEND."

He snorted, giving me a challenging look. "Don't I KNOW it! EVERYONE does. Michael's your BEST friend. Michael's the one you GREW UP with. Michael's the one you LOVE."

"WHAT?!" I gaped at him.

"Just admit it! He's more important to you than I could ever be!"

I wanted to punch him. I'd only ever wanted to punch him once before. But I didn't. I wouldn't do that. I would never do that. Although, right now, I wasn't sure he knew that. I suddenly wondered if he knew me at all.

"That's BULLSHIT," I yelled.

"IS IT?! You spend every waking moment with him! You hold his hand, you hug him, you... you KISS him!"

"Ben could be DYING!"

"So?! That doesn't mean you have to stick your tongue down Michael's THROAT!"

"FUCK. YOU." I fisted my hands and my arms trembled. "You KNOW that isn't true!"

"Do I?! How the fuck am I supposed to know?! Like you said, we're NOT monogamous! You can fuck WHO you want, WHEN you want, Michael included, right?!"

"NO! I wouldn't DO that, to HIM, or to BEN, or to YOU!"

"And why the fuck should I believe you?!"

I couldn't help it. I was so fucking angry. I was so fucking hurt. The one person who was supposed to know me, and understand me, and really GET who I was, had just spat out every shitty thing I'd thought about myself.

That I was a fuck up. That I couldn't be relied on. That all I cared about was cock.

"BECAUSE I DON'T CHEAT. I DON'T LIE. I DON'T FUCK AROUND BEHIND YOUR BACK. BECAUSE I'M NOT THE ONE WHO'S A *SLUT*!"

He gaped at me.

We both went silent.

My heart raced.

Fuck.

We stood there for a full ten minutes, staring at each other warily, bodies tensed, hearts racing. Finally, he relaxed.

I actually thought he might just laugh, like he always did when we had a big fight, and say something like "Brian, this is stupid, what the fuck are we fighting about?" and I'd laugh and say "Fuck if I know" and then we'd go to bed and I'd touch him, and kiss him, and it would be okay.

Then he turned, and walked out of the room. I stood there, watching as he walked up the stairs. I stood there, listening as he walked around upstairs. I stood there, watching, as he walked down the stairs with a suitcase fifteen minutes later.

I didn't move from the spot as he walked to the front door, put on his shoes, grabbed his keys and walked out the door.

What was he doing?

I couldn't comprehend it.

Why did he need a suitcase?

Then I realized.

Oh. Fuck.

He was leaving.

I jerked forward and ran to the door, flinging it open.

But the car was already halfway down the driveway.

He was gone.

Everything was heavy. It was like gravity had been turned up, and I suddenly found it difficult to move.

He was gone.

I shut the door and stared at it, feeling the reality of it sinking into me.

He was gone.

I turned around slowly, and stared into the empty house, wondering what I was supposed to do now.

He was gone.

"Dad?"

I turned my head and looked up the stairs to where the voice was coming from.

Oh, fuck. Gus.

He stood there, looking much younger than his fifteen years, arms folded across his chest, a scared expression on his face.

I opened my mouth to say something, to explain, to reassure him.

He'll be back, I wanted to say.

He just needs to cool off, I wanted to say.

Don't worry, he queens out like this all the time, I wanted to say.

But I couldn't. Because I knew the truth. This was it. I'd finally said too much. I'd finally pushed too hard. I knew this day would come. I'd wanted to not believe it. I'd tried to convince myself it wouldn't. But deep down, I knew.

"He left, didn't he?" Gus asked softly.

I could only nod. My head was heavy. I wanted to sit down. I wanted to lay in bed, and hold Justin, and put my hands in his hair.

But he was gone.

Gus gave me the angriest, most hurt look I'd ever seen on his face, and ran upstairs.

I didn't move until the sound of his door slamming jarred me out of it.

Somehow I made it to my office and retrieved a few bottles of Beam. I put on a record.... Pink Floyd was still in the player. I sat on the floor, leaning against the wall, instead of my chair. My chair was too plush, too soft, too comfortable, for times like this.

And I drank.

*"It's weird...you know the end of something great is coming, but you want to hold on, just for one more second...just so it can hurt a little more." –Anonymous*

## **Chapter 8**

*I'm not the one who's a SLUT.*

And with that, I was gone.

I got in my car, the car he bought me, and left. Packed my suitcase, and left.

I left.

Our home.

Gus.

Him.

I left.

And I felt like I was going to die.

Yes, I said some things I shouldn't have. But that is what I do. We all know this. Everyone says things about the 'Brian Kinney operating manual'. Well guess what? Justin Taylor has one too. And Brian Kinney owns the fucking copyright.

So he should know. He should know me. I queen out. I yell. Get jealous. Sometimes even throw things. But I have NEVER EVER said anything to him like he did to me tonight.

*Cheated.*

*Jealous little brat.*

*Fuck you.*

*SLUT.*

And so I drove. But to where? I couldn't go to the loft. He'd know I was there. I doubt he would even come after me, but I just couldn't be around him right now. Not in our home. And not in our old home. I couldn't go to Debbie's. Those times had long passed. Deb was gone. Michael's? Out of the question. Ted and Blake's? Too weird. Emmett's? I honestly didn't even know where the fuck he lived. So I drove into Pittsburgh, on the outskirts of town and knocked on the door of the only other person I loved with all my heart. Who had been there for me no matter what. Who....would understand.

Jared opened the door and stared at me with wide eyes.

"Justin, man, are you alright?" His eyes were half shut. Fuck I had woken him up.

"Jared, I'm so sorry. But...I..."

"No, stop, come on in. I'll get her."

I stepped into the apartment and dropped my suitcase by the door. I was shaking.

"Justin, what the hell?" Daphne comes out of the bedroom, dressed in robe, hair messed up. Oh god, I hope they weren't fucking.

Ew.

"I'm sorry Daph, I just...."

"Shut up." She wraps her arms around me and hugs me tight. "Come on. Sit down. I'll get you a beer." I hear her whisper something to Jared and the sound of bottles clanging together. Jared walks past, smiles at me and disappears into the bedroom.

Daphne sits down hard next to me and shoves a beer at me.

"So? What did he do this time?" She takes a long gulp of her own beer and looks at me. I have to smile. God, she was awesome. She knew my bullshit. She knew why I did things. She knew me before Brian. She was my best friend....

Fuck.

Well, it's different. I didn't stick my tongue down her throat.

Ok, so maybe once but it was a long time ago...

Fuck.

"Hello, earth to Justin. What the fuck, Dude. What's wrong with you? It's fucking ten o'clock at night. You show up at my door step with a fucking suit case.....what the hell happened? Is it Ben?" She looked overly concerned. She looked...scared.

Fuck. I knew the feeling.

"No, Ben's fine. Well, no he's not fine, but...No. It's not Ben."

"Then what, Jus?"

I look at her, my eyes pleading with her to read my mind so I wouldn't have to tell her. To repeat what he had said.



Her expression didn't change. She could wait all night. Patient little bitch that she was.

Or maybe she was just the greatest friend ever.

I rip the label off my bottle of beer. I fidget when I'm upset. She grabs my hand. She knows that too.

I sigh loudly.

"He called me a slut."

She crinkles her brow and opens her mouth to say something but no words come out. For once I think I have left Daphne Chander's, well now Daphne Saunder's, speechless.

"So you like, left?" She finally asks.

I nod. She takes a large sip of her beer. I do the same.

"But..." She can't even find the words. That makes two of us.

"But why did he call you that? I mean...I'm confused."

"We were arguing. I was complaining he hadn't been home. He was always with Michael..."

"So you're jealous?" I glare at her.

"Well? Aren't you??" She almost smiles.

"Yes ok? I'm jealous. And I feel like a horrible person for it! I mean Ben is DYING and all I can seem to think about is Brian NOT being home and WITH Michael all the time...and them...god..."

"Fucking?"

I wince. "Yea."

She nods.

"Anyway...so we said some pretty nasty shit to each other. I accused him of cheating-"

"You're such an asshole." She cuts me off and rolls her eyes.

"Fuck you!" I shove her and she laughs.

It takes me a while and I finally continue.

"Then it was just a lot of yelling and him telling me I was the cheater and then he called me a slut. And then I left."

"You know people say things they don't mean when they are angry, Justin."

I shake my head. "That was like a slap in the face Daph. I mean, ME a SLUT?"

She looks at me with a cocked eye brow. I hate when she does that. She must have learned that from Brian. I know that had hung out over the 10 years I was in New York. Traitor.

"What?"

"Justin, you kinda DID cheat on him. And lie. And sneak around behind his back."

"That was over fucking 10 years ago. I was 19 fucking years old!!!"

"And? You think that matters in the world of Brian Kinney? Please. I'm not even fucking him and I know THAT much. He was always honest."

"I know, I know ok? I know I fucked up with the whole Ethan thing, but fuck I thought we were past all that you know?"

"Well you're the one accusing him of cheating on you. With Michael of all people."

"But calling me a slut? Daph, that's harsh, even for him."

She shrugs. "Maybe so. Listen, I'm not sticking up for him. You're my best friend. I'm on your side. He had NO right to say that shit to you."

"I'm not a slut." I tell her quietly. But who I am really trying to convince? Her or me?

"Are you leaving? Him, I mean." She asks me.

"I...I don't know. I'm not sure if I can forgive him for that. That was...not something I can just forget."

She pats my leg and stands up. "You can stay here as long as you want. Jared won't care. He's cool like that." She walks over to the closet and takes out a blanket and pillow and throws it to me.

"The couch pulls out." She scratches the back of her head and looks at me with a soft expression.

"I've known you a long time Justin. What, 20 years now? But I've also known Brian a long time too. You say you're not sure you can forgive him. But, what about all the times he's forgiven you?" And with that she disappears into the bedroom.

I lie down and let the night's events wrap around me like his arms normally do.

Harsh words.

Suitcases packed.

Leaving Brian. And Gus.

Fuck Gus. What the fuck had I done?

Who knows what my leaving had done to him. I shake my head to try and throw the thoughts of my head. I couldn't think about him right now. I....FUCK.

I bury my face into the pillow. A pillow without his scent on it. I try to sleep without his body next to mine. But I can't.

*But what about all the times he's forgiven you?*

God, why did Daphne have to be so fucking profound?

\*\*\*

"Every father should remember that one day his son will follow his example instead of his advice." – Anonymous

## Chapter 9

Joey's dad had been giving me rides home all week, since da... since Justin left, and today was no different. I would go to their house for dinner. Joey and me would play some video games, or read some comics. Then when it got late, Joey's dad would take me home, to Britin.

Britin. What a stupid name.

Justin was the one who'd named it that. He was the one who named it that, and then *left*. And what do you know? He'd just done it again.

I'd known about their history before. I knew that dad acted like a jerk, and Justin left, and then they'd do it again. Only that was a long time ago, when I was really little. And the last time he left, he didn't come back for *ten years*.

How long was it going to take him this time?

When I got home, I dumped my bag and shoes in front of the door, just like dad hates, just like I did every day. It was a small revenge, but it was all I could do right now. Then, just like every day, I went to his office, to see if he was home.

He was.

It was sort of ironic that once Justin left, dad had started spending *more* time at home.

As far as I could tell, he went to work, because he had to, and then he'd go see Uncle Mikey and Uncle Ben. Then he'd come home in the evening, and go in his office. He'd put on a shitty old record, usually Pink Floyd, and drink.

"Dad?" I asked, walking into the office.

*Some* office. The entire room smelled like booze, and pot, and cigarettes. There were empty bottles on the floor. The sandwich I'd tried to give him the night before was still on its plate, uneaten, and getting hard and gross.

"Dad!"

His eyes moved to look at me, but the rest of him stayed still. He was leaning against the wall, sitting on the floor, holding a half-empty bottle.

I was really getting sick of this. I was getting sick of the smell, the stress, the fear, and fucking Pink Floyd.

"Dad, how's Uncle Ben?" I asked.

He shook his head.

No change, huh? I had to not think about that right now. I couldn't deal with it. I'd talked to JR on the phone a few hours ago, and as her big brother it was my responsibility to sound cheerful, and reassure her that Uncle Ben was going to be okay. So I had to believe it. I had to.

"Did you eat anything today?" I sat down next to him and leaned against the wall, too.

He didn't reply.

Every day he got a little bit worse. Every day he said less. Yesterday he told me that Uncle Mikey had told him to say hi to me. That's all he'd said, but it was something. The day before, he'd told me to fuck off when I tried to give him dinner, and told me about how Uncle Ben had been looking a little bit better. The day before that, he'd even asked me how school was.

Every day he got a little bit worse.

I'd hoped Justin would come back before he stopped speaking entirely. I'd hoped he'd get over the stupid shit my dad said, and realize he *belongs* here, and that dad *needs* him.

But he hadn't.

"Dad, you have to eat," I said.

He didn't reply.

"Damnit, you can't starve yourself!" I kneeled next to him, glaring in his face. "Just because he left, doesn't mean you can just STOP!"

He turned his head and looked at me, and I swallowed my tears.

Dad was losing it.

I'd seen him bad, before. I'd seen him on those anniversaries, growing up, that I didn't understand until this year. I'd seen him when he wouldn't let anyone else near him, so drunk he was drooling on himself, and ranting about shit I didn't understand. I'd seen him so depressed he wouldn't eat anything but bags of pretzels and liquor. I'd seen him puking up the pretzels and liquor hours later.

But those times had only lasted a day. The next day he'd clean himself up, and he'd be okay, and he'd apologize to me in that gruff way he has of doing it.

It had been four days now, and the light in his eyes was fading.

He looked sort of like a zombie.

Normally, I'd laugh about something like that. But right now, it sort of creeped me out. My arms got all goosebumpy and I felt a shudder go down my spine.

"Dad-" I started to say, but my cel phone rang. I pulled it out of my pocket. It was mom.

"Hey," I said.

"Gus," she said, sounding relieved. "How are you doing, sweetie?"

"Alright," I said.

"And how's your father, and Justin?" she asked.

No one had told her Justin had left. I don't think Uncle Mikey knew. I don't think anyone knew, except me and dad and Justin, and whoever he was staying with.

I wanted to tell her. The little kid inside me wanted to burst into tears and say 'Mom, Justin left, and dad won't talk or eat and I think he might die, I think he might really die this time, mom.'

If I told her that, she'd freak out. She'd call dad and yell. She'd tell *everyone* and then they'd be on his case. And then she'd take me away from him.

"They're fine," I replied, trying to sound bored.

"We just spoke to Michael. He said they're giving Ben another physical. So make sure your father has his phone on. If... if they find any changes, they'll call him."

"Sure, mom," I said. I had to keep it brief. I had to keep it short. I wasn't as good at bottling my feelings up inside as dad was. I was my mom's son, too, and she was the one that was around the most. I'd inherited all of her drama and over-emotional crap. I had to keep a lid on it.



"Good night," she said. "We love you."

"You, too," I said, shutting my phone.

Fuck.

"That was mom," I said.

Dad just looked away.

"She said they're giving Uncle Ben another physical, checking if he's getting better. They'll call if he is."

He didn't say anything. He didn't move.

"Fuck!" I grabbed his face in both my hands and glared into it. "Snap out of it! You can't DO this! You can't fucking... DO this to me!"

Fuck. My eyes were stinging. I was going to cry. I couldn't cry. It would just freak him out. I knew dad. If I showed how fucking scared I was, or how hurt I was, he'd send me away. And then he'd lock himself up here, and...

And I didn't like thinking about that.

I took a deep breath and blinked hard, willing the tears away.

"You have to eat," I said.

He opened his mouth like he was going to reply, when his cel phone rang.

I grabbed it off the desk and yanked it open. "Hello?"

"Gus?" Michael asked.

"Uncle Mikey, is... what..." I couldn't even form a sentence. That was fast. That was too fast. Mom had *just* talked to him. It had to be bad news. FUCK.

"He's going to be okay," Michael said.

I felt dizzy, and this time, I did cry.

"His fever is down. They're... they're putting him back on his meds. He's going to be okay." Michael was crying, too.

I laughed, crying at the same time, and handed the phone to my father, who looked terrified. He obviously thought the worst had happened.

"Uncle Ben's okay," I said.

He grabbed the phone from me, moving faster than I'd seen him move in days.

"Michael?" he said, his voice strained.

I couldn't hear Uncle Mikey's end of the conversation, but dad's told me everything I needed to hear.

"That... that's good," he said. "Fuck. I... tell Ben..." he shook his head helplessly. "Tell him it's about time."

I heard Michael on the other end, laughing faintly.

"We'll be there tomorrow," he said.

After he hung up, he turned to me and stared at me, as if he was only just realizing I was there.

"Uncle Ben is going to be okay," I said, smiling.

"He has to stay in the hospital another week, to make sure he's stable. But he's going to be okay," dad said.

I felt light. I felt euphoric. Uncle Ben was going to be okay. Fuck, I'd been so scared.

"And this means you can all Justin, right?" I asked eagerly. "You can call him and tell him Uncle Ben is okay, and to come home!"

Dad's face got this guilty, strained look and he shook his head. "I'm sure someone else will tell him."

"What?!" I stood up, trembling. He wasn't going to call him. "FUCK you, dad! What's your problem?! You can call him! You can ask him to come home!"

"I can't," he said, his voice strained.

"YES you CAN! You just won't because of your STUPID pride! All you have to do is call him and tell him you're SORRY!" I couldn't believe it. Dad was such an IDIOT. He HAD to call him! He *had* to!

"It has nothing to do with that," he said, avoiding my eyes.

"Then what does it have to do with?! Why the fuck won't you just call him and apologize and... and ask him to come home?!" Fuck. My voice was getting shaky. But I was so fucking scared. I couldn't DO this much longer. I couldn't FIX this.

"If he wanted to be here, he'd be here," is all he said.

"He does want to! He LOVES you!" I shouted. I wanted to punch him. I wanted to yell and punch him and make him REACT, make him act like he felt SOMETHING.

"Sometimes that's not enough," he said calmly.

"You're such an asshole!" I yelled.

He just smirked. "So I've heard."

That was it. That was all I could handle. I grabbed my phone and ran, out of the office, up the stairs, and to my room. I slammed to door and threw myself on the bed and cried. Fuck, I felt like such a girl. I felt like such a weak, pathetic loser, but I couldn't help it. I was fucking terrified. If Justin didn't come back soon... dad would...

I sat up and dialed Justin's number.

Only he didn't answer. Of course not.

As soon as the beep sounded, I went off.

"You're such an ASSHOLE. You haven't called, you haven't checked on us at all! Do you know how bad off dad is?! Do you have any idea how he feels?! I HATE YOU." I paused for a long moment, trying to catch my breath. "Uncle Ben's going to be okay. You should go see him, at least. That is, if you give a shit about ANYONE but yourself!"

I hung up and threw my phone across the room, but it wasn't enough. I was so fucking angry that it pulsed through my veins, making my head throb. I felt hot all over. I thought about the way Justin had promised, fucking *promised* not to leave again. I thought about how dad was slowly fucking *dying* inside. I thought about how *both* of them had said the *stupidest* things, and forgotten about me. Neither of them gave a shit about what happened to me. Justin *left*. He was supposed to be my *dad*. He let me *call* him that, so he was supposed to *act* like one. Instead, he LEFT. He LEFT, just like dad always did. The minute something went wrong, dad sunk in on himself, and Justin runs away, and I'm left. Alone. And I couldn't call mom, and I couldn't tell anyone, because then something *worse* would happen.

It was all I could take.

I fisted my hand and pulled back, punching the wall as hard as I could.

The wall gave way, and my fist went through.

I breathed, hard and deep, feeling the anger slowly seep out of me.

Then I pulled my hand out, went to the bathroom, cleaned myself up, and went downstairs to make dad a sandwich.

He had to eat.

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**"Secrets are made to be found out in time. -Charles Sanford**

## **Chapter 10**

*You're such an ASSHOLE. You haven't called, you haven't checked on us at all! Do you know how bad off dad is?! Do you have any idea how he feels?! I HATE YOU. Uncle Ben's going to be okay. You should go see him, at least. That is, if you give a shit about ANYONE but yourself!*

I shut my cell phone and lean against the red bricks of the Education building. I let out my breath that I had been holding since I saw that Gus had called and retrieved my voicemails.

He hates me.

I don't blame him.

And Brian was bad off? Well, that makes two of us. I could barely get myself up in the morning to go to school. I spent most of my nights in front of Daphne's TV, doing homework, eating junk food and watching reality shows. What had my life come to?

I guess that is what it's like to be without Brian.

I fucking hated it.

God, I know I was wrong. I know I shouldn't have left. I promised Brian. Time after time. I won't leave. I promise. I'm staying this time.

Leave it to me to break a promise.

But that's what I do, right? I always do this. No wonder Brian was so scared when I first came back. He expected me to go again.

And I did.

I am an asshole. Gus is right. I don't deserve Brian. I don't deserve Gus. This family I always wanted and I finally got, I destroyed.

I left.

I broke my promise.

And now it was too late. How do I fix this? Brian won't take me back now. Why should he?

But god he hurt me. Every horrible thing I ever felt about myself he unleashed.

That I was the cheater.

That I was a slut.

No matter what anyone says, I'm not sure I can ever forget those things.

But Ben was going to be ok. And right now, in the greater scheme of things, that's all that really mattered. So after class I decided to go to the hospital. I hadn't been there all week and as much as I was afraid of running into Brian or having everyone ask me a million and one questions, I needed to see Ben. He was my friend. Michael was my friend.

And I was a schmuck.

The first person I saw when I arrived at the hospital was Ted. His eyes got wide with concern and he rushed to me.

"Justin! Jesus...are you ok?" He asked, frantic.

"Yea, Ted. I'm fine." My voice was low and unconvincing.

"Brian's been... really..." He must really be bad off. The look on Ted's face wasn't good.

"Is he...ok?" I asked softly. I couldn't even look at Ted.

"You know Bri. He puts on a good game face. But, I know, we all know, he's a mess."

I nodded.

"What happened, Justin?"

I finally looked at him, trying to blink back tears.

"I can't..." I could barely get any words out.

"Never mind. You don't have to tell me." Ted's voice was sincere. I nodded.

"Is he awake?" I looked down the hall to where Ben's room is. I saw Michael outside talking to Hunter.

"He's resting right now. They're sending him home the day after tomorrow."

"That's great." I whispered. Why was I whispering?

"Justin, you look like shit. Did you eat today?" Ted put a hand on my shoulder.

"No, I uh...I was at school all morning."

"Why don't you grab something? At least some coffee." I nodded and headed down the hallway toward the vending machines.

God, I felt like shit. Not just physically but mentally and emotionally too. Fuck. Me and my stupid pride. Why the fuck couldn't I just keep my fucking mouth shut? Why do I need to unload every fucking feeling or thought in my head onto Brian? Maybe Brian had the right idea. Hide your feelings, bury your emotions and no one gets hurt. Nothing is said that could possibly damage another. Maybe I was the crazy one.

As I was hitting the button for the coffee I wanted, light no sugar, I heard a strange man's voice behind me.

"Justin Taylor? Is that you?"

I turned slowly to see a male nurse standing behind me. He must have been around Brian's age.

"Oh my god, it is you!" His eyes were wide and he was smiling from ear to ear.

"I'm sorry, but do I know you?" I asked nicely. Maybe I was just tired. Maybe I fucked him. Maybe Brian and I both fucked him. Damned if I knew.

"I'm Miguel. I was your nurse on duty, like, wow, 15 years ago. When you had your....accident."

"My accident?" What the hell was he....OH. Accident. 15 years ago. FUCK.

The bashing.

"Oh, hi. I'm sorry. It's been so long. And a lot of that I don't really remember." I shook his hand and smiled. He seemed really nice.

"No, it's ok. It was a long time ago. So, wow. You look great. You know, I always wondered what had happened to you. How you made out. Did you ever draw again?" He fumbled with his clipboard.

"Actually, yes. I spent 10 years in New York painting. I even had my own gallery for a while." I smiled at him. It was the first time I'd smiled in a week.

"Wow, Justin. That is so great! I'm really happy things worked out." He touched my arm and I caught a faint glimpse of brown hair bobbing down the hallway by Ben's room.

I gasped and my heart stopped.

Brian.

Fuck.

Miguel turned his head to see where my attention had been drawn to and smiled brightly.

"He's a looker. You're very lucky."

"Huh?" I asked, being broken out of my daze.

"Brian, right? That's his name? You're lucky. Can't believe you guys are still together after all these years."

"I'm not sure I'm following you." I shook my head at him. He cocked his head to the side.

"You and Brian." He smiled again. "I've never seen anyone like him before. The way he sat here every night that you were here. Sometimes till 6 in the morning, just to make sure you woke up. That's love."

What was he talking about?

"Miguel, I'm not really sure you know what you're talking about. Brian...wasn't here. The first night maybe, when they brought me in. But after that, no. I think you have him confused with someone else. Or me."

He laughed. "He never told you did he? That shit." He looked down the hall. I followed his gaze and Brian's eyes meet mine. He winced when he sees who I am talking to.

"I...." I couldn't even find the words. He was here. Every night. After all those times I asked why he didn't come. He lied. Time after time.

*Why didn't you come and see me?*

*What for?*

*Considering I was in a coma for two weeks, in rehab for a month, trying to relearn how to throw a fucking wiffleball. You should have at least called to see if I were still alive.*

*I'm sure I would have heard if you weren't. Besides, I'm not your occupational therapist, I'm not your trauma specialist, I'm not even your god damn mother sitting there holding your hand. I mean, there's nothing I could have done for you.*

I felt like I had the wind knocked out of me. 14 fucking years I thought he didn't come see me. 14 fucking years I lived with that. How could Brian claim to love me as much as he did, take care of me, miss so much when I left him for Ethan, want to fucking marry me, when he couldn't even come and visit me ONCE when I was lying in the hospital.



I had thought that all these years. It's something I had lived with. Something that ate at me. Something I put into the back of my head because Brian showed me he loved me in other ways. In so many other ways.

But I never forgot.

One more thing I will never forget.

FUCK.

Miguel reached out and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Justin, are you ok? I'm sorry if I upset you. I didn't mean...."

I put up my hand. "No, it's ok. I just haven't really eaten today. I'm just a little light headed. I think..." My eyes fell on Brian again and I felt as though my heart might burst. My chest was so tight, I could hardly breathe.

"...I'm just gonna go..." Home? What home? What the fuck home do I have? All I have are lies. What the fuck is true anymore?

"I have to go." I ran down the hallway, right past Ted. Right past Michael who reached out to grab me but I was too fast. And right past Brian who looked like he hasn't slept in days. Our shoulders bumped and I almost hit the wall.

"Justin..." His voice was soft but firm. I just kept going. I just kept running.

I climbed into my car, tears streaming down my face. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. But I could feel. I felt everything all at once.

But one feeling took over more than the others.

I started to punch my steering wheel, the horn blaring with each strike.

I hit it over and over until my knuckles were bleeding.

I don't care.

I kept hitting it until the white leather on the steering wheel turns as red as my hands. I brought my bloodied hands to my face and cry.

All I could do now is cry.

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*You have a choice. Live or die. Every breath is a choice. Every minute is a choice. To be or not to be. – Chuck Palahniuk*

## **Chapter 11**

Silence greeted me when I entered the house. I could tell immediately that Gus wasn't home, although it was already past midnight. For a second I was worried, and then I remembered that it was Friday, and he was at Joey's for the night. I put down my keys and wallet, slipped off my shoes, tossed my jacket aside, and went to my office.

I didn't make any food. I wasn't hungry. Cynthia had tried to make me eat before I left Kinnetik today, but I lied and told her I would at the hospital. Michael tried to make me eat at the hospital, but I lied and said I already had at work. I didn't want to eat. I wasn't hungry. Lasagna wasn't going to make me feel better. I wasn't Italian, like Mikey. I was Irish.

I poured myself a large glass of Beam, put on a record, and sat down in my usual spot on the floor. Every day since... things changed, Gus made me dinner. At first I'd tried to eat a little, but eventually I stopped. Today was the first day there wasn't a sandwich waiting for me. I guess he'd given up.

It was about time I gave up, too.

Ben was fine. He was exhausted, and weak, and shaken, but he was going to be okay. He'd leave the hospital in a few days, a week at most, and he'd be fine. This meant that Michael was also fine. He was also exhausted and weak and shaken, but he was fine. Ben was coming home. He didn't need me to sit there and hold his hand anymore, or tell him everything was going to be okay.

Which was good, because I was too tired to do it anymore.

When I'd seen Justin at the hospital, I thought I might actually be able to fix things. I thought now that Ben was okay, we could work things out. Then I saw him speaking to that nurse, and I knew. This was bad.

I didn't remember his name, but that nurse had been there almost the entire time Justin was in the hospital. He'd talked to me. Brought me coffee. He knew who I was. He knew who Justin was. And he knew that I'd been there.

Somehow I'd forgotten that Justin didn't know. It was so fucking long ago. But when he ran past me, and we bumped shoulders, I felt it.

He knew.

And he was never, ever coming back now.

I wanted to be angry. I wanted to be pissed about the things he'd said when we'd fought, but I'd already forgotten what they were. I wanted to be angry that he'd left again, even after promising so many fucking times that he wouldn't, but I couldn't. He had every right to go. It was for the best, just like I always knew it was.

At least I'd had a few months before it happened.

But this time, there wouldn't be another ten years apart before he returned. I couldn't do it again. I couldn't move on, because I hadn't been able to move on since the first night I brought him home. I couldn't wait anymore, because I knew that this was it. He wasn't coming back.

I was just working myself down into a nice, deep depression, when the phone rang.

Justin.

"Hey," I said. If he'd called the day before, I might have felt a rush at seeing his name on my caller ID. But this was today, and today I knew that it was really over. So there was no hope. There was no rush.

"Why the fuck didn't you tell me?"

He'd been crying. He was angry, furious, seething. His throat was raw, and his voice was hoarse. "I didn't want to," was all I could say.

"You *lied*. All this time, I thought the one thing I could count on from you was the truth. I've been waiting since the day I woke up from that coma to know where the FUCK you were, why the FUCK you weren't there! And how the fuck could you say you LOVED me, if you didn't care enough to fucking visit me in the hospital when I could have DIED?!"

I shut my eyes and frowned. "Are you hurt?" I asked.

"What?" he asked, clearly taken aback.

"You're hurt," I said. It was obvious, from the way he was talking. He was in pain, and not just fucking emotionally.

"I'm fine!" he shouted. "Fucking listen to me!"

I shut my mouth and nodded, even though he couldn't see it. Until now, our fights had always been heated, exhausting, passionate. But I didn't feel any of that this time. This time I just couldn't bring myself to feel it. I'd felt more in the past week than I had in years. I wasn't used to it. I was shut down. I was comfortably fucking numb. And that was okay. Because Justin wasn't coming back.

"If you had *told* me... if you have fucking TOLD ME that you'd been there, I *never* would have left! I wouldn't have left you for Ethan, I wouldn't have gone to LA, I wouldn't have gone to ml:namespace prefix = st1 />New York, I-"

"That's why," I said.

"FUCK YOU, BRIAN," he yelled again, sounding like he was on the verge of tears. "Do you have ANY IDEA how much it's fucking HURT?! How much it's KILLED me to know that you didn't GIVE A FUCK? To know that you were NEVER there?! And now I find out you WERE?! You let me feel that for YEARS."

"Now you know," I said. I couldn't think of anything else to say. I'm sorry? That wasn't going to cut it. Sorry's bullshit. I couldn't explain to him that his own mother had known, and hadn't told him, and clearly didn't want me to. She didn't need to get this from him. He needed her. Besides, it was my decision.

"Is that it?! Is that all you have to say?!" he asked, practically sobbing.

"I guess so," I replied.

I heard him make this noise that he always makes, when he's really, really upset. Then there was a click, and he was gone. He'd hung up.

I shut my phone and set it aside, and thought. I poured myself another glass and drank it down quickly, the burn soothing.

I'd become just like my parents in the end.

I'd hurt, lied to, and driven away the one person that really gave a fuck, that really loved me. I'd turned to fucking drinking myself into oblivion because, just like my folks, I was too weak to deal with the reality of my own fucking stupid decisions. And then, icing on

the cake, I'd hurt Gus.

Gus was practically an adult at fifteen, and the formative years were long past. He was his own man now, whether his mothers liked it or not. He was smarter and more responsible than anyone else his age, and even if he still made stupid, teenage fuckups, they weren't huge. Hell, he was already more mature and fucking up less than me *now*.

He didn't need me anymore. All I was doing was hurting him.

I poured another glass and drank it, and then another.

He was better off with his mothers after all. Finally, my first chance to be a full-time dad, and I fucked it up. Good job, Brian.

Michael was fine. He was better off with Ben. I'd performed my best friend duty, and I wouldn't be needed anymore.

Justin would be fine. All I was doing was hurting him. He didn't need me. He was better off in New York, before he'd come back and let me fuck up his life all over again.

And here I was, completely drunk, completely fucked up, and wallowing in self pity.

Brian Fucking Kinney doesn't do self pity. Brian Fucking Kinney doesn't do love. Brian Fucking Kinney doesn't live past thirty.

What a fucking joke.

Maybe I should have tied the scarf a little tighter that time. If only I'd started a few minutes sooner, Michael would have been too late.

Maybe I really should have gone to Ibiza instead of getting my ball removed.

Then none of this would have happened. Then I wouldn't be an old, pathetic, self-pitying, drunken loser.

Did I really want to continue doing this shit to myself? Did I really want to stick around to fuck up Gus' life more? To FEEL this way more? To live to a ripe old age and not only deal with disease and the gradual decomposition of my fucking body and mind, but also to do it alone? Without Justin?

No. I didn't want that at all.

But I was too drunk, too fucking exhausted to think about it anymore. So I got up and locked the door to my office, so that Gus couldn't come in and see me passed out drunk again when he got home. He didn't need that shit. Then I lay down on the blankets that Gus had brought me, and opened another bottle of Beam.

In the back of my mind, I knew that drinking so much and having barely eaten for days was probably a bad idea. But I really didn't care anymore. If I died from alcohol poisoning, I wouldn't really mind. It would save me the trouble later, of having to make decisions about that sort of thing myself.

So I drank the last bottle, and passed out on the floor.

***"To regret something is to hang yourself with your own noose." –Anonymous***

## **Chapter 12**

*"You need to get here NOW. He won't open the door! The door is LOCKED and he's NOT ANSWERING ME! This is all YOUR FAULT!!! NOW! COME NOW!!!"*

Gus' frantic and terrified voice rang in my ears as I did 90 down the turnpike towards the house. All my anger, my pain, my resentment toward Brian that I had felt over the past week was gone. Pure fear consumed me then. I had to get to him. The only thing I could wrap my brain around was "I have to get to Brian. I have to get to Brian."

This was all my fault. Gus was right. If he died...if he had...it would be on my head. Forever. I wouldn't be able to live with that. I couldn't live with that. If he died....I'd die too.

I shouldn't have yelled at him like that. I knew how Brian worked. I knew WHY he didn't tell me. But it didn't take the pain away. But that is what I do. I yell and scream and cry and then it's over. He fucks me into bliss and holds me afterwards and it's over.

That's what I should have done. I should have gone home last night, yelled and screamed and then jumped into his arms and have him fuck me against the wall of his office. Or his desk. Or the fridge. Or on the stairs. Anywhere. Anyhow.

But that isn't what I did. And now look what happened.

Oh god. Oh god. If he's dead. If he....

I promise I'll make it better. I promise I'll come back home. Just please please please....

I screeched into the driveway and before I could even get out of my car I saw Gus waving his arms and I heard him screaming at the top of his lungs from the front door.

"What the fuck TOOK YOU SO LONG!!!" His face was red, he was sweating and he had been crying. Oh god. Gus. Jesus, please please please let him Brian be ok. Don't do this to Gus. Please please please....

I barreled past him into the house and straight to his office door. Locked.

I pounded on the door. "BRIAN! BRIAN!"

"It won't work! I've tried that! Don't you think I'VE TRIED THAT!!!!!!?" Gus can't even breathe.

Ok, Ok, think Justin. You can do this.

OH!!!

"Gus listen to me. Go up to the bedroom and go into the top drawer of the long dresser, okay? Look under all the socks. There is going to be a long, old key in there. Get it and bring it to me." He was up the stairs before I could even get all the words out.

Thank god for old houses. They always had a skeleton key.

I put my hand and ear to the door. Silence. Complete silence.

"Brian...please..." I whispered against the door.

"Here!" Gus shoved the key in my face as he ran back to me. I blinked.

"JUSTIN FUCK HERE!!!!!!!!!" He shoved the key into my hand.

Ok Taylor. Get a grip. You can do this.

I put the key into the lock and at first it wouldn't work. I'm cursing under my breath as I worked it into the lock carefully.

"Why isn't it working!?" Gus screamed.

"Gus you need to calm down, okay?"

He shut up right away. He was ringing his hands and tears were streaming down his face.

I finally got the lock open with a loud click and I don't think I had ever felt so relieved in my life. Not that I wouldn't have broken down the door. I think in that state of panic, my adrenaline would have taken over and I probably could have pushed a fucking car over.

As soon as the door opened the stench of vomit and liquor filled my nose.

"DAD!!!" Gus rushed towards Brian's motionless body on the floor.

"Gus NO!" I grabbed him and pulled him back. I kneeled down next to Brian. He was pale and I'm not sure if he was breathing.

"DO SOMETHING!!!!" Gus was screaming in my ear but its like I was under water. I couldn't do anything but stare at Brian's face. No please please. I promise I'll make this better. Just please god, don't let this be it....

I put my ear to his chest. I heard a faint slow heartbeat.

"Gus go get me some water." I barked at him and slapped Brian's face a few times.

"Brian. Wake up. Come on Brian! FUCK JUST WAKE UP!"

Nothing.

No movement.

No nothing.

"YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE! YOU ARE NOT DOING THIS TO US YOU UNDERSTAND! YOU'RE NOT FUCKING DYING ON ME!" I pulled him up to my body and his head rolled back.

"Here." Gus looked like he was ready to throw up. I took the bottle of water and poured it over Brian's face. I smacked him a few more times.

"BRIAN!!!!!!!!!!!!!" I screamed into his face.

All of a sudden he burst into a fit of coughs and spit water out all over himself and me.

I immediately burst into tears.

Gus was right behind me.

I hugged him close to my body and rocked him back and forth. He was awake but barely coherent.

"Justin..." His voice was raw and I could barely even make out that he was saying my name.

"Gus do me a favor and go turn on our shower." He ran as fast as he could out of the room and I heard him stomp up the stairs.

"Brian, Brian. Open your eyes." He moaned and slowly opened his eyes and I brushed his hair out of his face.

"Justin, I-I-I'm sorry." He could barely get any words out.

"Shhhh...No. Don't talk, okay? We need to get you cleaned up." I stood up and gently lifted him up. All his weight was on me, and here was what I was saying about the adrenaline rush. Brian is obviously bigger than me, but right then I was the one supporting his weight as he walked up the stairs.

When we got to the bathroom, the shower had been started, 2 towels were laid out and Gus was sitting on our bed, trying to breathe. I laid Brian down next to him on the bed.

"Sonnyboy..." Brian reached a hand out to his son. Gus lied down next to him and hugged him tightly. I watched with tears in my eyes as Gus sobbed into his father's chest. Brian could barely keep his eyes open but he reached his hand up and placed it on Gus's head.

"Gus, can you do me one more favor?" He sniffled and sat up nodding.

"Can you please go make some soup for your Dad?" He got up slowly and as he passed me, I touched his shoulder. He looked up at me, dazed.

"Gus, I'm so sorry." He stared straight into my eyes.

"Don't ever fucking leave again." And with that he was out the bedroom door.

I watched him leave and let out a huge sigh. He was just like his father. He couldn't say he forgave me. He couldn't say much of anything but what he does say comes out with venom and it hits you right in the gut.

I undressed Brian and myself and got us into the shower. I washed his body and hair gently and slowly, letting the warm water wash over him. I know he must have been aching from lying on the floor all night. I wanted to be angry and scream at him for being so god damn stupid. But right then, none of that mattered. He was alive.

I dried him, and put him in a loose pair of sweatpants and a worn white t-shirt and helped him downstairs. His bowl of soup was waiting on the kitchen table and Gus was putting the dirty pot in the dishwasher. Gus knew Brian and I needed time together and he gave me a gentle smile as he exited the kitchen. I wondered to myself how one kid could be so amazing.

I made Brian eat. At first I had to force feed him but finally he took the spoon from me and started to feed himself. I watched him. I just memorized every inch of his face. It was like I was seeing it for the first time.

He looked up at me, eyes red and blood shot, face scruffy with stubble, hair wet and tussled. We kept each other's gaze for a long time.

"You could have killed yourself." It wasn't a question. It was a fact.

"Well, that's not the worst thing that could happen."

I winced and he reached across the table and took my hand.

"Justin...I'm just so sorry...."

"Shut up. Just...shut up." He closed his mouth and looked down at the table. He rubbed his thumb over mine.

"If you ever, and I mean ever say anything like what you said to me again, I will kick your fucking ass. That is what I am going to start doing. Instead of yelling and queening out I'm just going to start punching you in the face."

He let out a short laugh. "That seems fair."

"And don't you ever fucking lie to me again." He frowned and looked away. I put my hand to the side of his face and forced him to look at me.

"Ever again." He nodded. He tugged on my hand, pulling me closer to him across the table. I knew what he wanted.

I stood up and sat gently in his lap on the chair. He wrapped his arms around me and pressed his nose into my hair. I stroked his head and made soothing noises as his body relaxed under me.

"Don't you ever do this again. You cant fucking leave me. Or Gus. We need you. Do you understand?"

"Yea...." His voice was muffled in my hair.

I knew we had so much to work through. This wouldn't just fall back into place. Gus was destroyed and that alone was going to take a lot of work to repair. On both our parts. I had to regain Gus's trust again. And Brian, who was Gus's hero, was no longer the adult in that relationship.

And Brian and I had to rebuild the trust we had between each other as well. My trust in him that he would never lie to me. And his trust in me that I wouldn't leave again.

But right then none of that mattered. He was alive. I was back home. And all we wanted to do in that moment was hold each other.

\*\*\*



*"Life is like a rainbow. You need both the sun and the rain to make its colors appear." - Anonymous*

### **Chapter 13**

It had started raining around 2 AM last night, and hadn't stopped yet. I remembered, because I was still up at 2 AM. Both of us were.

We'd talked a little. There would need to be more talking soon, but last night there was only so much we could say with words. I'm a lot better at expressing myself with my body, anyway.

It seemed like it had been forever since I'd tasted him, or kissed him, or fucked him. I made sure to make up for the lost time last night. We'd barely made it to the bedroom before we were all over each other, and we didn't separate until almost 5 AM. At that point, we both passed out. I don't know where I got the energy.

When I woke up at noon, he was already in his studio with his headphones on, painting a large canvas. The colors he was using were cool, lots of blues and grays, but they weren't sad. I've gotten good at reading his art. The painting meant he was in a good place, and I decided to leave him to it, at least for a while.

I went downstairs and made myself a protein shake, and threw a banana and some yogurt in for good measure. Usually I'd have the mostly flavorless smoothie and be fine with it, but I had a feeling my body could use the nutrition. Then I went outside onto the back deck, and settled into a chair and watched the rain.

The rain here wasn't like the rain in ml:namespace prefix = st1 />Pittsburgh, where it turned everything gray and filthy and dead. The rain here was soothing. The rain here was warm, and smelled incredible, and made all of the already green landscape brighten.

Fuck, living with Justin was really rubbing off on me. I sounded like such a fag.

I lit a cigarette and sat there, staring out at the rain and the green and enjoying the coolness in the air, when Gus settled into the chair next to me.

"You should really quit smoking," he said, staring at me.

I glanced at him and arched an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"You've already had cancer, why would you want it again?" He frowned at me.

Fuck the DARE program.

"Don't worry sonnyboy, I've got the best health insurance money can buy."

He sighed and rolled his eyes. He was giving up far too easily. That meant he was after something. Shit.

"I have some questions," Gus said, and he pulled his chair closer to mine, giving me a serious look.

Oh, hell.

"And I suppose you want me to supply you with answers," I said, stubbing my cigarette out.

He nodded. "I want the truth. No bullshit. No pretending. No trying to hide your feelings."

"When do I ever try to hide-"

"Dad," he said in a tone that was annoyingly like Michael's when I was frustrating him.

"Alright, alright," I said, folding my hands in my lap. "Shoot."

"I wanna know about you and Justin," he said.

I arched an eyebrow at him and said nothing. What the fuck was the kid after?

"You owe me," he said. His look said it all. He wasn't going to forgive and forget. Good for him. He shouldn't. I'd been a failure of a father and a complete asshole. He should be angry. This just wasn't how I expected him to deal with it.

I just shrugged. "What about us?"

"How did you meet? You said he was there when I was born, but that's all you told me." Gus scooted a little closer and now we were facing each other, and he had an eager look on his face that suited his age much more than the anger and stress he'd been carrying around lately.

So I decided I might as well play his little game and give him answers. He was old enough to ask me shit and get a real response. And he was right. I owed him. "We met the night you were born," I replied.

"What?" He looked confused. "And he came to see me?"

"I brought him along," I replied simply.

Gus peered at me suspiciously. "So *where* did you meet?"

I felt myself grin a little. "Under a streetlamp."

"What?" he asked, wrinkling his nose in confusion.

"He was on Liberty Ave, that night. It was his first time there. I was leaving Babylon with Mikey, and I saw him. So I picked him up."

"Just like that?" he asked.

"Just like that," I said.

"Why?"

I frowned. What did that mean? "Why?"

"Why him? There's tons of hot guys all over the place there, why would you pick him up? Wasn't he like, a kid?"

I snorted. "He was almost eighteen."

"So *why him*?"

Tongue in cheek, I thought about it. "I don't know," I said.

"Dad!"

There was that exasperation again.

"I really don't," I said. "He caught my eye."

"Why?" Gus leaned forward a little more, and I realized I wasn't just dealing with typical curiosity. He was trying to understand us. He was trying to understand *me*.

I sighed and leaned back in my chair, staring out at the rain again, thinking. "It was just something about him. He had this... glow."

"A glow?" Gus asked.

I looked back at Gus and shrugged. "He glowed. He's so pale, and his hair is so blond, so the way the light hit him he sort of... glowed."

Gus stared at me for a moment, and then nodded. He didn't get it. He would, someday, if he found someone he felt that strongly about. In a way I hoped he wouldn't. Caring this much about someone sure hurt a hell of a lot. Then again, Gus was a lot smarter than me. He probably wouldn't fuck it up like I always did.

"So you picked up a seventeen year old kid, and fucked him, and then let him tag along when you got the call?"

I nodded. "More or less."

"So why'd you bring him along if you just met him?" Gus asked.

"He couldn't go home, his parents thought he was at Daphne's. I could have kicked him out, but..." I sighed and shrugged again. "He was interesting."

Gus grinned. "You were already in love."

I rolled my eyes. "Bullshit. I was in lust. He was hot, and I hadn't even gotten to fuck him properly yet."

Gus laughed. "So you brought him along."

"So I brought him along," I replied.

"And then he kept coming around, right?"

I arched an eyebrow at him. Where had he heard that?

"Uncle Mikey told me Justin was a great stalker," he said, grinning mischievously. Oh, so they'd been talking about me, had they?

"I *let* him stalk me. He was hot and enthusiastic."

"And?" Gus asked.

I paused, wanting to ignore him and tell him that's all it was. But he was right. I owed him. If this is what he wanted, I guess this is what I'd have to give him. "He got under my skin. He was smart, and he could keep up with me, and he seemed to *get* me, even though he barely knew me. He kept me interested."

"And you went to his prom?"

*Smiling, laughing, spinning, dancing, kissing, screaming, blood all over the pavement, blood on blond, blood on-*

"Yeah. I went to his prom."

Gus must have seen the way I tensed up and paled, because he looked like he felt bad for even bringing it up. "He told me about that."

I just nodded, and lit another cigarette. This time he didn't scold me.

"So what then?"

I exhaled a long plume of smoke and watched as it disappeared into the humid air. "We fucked a lot. He chased me. I told him I didn't give a shit. I told him I didn't believe in love. He gave up a couple of times, but he always came back. Every time he left I felt like shit, I was a fucking mess. But he always came back."

"Just like now," Gus said.

I nodded.

"But then he went to New York," Gus said slowly. "And it was really over?"

I licked my lips quickly. "We were going to get married."

Gus nodded slowly.

"But he had his future and his career to think of. He had to go to New York if he was going to succeed as an artist. And I couldn't go with him."

"So you just let him go?" Gus asked.

I lifted the cigarette to my lips again and inhaled deeply, remembering the long goodbye, the long fuck, the bullshit about not needing rings, and it only being time. "I let him go."

"Do you even love him?"

I almost dropped the cigarette in shock. "What?"

Gus shrugged, nonchalantly. "He loves you."

"I know that," I said. "But what the fuck did you say?"

"I said I don't know if you really love him."

I stared at him, at my son, and wondered how he could even say that after what we'd just been through. "I love him."

"Yeah, I guess," he said. He sounded unconvinced.

"What the fuck does that mean?!" I asked, getting pissed. I stubbed out the cigarette and glared at him.

"It means you let him go. You let him go *over* and *over* again! How could you do that if you loved him so much?!"

Fuck. Sometimes I forgot that Gus was still a kid. "Because that's what you do when you love someone. You let them go if that's what they need to do." I relaxed back into my chair and sighed.

Gus was silent for a long time, and we sat there, side by side, listening to the rain fall on the grass and the roof.

"Then how come you're not married?" he asked softly.

I didn't look back at Gus. I just shrugged. I didn't have a real answer for him.

"Is it because you like fucking other people?" he asked, almost challengingly.

"I don't," I said.

"Bullshit!" he exclaimed, turning to look at me again. "I'm not *stupid*!"

I turned my head and stared him straight in the face. "I don't fuck other people. I haven't since he got back, except when he was with me, fucking them, too."

Gus stared at me silently in surprise. "That's why you were so pissed," he said.

I blinked at him, wondering what the fuck the boy was on about this time.

"On his birthday," Gus clarified.

"Oh, fuck," I said, running a hand through my hair. "I was pissed because I'm an asshole. That wasn't his fault."

"Well *duh*," Gus said, rolling his eyes. Sometimes the little brat looked so much like me it was eerie, but right now he looked just like Lindsay did whenever she thought I was being stupid. It made me miss her, a little. "But that's why you got all pissy. You were jealous."

I shrugged again.

"So why don't you tell him?" he asked.

Another shrug.

"Come on, you owe me, remember? So spill!"

I couldn't help but laugh a little at that. "Fine," I said. "I was going to, that night." I looked back at him. "But like you said, I got 'all pissy', and then we got the call about Ben."

"And then *he* got all pissy," Gus said.

"And then I was an asshole again," I said.

"And then he left," Gus said.

I nodded.

"One more question," Gus said slowly.

"Only one more?" I asked.

"Yeah. Then you have to go tell him you're not fucking anyone else so the two of you stop queening out over the littlest shit."

I laughed again, and felt myself smile. "When you put it that way, I guess I have no choice."

He grinned at me and nodded. "So, last question--"

"I can hardly wait," I said.

"What the fuck is it that everybody thinks is so hot about him?"

I stared at my son for a long time before responding. "Do you really want to know?"

"Yeah. Only keep it PG13. I don't want to hear any weird kinky shit."

I snorted and shook my head, and thought for a long moment, listening to the rain fall. Why did I think he was so hot? Why did I think he was beautiful? "It's his eyes," I said.

"Huh?" Gus asked, making a face.

"Well, and his hair," I said. "But he could shave his head and that wouldn't really change anything."

Gus nodded slowly.

I ran a hand through my hair and sighed. This was the most awkward fucking conversation I'd ever had. "It's his eyes."

"I don't get it," Gus said. "What about them?"

I felt myself grin.

"What? What are you thinking?!" Gus asked, pointing at me. "You're making that *face*!"

"What face?"

"That dopey face you make whenever you think mushy shit!"

I frowned sharply and glared at him. "I don't think *mushy* shit, and I don't make *dopey* faces."

"Yeah, sure, whatever," Gus said, rolling his eyes again.

"Alright, enough with the inquisition," I said. "I'm going upstairs."

"Try not to fuck up," Gus said.

I snorted. "Thanks for the vote of confidence," I said, standing up.

"And dad?" Gus said softly.

I turned and faced him again, one hand on the doorknob. He grinned slowly at me.

"Thanks."

Fuck. I couldn't help but grin back. Had I actually just had a father-son moment? Had I actually just done the right thing in talking to him? Maybe.

I just hoped the next conversation I was going to have would go that smoothly.

***Happiness often sneaks in through a door you didn't know you left open. ~John Barrymore***

## **Chapter 14**

That's the thing about old houses.

You can hear *everything*.

I had woken up around nine in the morning to sound of the rain hitting the roof. I laid there a long time, listening to the rain and Brian's heavy breathing through his deviated septum. I looked over at him, all peaceful, arm wrapped strongly around my middle and took in my surroundings - my beautiful house, the sound and the smell of the rain through the open window in our bedroom, his face that 15 years after he picked me up under that streetlamp was still the most gorgeous face I had ever seen.

We didn't talk much. We should have. You know me and my constant need for conversation and analyzing things till they don't even exist anymore. But for some reason I just couldn't do it. All I wanted to was to feel him. Kiss him. Touch him. I wanted him inside me so badly we barely made it to the bedroom. We knew Gus wouldn't want to see that, even though in a way I'm sure he would be more relieved than grossed out.

We went into the bedroom around 4 in the afternoon and fucked all day and night. We finally passed out around 5am, I think, only because I remember glancing at the clock the last time I came. I lifted up the sheet that was bunched up around my abdomen and smirked. I was disgusting. And I loved it.

I brushed Brian's now graying hair out of his face and quietly got out of bed. I showered and went into my studio. I needed to paint. My whole body was buzzing to get these emotions down on the canvas. I started with dark blues and let my hand take over. My emotions poured out of me. But, it wasn't a sad blue or an angry blue like the blues I used to use in New York. This was a soothing blue, kind of like the rain that was falling outside my open window.

I'm not sure how long I was painting. I just knew when it was done. I took my headphones off and stood there, staring at my finished work for a long time. I took in all the emotion I had just let out. Fuck, I was exhausted.

As I started to clean out my brushes in the sink, I heard the faint sound of voices outside my window. Were Brian and Gus outside in the rain? I walked closer to the window and listened.

*"It was just something about him. He had this... glow."*

What? What the fuck was he talking about?

*"A glow?"*

Gus's voice now.

*"He glowed. He's so pale, and his hair is so blond, so the way the light hit him he sort of... glowed."*

Oh my god. I huge smile spread across my lips. I just couldn't help it. Is that really what he thought? All this time, that's the first impression he got of me? My heart could have burst.

I continued to listen as Brian told Gus about how I stalked him, but honestly how he liked it, which I always suspected.

Gus brought up the prom which didn't go any further than them just confirming that yes indeed Brian had gone to my prom.

Then the words hit my ears like a knife to my heart.

*"We were going to get married."*

Fuck.

Then the conversation turned a little heated. Gus accused Brian of not loving me. Oh dear god.

*"I love him."*

*"Because that's what you do when you love someone. You let them go if that's what they need to do."*

I felt tears form in my eyes and it took everything I had not to scream out the window down to him, to scream at him that I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay with him, that I loved him so god damn much. That I always had, and I always would.

Fuck.

And the words floated up through the sky, into my window and straight into my heart.

*"I don't fuck other people. I haven't since he got back, except when he was with me, fucking them, too."*

Holy god fucking shit.

No. That cant be true. I mean....he's at Babylon at least twice a week. How could he not be getting laid or at least a blowjob? I mean...he's Brian Fucking Kinney. We never even



discussed....

Oh, god.

Then Gus said it. The answer to why the past two fucking weeks happened in the first place.

*"But that's why you got all pissy. You were jealous."*

God I am such a fucking little twat. I swear to god.

He wanted to tell me that night. That was his plan to tell me, to have this fabulous birthday dinner, the flowers, romance, and he was going to tell me the one thing I had wanted to hear from him all along.

He wanted to be monogamous.

And what did I do? I went and got sucked off by some model in the bathroom of a restaurant and acting like a whiny little brat. Oh, god. I will never understand for the life of me why he puts up with me.

I was just about to close the window and go back to washing up the blue mess I had made in my studio when Gus's question caught my interest.

*"What the fuck is it that everybody thinks is so hot about him?"*

So call me curious. I had to hear Brian's answer on this one.

Even though I already knew. My ass, probably. My perfect twink physique. How big my cock was for my size. I knew the answers to that question. I was just curious to see if he would tell his 16-year-old son.

*"It's his eyes."*

What?

*"Well, and his hair. But he could shave his head and that wouldn't really change anything."*

I already did.

Oh my god. Now I was crying. I was crying like a fucking little faggot, and I didn't care. I know it was wrong of me to listen in on their conversation, but COME ON, who knew when the next time Halley's comet would appear and Brian fucking Kinney would confess his feelings.

I could tell their conversation was dying down so I quickly rid my cheeks of my tears and went back to the task at hand of cleaning off my brushes.

He appeared in the doorway of my studio not long after.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"You were up pretty early." He rubbed his hand over his face. I didn't look at him.

"Yeah, I know. Sorry. I kinda just had to paint." I waved my hand toward the canvas and

watch out of the corner of my eye as he walked to it. He stood there a while, head cocked to the side, admiring it, analyzing it.

"It's good."

"It's genius."

He laughed and nodded. "Like always." He paused. "We should hang it."

"If you want."

"I want."

I smiled and turned off the water in the sink.

He cleared his throat and I turned around and looked at him.

"So, Gus was asking some questions."

"Oh?"

"Uh, yea." He looked around the room nervously. "About you. About us."

I nodded.

"So I told him." He shrugged.

"Okay."

"Don't you wanna know what I told him?"

"Nope."

He gave me a confused look. "Why not? Brian Kinney actually *TALKED* about his feelings and Sunshine doesn't want to know what was said about him?"

I let out a loud sigh and start to put the lids back on my paint cans.

"What?"

I turned around and give him a serious look. He looked scared.

"So why aren't we married?"

He paled. "What did you just say?"

"I asked you why we aren't married, if you want to be monogamous, if you love me, then why don't we get married?"

He opened his mouth to say something then quickly shut it. He really had nothing to say to that. He rubbed his hand over his face and let out something that was a cross between a groan and a whimper.

God, I was so stupid. I knew better now than to push him. That's usually what sends him straight out to the backroom to trick. FUCK.

"Never mind. Forget it." I shoved my paints back up on the shelves.

"Okay, then."

Huh?

"What?"

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Lets do it."

Oh my god. Was he....did he actually....HOLY SHIT. Okay, I had to stay calm. It took everything I had not to jump around like a little kid and squeal and throw my arms around him. Part of me wanted to run out to the streets and scream; *"He wants to marry me! He wants to marry me! Brian Kinney is going to marry me!"*

I huge grin formed on my face and I folded my arms and gave him a challenging look.

"Say it."

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

He laughed and walked quickly to me and pulled me into his arms.

He put his lips to my ear and sighed heavily.

"Yes I will marry you. I'll marry you. You little twat."

In that moment it occurred to me just how much 10 years changes things. How much Brian Kinney's walls had come down. How even 10 years ago when he had made his declaration of love and asked me to marry him, if I had pulled this stunt instead, it never would have gone like this. But for once he allowed it to be on my terms. He gave me control. He let me have this moment.

I wrapped my arms around him and giggled into his chest. He kissed my forehead, my hair, my cheek, my ear, and every bit of skin he could reach in that position. I breathed in his scent. The smell of his skin underneath his t-shirt. The warmth of his arms. The sound of the rain hitting the roof and windowpane.

God, I was beginning to love the rain.

"So are we gonna tell people?" I asked.

"You know what they're all gonna say."

"What? That it's about fucking time?"

He let out a short laugh. "They wont believe us." His voice sounded a bit sad. I pulled back and looked into his eyes.

"What? Why not?"

He nuzzled my cheek. "Cause isn't this what we do, Justin? We never follow through."

I frowned at him and he looked deep into my eyes.

"Do you want to marry me Brian?"

"Yes, I just told you yes."

"Do you believe that I'm not leaving again?"

He didn't answer me.

"I don't mean queening out, packing a bag and sleeping on Daphne's couch for a few nights leaving. I mean *REALLY* leaving. Like I'm not going to pack up and move back to New York or leave *YOU*, leave."

He thought about it for a few minutes while our eyes were locked. He really thought about it.

"I believe you." He finally let his breath out with that statement.

"Then who the fuck cares what everyone thinks?"

"Well, I'm sure they'll believe it after we have the huge fabulous wedding of your dreams, with... white bows on the fucking bushes, right? You'd better call Emmett and get his ass in gear to get you your golden gardenias from Japan or China or wherever the fuck they grow."

I laughed at him and hugged him closer to me.

"I don't want any of that." He pulled back and gave me a *LOOK*.

"Is this going to be that thing you do when you tell me you don't want something because you think it's what I want and then 5 years from now you queen out about it and blame me?"

I smirked and shook my head. "No. I really don't want all that. We could do something small. Just us. And Gus and my mother. If you want Michael to be there, that's fine. But if you do I have to invite Daphne. She'd fucking kill me, otherwise. And with her fucking hormones these days from the pregnancy I'm sure she really would."

"Wait, what? Daphne's *PREGNANT*?"

I smiled. "Yup."

"Well, fuck me."

"With pleasure, Mr. Kinney."

"Nice try, Sunshine."

He held me for a long time, running his hands through my hair and kissing the top of my head.

"Marriage, huh?"

I nodded into his chest. "And monogamy?"

He tensed for a minute then I felt him relax slightly.

"Christ, Sunshine, are you gonna let me do *ANYTHING* today? First you ask *ME* to marry

YOU and now I don't even get to make the great declaration of telling you your ass is the only ass I want to fuck till death do us part?"

I kissed his chest through the fabric on his shirt.

"Okay, go for it. Declare away."

"No, 'cause you just totally ruined it now." God he sounded like such a fag when he said that. I smacked his ass.

"Okay. Okay." He held my face in his hands and pressed his forehead to mine.

"Justin Taylor, your ass is just so hot that I can't find anyone else's that even compares. So I've decided to stop trying. I'm just gonna fuck you from now on."

Okay, so maybe it was the greatest declaration of love around, but hey, this was Brian. And to me, it was the sweetest, most romantic thing he could have said.

I kissed him then with my whole body. I kissed him from the tips of my toes to the top of my head. I kissed him for the 5 years we were together before I left for New York. I kissed him for the 10 years I spent there, missing him and loving him. I kissed him for the 6 months I had been back here, setting up our home and our family with Gus.

I kissed him for what was to come, for what our life was now going to be.

When the kiss ended, we were both breathless and a little lightheaded.

"We have to tell Gus. If he isn't the first person we tell he may run away to Zimbabwe."

I nodded, but kept my arms tight around his waist. I listened to the sound of his heart beating in his chest.

"Sonnyboy! Come here!" he yelled for his son, and within seconds Gus came pounding up the stairs and stood in the doorway.

"Yeah?" His eyes looked concerned.

"We have something to tell you." I tried to keep my voice steady and my feet still. I honestly wanted to take him and twirl him around and squeal like a little schoolboy.

"Oh god, you guys are breaking up aren't you! I fucking KNEW IT! God why can't you guys just SUCK IT THE FUCK UP! I MEAN SERIOUSLY...."

"Sonnyboy, calm the fuck down would you? Since when did you turn into Uncle Mikey? Christ."

Gus shut his mouth immediately. At least Brian could still get his attention.

"We just thought you would like to be the first person to know..." Brian looked at me and I smiled.

"...We're getting married," I finished.

Gus's eyes widened and let he let out a HUGE sigh of relief.

"Well, it's about fucking time."

Brian and I both laughed and he tightened his grip around me.

"So when's the wedding? Do I get to wear a tux? That would be SWEET!" His eyes were full of excitement.

"Actually..." Brian's eyes met mine again and I nodded at him. It's okay, I told him with my eyes. This is what I want.

"...I have a plan. But we're going to need your help..."

\*\*\*

*It is not flesh and blood but the heart which makes us fathers and sons. ~Johann Schiller*

## Chapter 15

After all the drama we'd dealt with lately, you'd think we'd get a break, time to relax, time to sit around the house and not have to deal with anyone else's bullshit.

"I hope you have a fully stocked cookie jar, she's in one of her moods," Melanie said, walking past me into the house and setting two large suitcases down with a grunt.

A small dark haired child ran past her, screaming at the top of her lungs in a way that I couldn't tell meant if she was happy or scared shitless.

"JR!" Gus shouted happily as he ran down the stairs. He scooped up his little sister into his arms and laughed.

"Gus!" JR shouted back, wrapping her arms around his neck.

Ah, it must be 'happy'.

"We don't have a fucking *cookie jar*," I said, stepping aside so everyone else could come in.

Yeah. Everyone else. Fuck, how did I get talked into this?

Lindsay smiled at me and carried two suitcases inside. "But you have a waffle iron."

"Justin likes waffles," I mumbled. Shit, how much crap did they have to carry around?! They were only going to be here a week.

"Don't listen to him," Justin said, walking down the stairs and wiping his hands off on a cloth that was already stained with ten different colors of paint. "He loves waffles. And we have *plenty* of cookies."

"They'd better be the real thing, or she's going to throw a fit," Melanie said, sighing heavily. "Not any of that low fat bullshit."

"Don't worry, they're chocolate chip," Justin said. He hugged Melanie and even Lindsay, although that one was a little awkward. Then I was pulled into hugs as well.

Once everyone was done being fucking huggy and embarrassing, I picked up two of the suitcases and carried them upstairs to a guest room. We had a few, but Lindsay had requested one as far from our bedroom as possible. Couldn't imagine why.

"Thanks for letting us stay here," Melanie was saying, carrying the other two suitcases up the stairs after me.

"Well, we've got the room," I said, hoping I sounded as indulgent as I wanted to. Truth be told, I hadn't wanted them to stay with us at all. But Justin had gone off on Gus needing to spend plenty of time with his mothers, and how he probably missed his sister, and how Michael's place didn't have any room, and by then I'd gotten bored with the conversation and agreed to it just to get him to shut up and go back to sucking my cock.

It's okay to be manipulated, as long as you know you're being manipulated.

Melanie laughed and shook her head, looking around the room. "Shit, Brian, this really is a palace."

I shrugged, but grinned, tongue in cheek. She was right. I'd picked it just for that reason.

"Justin must be really happy," she said softly. She gave me one of those slow, sweet grins that she'd only given me a handful of times before, and I suddenly felt extremely awkward.

"Lunch is almost ready. Justin's been cooking all day," I said. I ignored Melanie's laugh and went back downstairs, just in time to have JR grab me around the waist, a cookie in each hand.

"Hi Uncle Brian!" she said, smiling up at me, all dimples and missing one of her front teeth.

"Hello, demon spawn," I said, picking her up. I was going to get chocolate all over my clothes at this rate. Good thing I'd planned ahead and worn clothes I didn't *mind* getting chocolate on.

JR giggled at me and offered me a bite of her cookie.

"Not before lunch," I said. Fucking cookies. Justin had stocked the kitchen with processed sugar and carbs the minute we'd agreed to host this little family gathering, and I'd been tempted ever since.

"Is daddy coming soon?" she asked.

I couldn't help but smile. "Mikey'll be here soon," I said.

Gus walked over to us, munching a cookie of his own, and grinning widely. He looked so happy, the last of my annoyance at the entire situation faded. I was sure it would return soon enough, but for now, I didn't mind this so much.

"I got some new games," Gus said to JR.

The little girl in my arms turned her head and beamed at her brother, wriggling a little. "Which ones?"

I set her down and watched as Gus started walking upstairs. "Come on, I'll show you."

JR followed her big brother quickly, and the living room was suddenly much quieter.

I sighed and went into the kitchen.

"He looks well," Lindsay said. "You're a good father despite yourself, Brian Kinney."

Christ, I was glad they'd never found out about our little fight. "It's Justin, not me," I said, leaning against the counter and pointedly ignoring the open bag of cookies next to me.

"Gus says otherwise," Lindsay said. "He says you're both 'awesome dads'."

Justin laughed, and pulled a large pan of something that smelled suspiciously like baked ziti from the oven. "We're trying."

"You're doing a good job," Melanie said, peering over Justin's shoulder. "Even if I resent saying it." She patted Justin on the shoulder. "Not you, of course. *Him*."

"Fuck you very much," I said, grinning at Melanie. So we got along for the most part these days, but a friendly barb now and then kept things comfortable and familiar.

Melanie flipped me off and Lindsay frowned at both of us. "Not in front of the kids," she said. "Jenny is already too much to keep up with. The last thing I need is her talking like the two of you."

I snorted and shrugged. "It's just *words*," I said.

"Words her fifth grade teachers don't appreciate," Lindsay replied. "She's already gotten in trouble for fighting."

"Fighting?" Justin asked, pulling dishes out to set the table. He was using the fine china that he'd *insisted* we needed for occasions such as this. That crap couldn't be put in the dish washer. I'd be doing dishes after lunch for at least an hour. Damnit.

"She was pulling another little girl's hair," Lindsay said.

"That other little girl was calling her a boy," Melanie said sharply. "Because she likes to play soccer instead of dolls."

"She's going to be a dyke, isn't she?" I asked, sighing heavily. "Just what we need, another muncher."

Justin gave me a look that said to behave, and I grinned at him, grabbing a pile of plates and carrying them to the table.

"Where's daddy's little angel?" I could hear Michael's voice, and then the front door shutting.

"The demon child is upstairs with Gus," I called back.

Michael walked into the kitchen, closely followed by Ben. "She's not a *demon child*, Brian."

I rolled my eyes. He was completely fooled by her act. I gave Melanie a knowing look and she shrugged helplessly. JR was going to be daddy's little princess, no matter how badly she behaved.

Michael and Ben did the hugging thing with the lesbians, and I retreated to the living room to pour myself some Beam. I was going to need a drink to deal with the noise that was coming up.



Justin walked into the living room behind me and put a hand on my back. "Hey," he said.

I turned and grinned at him, downing the shot. "Hey," I replied.

"It's only for a few days," he said, cocking his head at me. "So don't act like a jerk."

I snorted. "Don't worry, I've used up my jerk allowance for a long time. I'll behave."

I was granted one of those bright smiles of his, and for a moment it all seemed like it might actually be worth it.

Then his smile faded, and I could see the worry in his eyes. "Mom and Molly should be here soon, for lunch."

I nodded. I knew what he was worried about. Was he going to come? Was he not going to? And which situation would be worse?

"I told him not to show if he couldn't behave," Justin said.

"That's fair," I said. I poured another shot and handed it to Justin. He smiled and drank it.

"I hope he comes," he said, staring into the empty glass.

"Craig will show if he wants to," I replied, taking it from him. "If he doesn't want to be here, we don't want him here anyway."

Justin nodded quickly. "I know."

I kissed him on the cheek and fluffed his hair, and headed back into the kitchen. I had promised to be social, whatever the fuck that meant. I thought it probably meant I couldn't lock myself in my office until everyone had gone. That was going to be hard.

"Hey, Justin," Michael said. He grinned and hugged Justin quickly when he followed me back into the kitchen.

Justin hugged him back, but I could tell he felt fucking awkward. Michael knew the two of us had had a fight. He had no idea how bad it was, or what it was about. Of course, Justin knew now that nothing had gone on between Michael and I, but that didn't seem to help much. As soon as they broke apart, I put a hand on the small of Justin's back and grinned at him. He glanced at me and relaxed. I felt a pang of guilt all over again for putting him through what I had.

Everyone started talking about JR, and Gus, and school, and all of that other parenty crap, so I finished setting the table, and then returned to the living room for another drink. There was a knock on the door, so I answered it, glass in hand.

"Hello, Brian," Jennifer said, smiling. She kissed me on the cheek and walked inside.

"Everyone's in the kitchen," I said, pointing in the right direction, as if she didn't already know.

She smiled and nodded and went to find her son.

"Hey," came a young female voice from behind me. I turned back towards the door to face a young woman with light brown hair, grinning in a way that gave her away as a ml:namespace prefix = st1 />Taylor in an instant. It was fucking scary how similar she looked to Justin sometimes, when she made the right expression.

"Molly," I said, grinning back at her. "To what do I owe the honor?"

"Mom dragged me along," she said. "I guess that's what I get for living at home while I go to college. She can still tell me what to do." She stepped into the living room and shut the door behind her, glancing around. "Nice."

She hadn't been here since we'd furnished it. "We like to think so."

She smirked at me and shook her head, then snatched my glass out of my hand, and downed the shot. "Mm," she wrinkled her nose and handed it back. "Do you have to drink that shit?"

"Hey," I said, amused. "We have plenty of wine and girly drinks. Ask Justin to make you one."

She rolled her eyes and strolled past me, looking around the room intently. I could tell she was avoiding going into the kitchen to deal with the crowd, just like I was. Molly and I had a few things in common. I liked her, for a heterosexual female.

Okay, maybe I just liked her in general. She was a good kid. While Justin had been gone, we'd kept in touch. I'd been the one she called when she'd gotten stranded at her first high school party and didn't want her mom to know she was out drinking and partying at sixteen. I was the one who consoled her after her first boyfriend fucked her and dumped her. I was the one she first smoked a joint with. I guess I was a safe person to turn to. Her dad wasn't exactly reliable, and her big brother had been gone.

Brian Kinney, corrupting America's youth.

I wondered distantly if Justin knew about all that. Had Molly told him? Somehow I doubted it. I made a mental note to bring it up later, when I had Justin to myself.

Molly Taylor also had things in common with her brother besides looks.

She had an enormous crush on me.

"So, how long is this stupid party going to last, anyway?" she asked, smirking at me.

I gave her my most charming smile and poured myself another drink. "Most of the day, I'm afraid."

She sighed and nodded. "That's what I thought. What a pain."

I snorted and drank the shot. "Glad to know I'm not the only one that'll be suffering."

"Hey, dad," Gus said, running down the stairs, closely followed by JR. "Is lunch almost ready? We're starv-" He stopped as soon as he reached us and stared at Molly. "Oh. Hi."

Molly stared at Gus, one eyebrow arched. "Hi."

Gus smiled, and it was one of *my* fucking smiles, all charm and self-satisfaction. "I didn't know you'd be here."

Molly shrugged, clearly bored.

"Can I have more cookies?" JR asked, pouting up at me.

"Ask your father," I said. "He'll say yes."

JR smiled and ran into the kitchen to find Michael and I turned my attention back to Gus and Molly.

"What's for lunch?" Molly asked me.

"Ziti," I said. "One of Deb's old recipes. He's been perfecting them."

She sighed loudly. "Great. Carbs and fat."

"That's what I said," I replied.

Gus stared at Molly, his gaze shifting down, and then back up her body. "I don't think you need to worry about it."

Molly *looked* at him, like she was trying to figure him out, and then grinned at him. "So, how's *middle school*?"

Gus' expression faltered, then he grinned again. "I'm in high school now."

"Oh," Molly said, sounding only slightly interested. "A freshman, huh?"

I cleared my throat loudly. "We should return to the kitchen. I'm sure the food is almost done."

Gus shot me an irritated look, then turned back to Molly. "If you get sick of everyone, we could go to my room and... hang out."

Molly arched her eyebrows and then laughed. "Right, sure."

We watched as she turned and went into the kitchen, and then I glanced at Gus. He was biting his lower lip, and had this fucking determined expression.

Well, shit. Justin wasn't going to like this.

I did my best not to laugh, because it was fucking funny, and we followed her back to the kitchen.

Lunch went without anything too horrible happening. JR knocked over her juice, and Michael knocked over his wine trying to help JR clean up her spill. The munchers updated everyone on Canada. We got a full update on JR's school, her grades, and her trouble-making. She was a dyke for sure. Ben told everyone about his new book, and Justin told them about his new painting. Lindsay asked if she could see his studio after lunch, and he said yes. Jennifer and the munchers talked about their children, and the differences in the school systems in Canada and the US.

Gus sat in between Molly and JR, and spent a lot of his time staring at Molly openly. It was fucking shocking that no one else noticed. Well, except for Molly. I had a feeling she knew. She also thought it was funny, and didn't show the slightest interest in him. *Her*

eyes were focused on me. And mine were on Justin, who looks fucking adorable when he's got marinara sauce on the tip of his nose. Finally I got bored with the conversation and leaned over to lick the sauce off, and he shoved me away, giggling and blushing slightly.

"Alright, alright, we'd better get up before Brian gets *too* bored, or who knows what he'll start doing," Melanie said, standing up and picking up her plate.

"Oh, don't worry about the dishes," Justin said, standing up. "We'll get them."

I sighed and shook my head, grabbing the plate from Melanie. "I'll do it." I glanced at Justin. "I don't want any of that fucking cake you got, anyway."

"Brian," Lindsay said sharply.

I smiled sweetly at her. Fuck her and her stupid 'don't curse in front of the kids' rule.

Jennifer insisted on helping me, and we found ourselves in the kitchen, filling the sink with dishes, while everyone else moved to the living room to get comfortable. I politely ignored the murmurs of 'Brian does *dishes* now?' Justin kissed me on the cheek and grabbed dessert plates and a huge cheesecake from the fridge and went to the living room to serve them. They were going to get fucking cake crumbs everywhere. Shit.

"You've done a good job here," Jennifer said, wrapping the leftovers and putting them away.

"Tell your son that, he was the one that picked out most of the furniture," I replied, filling the sink with water. Fucking hand-wash bullshit.

"I don't mean the decorating," Jennifer said, laughing softly. "I mean everything else."

I glanced at her over my shoulder. I didn't know what to say. "I don't always do a good job."

She smiled and walked over, putting a hand on my shoulder. "No one does. The important thing is that you do your best. And you give them love."

I shrugged and grabbed the sponge, washing the plates.

Jennifer grabbed a cloth and took the clean plates from me, drying them and putting them away. We worked in silence for a long time, but it was comfortable, not awkward.

"I'm just so thankful," she finally said, wiping her eyes on the back of her hand.

Christ, she was going to start crying.

"All a mother wants for her children is for them to grow up happy and healthy. You give Justin so much. After everything he's been through, after what you've *both* been through..." She blinked hard and cleared her throat, then smiled at me. "I'm so glad you're together."

I stared at her for a moment before turning back to the sink. "Yeah. Me, too."

I could tell she was smiling ear to ear without even looking at her, and she took a glass from me and dried it.

"I hope Molly finds someone like you," she said.

I let out a short laugh, thinking of Gus and his obvious crush, or whatever it was. "Yeah. Let's hope she finds someone who doesn't put her through what I put Justin through."

"I'm sure it was worth it to him," she says.

I shrugged. I guess it was. At least, he thought so.

I could hear the soft murmur of voices in the living room suddenly go silent, and Jennifer and I glanced towards the door. What the fuck happened? She shot me a worried look, and we walked into the living room.

Craig was standing in the doorway awkwardly. I arched an eyebrow at him. Well, shit. He had balls after all.

"I can only stay a little while," he said.

Justin stood and walked over to him, and then hugged him. It wasn't a full, warm Justin hug, like the ones I was used to, but he was trying.

Molly waved to her father and smiled at him. Their relationship was strained, but it had never been destroyed like his with Justin.

"I'm glad you're here, dad," Justin said.

Craig glanced around the room warily. He was surrounded by fags and dykes, and he looked fucking terrified. I smirked and walked over to him. "Come into the kitchen, I'll make you a drink."

He shot me a relieved look and nodded. "Sure."

Justin looked at me and grinned weakly. He was nervous. But at least Craig had shown. He really was trying.

Jennifer settled onto the sofa next to Lindsay, and Craig and I returned to the kitchen. I took out a new bottle of red wine, and poured two glasses, handing him one.

"I'm not staying long," he said.

"Yeah, you said that," I replied, leaning against the counter.

His gaze shifted to my face and he frowned. "This isn't fucking easy."

"No kidding." I sipped my wine, waiting to see what he was going to do.

He licked his lips nervously, and drank half the glass before speaking again. "I'm never going to...approve of this... lifestyle of yours."

I arched an eyebrow at him and shrugged.

"But I want Justin in my life."

I nodded once. Craig wasn't worth it. He was an asshole. Justin should have cut him out of his life ages ago. Then again, I never did completely rid myself of Jack, and he never

even tried to tolerate me. I guess that's the thing about fathers and sons. You can never really escape.

Suddenly, Craig looked me directly in the eye. He didn't do that very often, and it was sort of shocking. I could see bits of Justin in his eyes, and I wondered how someone so full of shit and hate could have made someone as beautiful as Justin. I gave Jennifer all the credit for that.

"I want to take Gus fishing."

My jaw dropped. What. The. Fuck?!

He ducked his head again before continuing, staring into his glass. "Molly isn't going to have children any time soon. And Justin... never will."

I nodded once. At least he was accepting that even if he didn't like what Justin had decided to do with his life, it wasn't going to change. Of course, I knew that Justin had talked about having a *family* long ago, and he might spring the 'I want a baby' thing on me eventually. But that was none of Craig's fucking business. I could only hope that when Justin brought it up, he would want to be a part time dad, like me, or even a half-time dad like Michael... at least until the kid was a teenager. *Fuck*. I dreaded that day.

But what the fuck was this about Gus?!

He looked back up at me and cleared his throat. "Gus is the closest thing I have to a grandson. He calls Justin his father. He's a good kid."

I stared at him warily. He'd met Gus a couple of times, briefly, during the awkward lunches we'd had with him over the last couple of months.

"Justin never wanted to go fishing, or go to a game with me. Molly was only interested in softball. And I have a feeling you don't take Gus to do those things, either."

I wanted to say something about assuming I didn't like sports and shit just because I was a fag, but he was right. I didn't. I had no fucking interest in that shit. "Melanie takes him to hockey games," I said.

He nodded. "But he lives here now."

I shrugged again. This was the weirdest fucking conversation I'd had in a long time.

Suddenly Craig's expression softened and he looked old and tired. "I might not live long enough to see my grandchildren, if Molly even decides to have kids. I'd like to be Gus' grandfather. I want to take him fishing, and to soccer games, and buy him Christmas presents."

I stared at him a long time before speaking. "They mostly celebrate Hanukkah."

He let out a short laugh. "Figures," he said.

"They mix them," I tried to explain. "Melanie is Jewish."

He nodded and sighed. "Fine. Hanukkah, then."

I considered it for a long time. Did I want this asshole who tried to kill me once spending time with my son? Did I trust him?

I walked over to him and got in his face. He tried to step back, but I stayed close. I was going to make myself perfectly fucking clear.

"My son is not going to be exposed to your bullshit religion, or your bullshit homophobia."

Craig nodded slowly.

"His mothers are lesbians." I paused. "His fathers are fags. He knows about homophobic assholes like you. But he doesn't know you are one. He knows you weren't happy that Justin was gay, back then. But he doesn't know you're still, and you're always going to be, a homophobic prick."

Craig swallowed hard and straightened up. He was still shorter than me, which I could tell bothered him. "I wouldn't say any of that to him."

"Damn right you won't," I said, finishing off my wine. I set the glass on the counter next to us and narrowed my eyes at him. "Because if you did, I would make sure you paid."

"I won't," he replied.

Shit, he was actually holding out. He wasn't tucking his tail between his legs and running away. His gaze was meeting mine, and although he looked fucking scared, he still wasn't letting it make him back down.

So I stepped back and nodded. "Alright. I'll talk to Gus and Justin. If Justin's alright with it, and Gus wants to, you can take him fucking fishing, or to games, or whatever the fuck."

Craig slowly grinned.

I sighed and shook my head. "But don't fucking misunderstand me, Craig. I don't like you. I know you don't like me. I tolerate you because it's important to Justin. But if you fuck up, if you hurt Justin, or my son, then you'll never get to see either of them again."

He nodded. "So we agree to tolerate each other."

I cocked my head. "I guess so."

He stuck his hand out, and I shook it.

Justin walked into the kitchen and stared at us with a worried expression. "What's up?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said.

Craig smiled at Justin, letting go of my hand. "You've got a beautiful home."

Justin blinked at him, and then beamed happily. "Want the tour? I was just going to show everyone my studio."

Craig nodded and followed him back into the living room. I sighed and trailed after them.

All of the adults followed Justin upstairs to the studio, and I hung back. Gus had his playstation on, and he and JR were playing the newest shoot-'em-up game and killing each other on it happily, sitting cross-legged on the floor. Molly was kneeling next to JR, pointing at the screen and shouting.

"Over there! Use the machine gun!" Molly yelled.

"I know," JR replied, a serious expression on her face.

"Don't help her!" Gus said. "Not fair!"

"She's younger than you," Molly replied, sticking her tongue out. "It's *totally* fair."

"Except she always beats me anyway," Gus mumbled, but he was grinning.

I smiled and settled onto the sofa to watch them. Maybe having the family over wasn't so bad. Even if it was a fucking weird family. Lindsay and Melanie, Gus and JR, Jennifer and Molly, Michael and Ben, and fuck, Justin and I. Oh, and Craig, somewhere in there, trying to find where he fit into the group. Fuck if I knew. I wasn't even sure where I fit.

I glanced above the mantelpiece to where the family photos that Justin had framed sat. In the center was a photo of Gus, Justin, and I that Jennifer had taken a month ago when we were at her place for lunch. In it, Justin was beaming, and Gus was smirking, and I was grinning. My arm was around Justin's shoulders on my right, and Gus was sitting to my left.

Well. Maybe I knew after all.

**In some families, *please* is described as the magic word. In our house, however, it was *sorry*. ~Margaret Laurence**

## Chapter 16

I watched him peel off his clothes at the edge of the bed as I lay back listening to the diminishing sounds of JR's voice screaming.

*"I don't want to go to bed! No! NO! Can I sleep in Gus's room? WHY NOT!?"*

And the muffled soothing voices of Mel and Linds and finally Gus's voice leading JR down the hallway and into his bedroom.

*"If you hear anything coming from Uncle Brian and Uncle Justin's room just... ignore it."*

Brian and I exchanged amused glances and burst out laughing.

You have to love Gus.

He climbed into bed next to me and my head immediately went to his chest as his hands tangled in my hair.



"It wasn't so bad," I said as I lazily traced my fingers over his bare skin.

"I fucking *KNEW* JR was going to be a muncher." He groaned. I giggled and placed soft kisses on his neck.

"She's still young. Maybe she's just a tomboy." I assured him.

"You tell Michael that. He's having a fucking heart attack about the whole situation." He must have felt my body tense cause his arms grew stronger around me.

The room grew quiet for a few minutes except for the sound of our breathing and ruffling sheets as we started to grope each other lazily.

"It was nice that my Dad came."

"Yeah."

"What did he say to you? In the kitchen?"

He stopped groping me and cocked his head to the side and looked down at me. Our eyes met and I knew this wasn't good.

"He wants to hang out with Gus."

"Excuse me?"

"He said he might not be alive long enough to see your sister have kids and since you won't be having kids-"

"-I could still have kids." I interrupted.

He let out a sigh and continued.

"-So he wants to spend time with Gus. Since Gus acknowledges you as his father."

My head started spinning in a million different directions.

"So you mean to tell me, he spent the last 15 years ignoring his *OWN* son but now wants to take *YOUR* kid to a fucking *BASEBALL* game? He never even took *ME* to a fucking *BASEBALL GAME!*"

"First of all, keep your fucking voice down. If you wake up JR, you're dealing with her hyperactive ass all night. Second of all, he's not *MY* kid. He's *OUR* kid. And third..." He pressed his nose into my hair and took a deep breath. "...And I can't believe I'm saying this, but he's trying Justin. Give him a chance to try and do the right thing here."

"Whatever. I don't want to talk about it."

Brian rolled over onto his side and stared at me.

"If you say no, the answer is no. I told Craig I would talk to you and Gus about it. You and he are what matter most, Justin."

"It's just so....fucked." I grabbed at my hair and covered my face with my hands.

"Well, that's family. And this is ours whether we like it or not."

"I...just can't think about this tonight. It's been too long of a fucking day, Brian."

"Yeah, tell me about it." He traced his finger down my jaw line and I could see him smile in the faint light from the moon through our window.

"Gus has a crush."

"Oh?" I turned my head to look at him and smirked. "A guy from school?"

He chuckled and buried his face in the crook of my neck. "Nope," I heard muffled into my skin.

"Then who?" I lifted his head up and stared into his eyes.

He rolled his lips into his mouth and smirked. "Your sister."

**"WHAT?!"**

"Shhhhh! What the fuck did I just tell you?"

"Sorry... but... I... *MOLLY*? She's fucking 23!"

"And?"

**"AND?** She's 7 years older than him!"

He cocked an eyebrow at me and I shook my head.

"It is **NOT** the same thing and **YOU** know it."

"Oh?" The fucker found this amusing.

"That's like incest or something."

"We aren't all really related Justin."

"Well by marriage we are!"

"We aren't married yet."

I shot him a look of death.

"Okay, okay. But step brothers and sisters get together all the time."

"Yeah, in fucking **KENTUCKY!**"

He doubled over with laughter and pulled me on top of him as he rolled onto his back.

"You're so hot when you're mad."

"I'm so glad you find this funny."

"I don't just find it funny. I find it fucking hilarious."

I swatted at his arm and he grabbed my wrist and wrestled me onto my back.

I squirmed and he devoured my mouth, his tongue making a hot wet home against mine. I moaned softly, but he kept his firm grip on my wrists as he pinned them beside my head.

"What are you doing?" I asked him as he licked long trails down my neck.

"Do you really need to ask?" It was hard to concentrate when he fucking licked my fucking nipples like that.

"Brian...we have a house full of guests...**OH GOD.**" His fucking tongue and oh dear fucking god.

"Well if you're fucking quiet... this... will... work..." He nuzzled his nose in the soft hairs above my now rock hard cock and ran his hand up and down my side.

"You know that never works..." I tried to keep my voice low but the moaning was getting in the way.

"Shhhhh..." His tongue was on my tip now sucking my pre come out of me.

"**JESUS FUCK!**" I arched my back and my ass lifted two feet off the bed.

He dug his hands into my hips forcing me to stay still. He growled into my dick which I always knew was my cue to stay still or else.

Or else he will stop.

And we didn't want that, now did we?

"Brian...please."

He blew his warm breath on swollen dick and that alone almost made me come.

"I'm going to fuck you... hard... just the way you like it." He teased my hole with the tip of his finger. "But you need to be quiet. Can you do that? Can you be quiet, Justin?"

I let out a small quiet moan and spread my knees farther apart to give him better access.

"Good boy."

What I love most about Brian and I was the fact that no matter how much time passes or how many years we have been together, the sex never gets old. I still feel like that 17 year old kid that first night we met and he still makes me feel like I am the only one he wants. Like he can never get enough of me.

And I felt the same way about him.

All those blow jobs and nameless fucks I had had over the past 10 years, and even the relationship I had with Calvin, could never compare to Brian. He was and is the only man I want to be with for the rest of my life. The only lips I want to kiss. The only body I want next to me at night. And the only person I want inside me.

And he felt the same way about me.

This was it. Just the beginning. No more tricks. No more wondering when he went to Babylon if he was going to come home smelling of another man. Because I didn't have to worry about those things anymore. He was mine. Only mine.

Forever.

He flipped me over with one swift move, grabbing me by my waist to bring me up on my

knees. He wasted no time, spreading me roughly and ramming his tongue into tight hole.

I let out a loud moaning version of his name and he smacked my ass. **HARD.**

"What did I say?" He growled against my entrance.

"That I had to be quiet," I whimpered.

"That's right. Be quiet or you don't get what you want." He lapped at me and I could feel his spit dripping down onto my balls. "And I know you want it. Say you want it."

"I want it." I thrust my ass back into his face to show him just how much I WANT it.

"Want what?" He slowly entered me with one finger causing me to gasp and clench the sheets between my fingers.

"This?" He kissed where he had smacked my ass, running his tongue slowly over the lessening sting.

"Yes. More." I couldn't get anything else out but that... that and his name that I wasn't sure I was chanting out loud or in my head.

"Do you still think about it?" He pushed a second finger into me, stretching me with only his spit. Fuck.

"Think about what?" I moan as I grabbed at my cock. Jesus, I was hard.

He smacked my hand away and thrust a third long digit into me, hitting my prostate with his tips.

"Me. Fucking you..." One more jab at my sweet spot. "...*raw.*"

And that, ladies and gentleman, was a wrap.

I came so hard all over the sheets my whole body convulsed. He had to hold onto my waist to keep his fingers inside me because I was writhing and shuddering from my orgasm.

"So I take it you still do think about it?"

I nodded into the mattress, trying to keep myself up on my knees.

He abruptly pulled his fingers out of me causing me to groan loudly. Then he smacked my ass again so hard it caused me to collapse onto the bed.

"Be a good boy... or I won't..." His breath was right by my ear as he laid his body on top of mine.

"Won't?" I asked breathlessly, as I reached around to grab at his thighs. God I needed him inside me so badly.

"Fuck you raw."

Wait, what?

Was he serious?

My whole body tensed as he sheathed his cock in a condom and readied himself to enter

me.

He ran his hand down my back to try and center me.

Did he not just hear what he said?

"Brian..." I whispered.

"Mmmm?" His tip eased in gently past my first tight ring of muscle and I lifted back onto my knees again.

"Are you serious?" I was panting because he was picking up pace and I was finding it hard to keep my breath regulated.

"When I said monogamy, Justin, I mean it."

Christ, and that was enough for me. I slapped his thigh to clue him in and I thrust back, HARD against his 9 inch dick.

"Oh, you like that idea don't you?" He finally slid all the way inside me, the tip of his cock, brushing over my already inflamed prostate and I let out lustful version of his name.

And then he fucked me. He fucked me hard, his hand pressed down into the back of my neck causing my face to be suffocated into the pillow.

He rode my ass like the finest piece of ass he's ever had. And I was. And he was mine.

He wanted only me. He was going to marry me. He was going to make me his, mark me by being the only man to ever come inside me. And I would be the only man he ever came inside.

Most people couldn't understand the significance to that. But to us it meant the highest form of intimacy and monogamy there was. Not that I would be preaching it from the mountain tops. I was over all that now. I had nothing to prove to anyone anymore. I think the fact that I was back, and Brian and I were together, in this house, helping raise Gus, was proof enough.

What happened behind closed doors was none of anyone's business.

Unless Gus had his ear to the fucking wall.

After he made me come a second time, he covered us with the blankets, all wet and sticky and ran his fingers through my hair until I fell asleep.

The rest of the week was going to be eventful to say the least. We needed all the rest we could get.

\*\*\*

*A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person.*  
– Mignon McLaughlin

## Chapter 17

Another family dinner was in order. At least, that's what I'd been told. I thought of the various arguments I could make *against* another such event in such a short period of time. Then, I realized that the timing would be perfect.

This time, however, it was *not* going to be held at the house. Michael could throw this one. His house would be crowded and noisy, but he liked it that way. I preferred *our* house to be quiet, and comfortable, and full of no one but *us*.

I just had to get through dinner. Dinner, and the family, and... fuck.

Fifteen years ago I would have sworn I'd never be in this situation. Hell, even ten years ago I would have said there was no way. Nine years ago... was when I changed my bet.

We were greeted by the smell of sesame and soy sauce. *Fuck*. They'd let *Ben* cook.

"Hey, guys!" Michael said, smiling widely as we walked into the house. Justin grinned at Michael, but that was all. He was still tense and anxious around him. Maybe he always would be. I wished I could fix that, but I didn't know how the fuck to do it.

"If the professor is making some kind of weird-" I started to say, but Hunter cut me off as he came down the stairs.

"Don't worry, it's just this Chinese stuff with chicken and garlic. It's good."

"I thought you'd left already!" Justin said, hugging Hunter. We hadn't seen him since...

Well, since the hospital.

"I was going to, but Gus *insisted* I stay." Hunter grinned proudly. He loved being surrogate big-brother to Gus and JR. The two of them practically worshipped the ground he walked on.

"Where are the girls?" Michael asked eagerly, glancing behind us.

"They took that monster of a minivan they rented," I replied. "We took the Jag."

"His majesty wasn't going to ride in the family van," Justin said, patting me on the ass and walking to the kitchen. Hunter followed him quickly.

I should have said something, or whacked the back of his head, but I didn't. I couldn't. I just grinned.

Fuck. My hands were trembling. I shoved them in my pockets and tried to act completely calm.

"Brian?" Michael asked, stepping closer to me. "Are you alright? You look sort of... pale..."

I shrugged. "Fine. Fucking sick of having everyone in my way."

He grinned and rolled his eyes. "Right, you must be really tripping over each other, with that *tiny* house. How could you *possibly* fit six people in it?!"

"Shut up, Mikey," I replied.

The door opened and we glanced back at it, and the girls poured through.

"Is he still complaining?" Melanie asked, making a face at me.

"I don't *complain*," I replied.

Lindsay laughed and pushed past us into the living room, running a hand through her wind-swept hair. "Of course not."

Michael giggled in that irritating way that he does that makes me forget that he's not fourteen anymore, and hugged the munchers. "I'm surprised you managed to live there for that long!"

"We're staying at a hotel tonight, though!" JR said, entering the house, wearing overalls and pigtails and a batman back pack, courtesy of her father.

"That's right," Lindsay said. "Because Uncle Brian is a big grump!"

Gus shot me a look as he entered the house and put a hand on the top of JR's head.

JR giggled and looked up at him, smiling widely.

I tried to grin at Gus, but couldn't. My fucking stomach was churning, and the shit I took earlier for my stomach wasn't helping.

CALM. DOWN. KINNEY.

"Never fear, the dessert is here!" shrilled a voice from behind me.

I jumped slightly, and felt my heartbeat double. *Fuck*. When did Emmet become so fucking sneaky?!

"You alright, sweetie?" Emmet asked, peering at me in concern, a large pan under one arm.

I shook my head. "I need a fucking drink," I replied.



"Always so cheerful when it comes to family events," Ted said, following Emmet into the house. Then he took a second look at me and frowned. Shit. He'd become better at reading me than Michael over the past ten years, and now I had to be careful how I acted around him, or he'd know something was up.

"Fuck family," I snapped back, looking around the room. "Where the fuck's the bar?"

"I don't think they have a *bar*," Emmet said tactfully. "But I'm sure there's something in the kitchen."

I groaned and stalked into the kitchen just as Lindsay and Melanie started saying my name in that pissed way that they did when I cussed in front of *the children*. Blake entered the house as I left the living room. He tried to greet me, but I ignored him, just like I was ignoring the dykes.

There was time to talk to the sage later. Fuck. How the fuck did Theodore end up him, and Mikey with a professor?

And me with an artist.

Shit.

Justin handed me a glass with some kind of brown liquor in it the minute I entered the kitchen and I sighed in relief, drinking it down quickly. I set the glass down on the counter and rested my hand on his shoulder for a brief moment. He glanced at me and grinned.

My heart started to race again.

*Fuck.*

"The food will be done soon," Ben said, grinning at me over his shoulder. He was stirring something in an absurdly huge wok, and there were *two* rice makers going.

Great. More carbs. Just what I need.

Emmet came into the kitchen, setting down the large pan, and then whipped the cover off. "Voila! Home made tira misu!"

"Wow, Em, you shouldn't have!" Michael said, looking down at the pastries happily.

"It looks great," Justin said, licking his lips.

Shit, that was hot.

"Daddy!" JR squealed, running into the kitchen. She stopped short of him and turned, running headlong into Hunter. "Hunter!"

Hunter laughed and crouched down in front of her. "Hey, Jenny."

"You know, when we *bought* this house it was big enough, but-" Ben started, but Michael cut him off. He was good at that.

"Okay, everyone who isn't cooking goes back in the living room!" Michael started herding everyone out, but I lingered.

I leaned against the counter and watched Ben cook, arms folded. He didn't say anything. He knew better. Instead, he took a beer out of the fridge and offered it to me, and went back to cooking.

I opened the beer and drank, thankful for a few moments of peace. I could hear everyone talking in the other room, a huge mess of voices and laughter. I could tell when Jennifer and Molly arrived, because everyone – especially Emmet – shrieked their names at once.

This group was, if nothing else, extremely enthusiastic.

"I remember parties like these," Ben said. His voice was low and soft. I turned my attention to him, and he was leaning over the stove, stirring the food absently. "I thought, if I don't live, I won't ever be able to cook for everyone again."

I didn't say anything. I didn't know what the fuck *to* say.

"Stupid, huh?" He grinned at me quickly.

I took a long swig of my beer. "No."

"I guess you've got plenty of things that would come before a crowded house full of yelling and food," Ben said. His voice was light, though. He'd stopped judging me a long time ago. I think it was because he saw past my bullshit.

"No," I said again.

This time he kept his gaze on the food. "You have a long time to make up for missed parties. You don't have to do two in a week." He hesitated before continuing. "Michael was worried. He said you wouldn't have had that party earlier in the week *and* come to this unless something was wrong."

I let out a short laugh and set down my mostly empty beer. "Nothing's wrong," I said.

Ben turned off the stove top and turned and smiled at me. "I know you were there for him while I was in the hospital."

I pursed my lips and waited. Was he going to accuse me, too?

"Thanks," Ben said. Behind his glasses, his eyes were glassy and wet.

"I'll always look out for Mikey," I said. "He's my best friend."

Ben smiled and hugged me, and I sighed dramatically and took it.

"But try to stay healthy from now on. It's a *pain* spending that much time in those hospital chairs. I had to see my chiropractor *twice* to fix my back."

Ben laughed and shook his head. "Brian Kinney, you'll never change."

I bit my lower lip and smirked. There wasn't anything I could say to that, either.

Ben walked past me into the living room and announced that dinner was prepared, and the entire fucking Novotny-Brucker, Peterson-Marcus, Wyzecki-Schmidt, Honeycutt, Taylor, Kinney party moved to the dining room table.

I sat down with Michael on my left and Justin on my right. Gus sat across from me next to JR and Hunter. Ben was at the head of the table. The others filled in on the other end. The table was barely big enough to squeeze everyone in. It was like a dinner at Debbie's all over again. I suspected Mikey liked it that way.

Food was passed counter-clockwise, and everyone loaded up on carbs and chicken and ginger and garlic and whatever the fuck else Ben had thrown in. At least when Ben cooked I could count on it being low in fat. But to be honest, if I had to eat something that I was going to have to spend an extra hour on the treadmill for, I'd rather it be fat than carbs. At least then it *tastes* good.

"That doesn't look like pizza," JR whined from her seat.

"Not *everything* has to be pizza," Lindsay said nicely, scooping stir fry onto JR's plate.

JR wrinkled her nose and pouted.

"It's good, Jenny," Hunter said, taking a big mouthful.

JR stared at Hunter silently.

"Yeah, Uncle Ben makes great stir fry," Gus said, mimicking Hunter and taking a bite himself.

JR turned her gaze towards Michael and I and I rolled my eyes. "Just eat a little and I'm sure they'll let you fill up on cookies later."

"Brian!" Melanie hissed at me, but JR took a huge bite and everyone laughed.

Michael nudged me and grinned. "I thought you'd have had enough of big family events by now."

"Well," I said, sighing dramatically and rolling my wine around in my glass. "I supposed I can sacrifice a *little* more of my precious time."

Molly smiled at me from her end of the table. "And I bet Justin threatened to withhold sex, too."

I snorted loudly, Gus, Justin, Emmet, and Ted laughed, Lindsay and Jennifer and Melanie all said her name in a disapproving tone, Michael glared at me as if this was *my* fault, and Ben, Hunter, and Blake pretended that they weren't on the verge of laughter themselves.

"We're not supposed to talk about sex," JR said loudly, taking another bite of her food. "Mommy gets embarrassed."

Then everyone laughed, even the two mothers, who had clearly given up a long time ago.

Everyone ate, and I even enjoyed it. It wasn't pad thai, but it wasn't bad. Maybe Ben knew how to cook after all. Seconds were passed around, then thirds, and everyone ate so much that I wondered how any of them stayed in shape.

Conversations revolved around anything and everything, and frequently got sharply put back into the PG13 category by Lindsay and Melanie. More often than not Emmet would just spell words out instead of saying them, but I'm pretty sure JR knows what H – U – G – E – C – O – C – K spells.

Quickly into the conversation, my mind drifted. I couldn't focus. Even under normal circumstances I would tune out most of what everyone was saying. Today was just that much harder.

I picked at my food and tried to focus, but it was nearly impossible. Now and then I'd look up and catch Justin's eye. He didn't look pale or anxious at all. Actually, he was flushed and laughing along with everyone else.

Damn extroverts.

And damn him for being sure all this time of what he wanted. Damn him for knowing what he needed and going after it. Damn him for being so fucking perfect and beautiful and making me fall completely fucking stupid in love with him. And damn him for making me enjoy things like family dinners at Mikey's house with everyone, without argument.

I never thought my life would end up this way. In fact, I thought it would be the opposite. Up until the day I turned thirty, I was certain that I wouldn't live past that. But that night, Mikey convinced me not to do anything stupid, and Justin gave me a reason to keep it that way.

Even then, I never thought I'd be here, surrounded by family, with a kid, with that damn blond twink who wouldn't take no for an answer.

This was one time I was fucking happy I'd been wrong.

Once everyone's plates were emptied, and Michael and Hunter cleared the table, Michael returned and held up his wine glass. "I asked everybody to come here because-" He stopped and laughed. "Well, because Brian wouldn't have everyone over to his place."

I flicked him in the arm hard.

Everyone laughed.

Michael's voice softened. "I also asked everyone to be here because... family's important. I know that almost none of us are related by blood, but that's what we are. We're family."

Ben grinned up at Michael with a look that could be described as tender and loving, and took his hand, squeezing it gently.

Michael smiled and squeezed Ben's hand back, and I could see Emmet at the other end of the table, wiping tears off his face. Fucking queen.

"We wanted to thank everybody for being there while Ben was sick," Michael said. His voice was slightly strained, but he smiled wider and looked happier than I'd seen him in a long fucking time. "I'm just really glad you were all here, and you're here now, and that we can all have a big noisy dinner together. That's what family is to me."

"To food and noise!" Blake said, holding his glass, and everyone clinked their glasses together, and took sips of wine.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

I set down my glass, because my palms were sweating, and I didn't want to drop it and make a total ass of myself.

Then I stood.

Everyone looked at me and went quiet as soon as they realized I was going to say something. Brian Kinney doesn't stand at a big dinner unless there's something important to say.

I cleared my throat and stuck my tongue in my cheek and took a deep breath. Time for the show, boys and girls.

"Since I can't *possibly* let Michael make a speech like that without showing him up," I said, shooting Mikey an amused look. He smirked at me, but looked confused. "I'm going to make an announcement of my own."

"Well, get it over with, I want dessert!" JR said.

I looked at her quickly, and for a split second the tone in her voice and the expression on her face were a mirror image of Debbie.

Then it was gone and Hunter was telling her to be good, and everyone was looking at me again. But now I felt calmer, and suddenly my anxiety was gone.

"Like Mikey said, we're family. Which is why Justin and I decided that we wanted you all to be here..." Justin took my hand and squeezed it and stood. I glanced at him and he grinned. How the fuck could he be so *calm*?! "...to witness this."

Gus smiled across the table at me and took a small black velvet box from his pocket. He set it on the table and slid it across to me. I picked it up and flipped it open.

Everyone gasped. Then there was silence. The air was suddenly tense. No one could believe what they were seeing. Well, they weren't the only ones. Part of me was pretty baffled about it as well. I think part of me would always be confused as to how I got in this situation.

Justin smiled down at the two platinum bands, then looked at me, and then his gaze shifted over the faces of our family around the table. "Brian and I have been through a lot. You've seen us together, apart, and somewhere in the middle. We've decided that it was time... that we commit to each other."

Justin's gaze shifted back to me and he smiled slowly, and suddenly every other person in the room faded away. "Brian Kinney, I love you. I'm going to keep on loving you, faults and all, for the rest of my life, and I want the rest of my life to be spent with you." He took the larger ring from the box, and grasped my left hand, and gently slid the ring onto my finger.

Ten years later, it still fit perfectly.

I thought I'd be more nervous than this. I thought I'd be embarrassed. I thought I'd be terrified.



Instead, it seemed like the simplest, most natural thing in the world to take the smaller ring from the velvet box and say, "Justin Taylor, even after everything we've gone through, it's been worth it. You make me happy, and even though sometimes I'll mess up, I'm going to make *you* happy, for the rest of our lives." I slipped the ring onto his finger, and it slid on so easily, and looked so fucking perfect, that my breath caught in my throat. "I love you," I said.

Distantly, as if I had something covering my ears, I heard cheers and applause and could see everyone jumping up. But I was distracted. I put a hand on the back of Justin's head, and the other one on his hip, and he wrapped his arms around my shoulders, and we kissed.

We've kissed thousands, possibly millions of times. But that kiss was in the top three.

Justin's lips were soft, and his hair was soft, and his skin was soft, and warm, and he smelled faintly of paint and shampoo, and I felt my cock go hard in my pants almost instantly. But I didn't want to fuck him. I just... wanted this. This was where I wanted to be. All the anxiety I'd felt all day, all week, was gone. This was right.

When we finally pulled apart it was only to catch our breath. I think he was just as startled as I was to realize where we were, and that everyone was staring at us.

Half of the crowd was crying. Emmet was sobbing into a tissue, and Ted was consoling him, eyes glistening. Michael was wiping his eyes on his sleeve. Jennifer was blinking rapidly and trying to look like she wasn't about to burst into tears at any moment.

"Fuck, Brian," Michael finally said, standing up. "You should have told us." He yanked me roughly into a hug, and that's when everyone else crowded around.

All I wanted to do was take Justin back to Britin (maybe it wasn't such a bad name after all) and – shit. I wanted to make love to him. I wanted to take him, slowly, and gently, and make it last for hours. And then I wanted to do it again, and again, until we passed out.

That was clearly not going to happen for a long time.

"Oh, honey," Jennifer gasped, hugging Justin tightly. "I didn't... I didn't know-"

"We wanted to surprise you," Justin said, smiling so widely I wondered if his face hurt from it. Mine did.

I was passed from person to person for hugs, like I'd just won the nobel prize, or gotten a gold medal at the Olympics. Of course, this was almost more impressive, considering who I was.

"If you get snot on my Armani shirt, you're paying for it," I told Emmet as he sobbed into my shoulder.

He stood back and shook his head, wiping his eyes quickly on a tissue. "Why didn't you let me throw you a real wedding? Or a party, at least? What about the... gold... whatever they were? The gardenias!"

Justin laughed and pulled out of his mother's grip only to be hugged by Lindsay and Melanie at once.

"We decided we didn't need that," I said. "And we also knew that if we didn't at least include all of you, we'd never hear the end of it."

"They also wanted to save the money to go on a month-long trip to Europe," Gus said.

I glanced over at him and smirked. "Well, that, too."

"A *month*?!" Ted asked, grabbing my arm. "B-B-But what about Kinnetik?!"

"Don't worry Theodore, I've gotten everything in order. You'll be *fine*."

Ted paled and looked nervous. Well, a little more anxiety wasn't going to kill him.

"What about Gus?" Lindsay asked, frowning at me.

"He can stay here," Michael said quickly.

I shot him a thankful grin. I'd been counting on that.

"Awesome! We can watch movies and eat tons of greasy food!" Gus said.

Michael smiled at him, and nodded quickly. Then he looked back at me. Behind the happiness was a little regret.

"I can't believe this," Lindsay said once she reached me through the crowd. "I guess you can't do things the traditional way, can you."

I snorted. "When have I been traditional about anything?"

I felt a hand on my arm and knew it was Justin. Finally. I quickly wrapped my arm around his waist, determined not to let him get separated from me by everyone again. I wanted him *close*. I wanted him as close as possible.

"Well, you have to at least *dance*!" Emmet said happily, running to the stereo.

"Oh, that's right!" Ben said, following him. "That's one tradition that *can't* be broken."

I arched an eyebrow at them. "Dance? To what? The Spider-Man soundtrack? That weird new-age shit *you* listen to?"

Michael swatted me on the arm. His eyes were still red and puffy. "We have *other* CDs, you know."

I snorted. "Yeah? Like what?"

"Oh, this is perfect," Ben said, putting a CD in the player. "Come on, you two."

Ted helped Ben move the coffee table out of the way to create room for us to dance in, and I laughed.

"Looks like they want to see us dance, Sunshine," I said, grinning at Justin.

"I don't blame them. We do look fabulous when we dance together," he said, smiling back.

I smirked and put a hand on his back, pulling him towards the large empty space in the living room as the music started.

I recognized it instantly and laughed.

*It Had to be You* started playing from the speakers, sung by Frank Sinatra.

"This is ridiculous," I said, putting a hand on Justin's hip.

"Ridiculously romantic," he replied, taking my hand.

I spun him around the small space we had to dance in, and he smiled the whole time.

For an instant I recognized that smile, and thought of his face as I danced with him in another time, and another place.

Normally a thought like that would depress me. Instead, I just let out a short laugh and dipped him.

He lifted his leg and giggled, just like he had over fifteen years ago.

When I lifted him back up, he rested his forehead against mine. I completely forgot that we were being watched. I completely forgot where we were. All I knew was that Justin was here, and I could see the ring on his finger that I'd gotten for him so long ago. And somehow, finally, it seemed like we were where we were supposed to be.

Once the song was over, everyone else crowded into the living room, dancing and talking. Jennifer pulled Justin away almost immediately and I let him go reluctantly. Every moment I wasn't touching him was painfully obvious. It was like my body temperature dropped when I didn't have his hand in mine, or his body against mine. It was like being hungry, but I wasn't.

It was like being a fucking lesbian, thinking about my feelings, and emotions, and getting *married*.

I stepped to the edge of the crowd, shooting Justin a grin and pulling a joint out of my pocket. He nodded over his mother's shoulder. He knew I had to bail for a minute. Before anyone else could notice, I went to the back door and slipped out, taking a deep breath of air and lit the joint, inhaling from it deeply. My hands were still shaking.

"Gonna share?" Michael asked, coming outside to stand next to me.

I handed him the joint and arched an eyebrow at him.

"I can't believe you," Michael said, shaking his head.

I shrugged.

"It took you long enough," he said. He inhaled deeply from the joint and then handed it back, coughing a little. "Shit. How did Justin talk you into it?"

I smoked silently for a minute before responding. "It was my idea."

Michael stared at me, expressionless. "You don't believe in love, you believe in fucking? Marriage is for heterosexuals and self-hating fags?"

Pursing my lips, I shrugged.

There was a long silence while we stared at each other. Michael's face was blank, but in his eyes I could read every emotion he was feeling. Regret. Relief. Pain. Love.

I slid an arm around Michael's shoulders and cocked my head at him. "I love you, too."

He grinned a little and leaned his head against my shoulder. "Always have, always will," he said.

We stood silently in his back yard, listening to the laughter and music coming from inside, and smoked the entire joint, until there was nothing left.

The door opened behind us, and I could *feel* that it was him.

"Aren't you supposed to be showering me with attention?" Justin asked. His voice sounded amused, but underneath there was fear.

He was just as scared as I was, and seeing me with Michael wasn't helping.

I dropped my arm from Michael and turned to slide my hands around Justin's hips. "Hey there."

Justin smiled, then shifted his gaze to Michael.

"Congratulations," Michael said. He put a hand on Justin's shoulder and looked him in the eyes. "I'm happy for you. I really am."

Justin arched an eyebrow at him, and I gripped his hips a little tighter. The air was tense.

Then Michael spoke again. His voice was soft, and he ducked his head while he talked. "Brian deserves to be happy. You'd better make sure he is."

Justin's smile widened and nodded. "You know I will."

Michael looked up and gave Justin a playful grin, and the regret seemed completely gone. "You'd better."

Justin glanced at me, then pulled out of my grasp and yanked Michael into a hug.

I shoved my hands into my pockets and watched as Michael tensed, then slowly relaxed and hugged Justin back, smiling.

When they broke apart, Justin took my hand and squeezed it tightly. "It's about time you took me home and fucked me."

I snorted and nodded. "Yes, dear."

Michael laughed and led us back inside. "Wait, you can't go yet!"

As soon as we came back in, we were grabbed and pulled into the living room, and stood in the middle of all of our friends.

"We have to take a picture to commemorate this event!" Emmet said. He had a camera set on a tripod on the other side of the room. A moment later he rushed into the group, and we all smiled.

I'd been in plenty of family photos before, but this might have been the first one where I actually smiled and meant it.

More photos were taken after that. Justin and I with Jennifer. Justin and I with Michael and Ben. Justin and I in every possible grouping that you could get. Then, Justin and Gus and I.

Finally, once the roll was full, I pulled Justin towards the door. "We're leaving *now*," I said. "You can't keep us here any longer!" And before anyone could reply we slammed the door behind us and ran to the car.

Justin was laughing, and I pulled him against my body, leaning against the side of the car. Our lips met, and it felt just right all over again.

When the kiss was broken, Justin nuzzled his nose against mine lightly before pulling away and opening the car door. He smiled and said my favorite words. "Take me home."

So I did.

***It's funny how no matter how far you go in life it only takes seconds to bring you back to where you started. –Anonymous***

## **Epilogue**

*6 months later.....*

"Dad?" I heard being bellowed through the house as I pulled a pan of chicken parmesan out of the oven.

"In here, Gus."

He strode into the kitchen and plopped his messenger bag down on the kitchen chair. "Hey," he said to me, smiling and peering over my shoulder at dinner.

"Hey yourself. How was your first day back at school?"

"Awesome." He seemed a little bit giddier than usual. No need for alarm I told myself. He's allowed to be happy. "Where's Dad?" He asked popping a piece of bread into his mouth.

"He should be home any minute. New account." I handed him some plates out of the cabinet so he could set the table.

He set the table silently and I noticed he was smiling the entire time. Now, it's normal for Gus to smile. He is naturally a happy kid. But he's wasn't just smiling. He was fucking beaming from ear to ear.



Just then I heard the front door open and the sounds of cursing and shoes being kicked across the foyer.

"Did you leave your shoes in front of the door again?" I asked Gus.

"Oops." He shrugged and continued to smile.

Brian stormed into the kitchen and glared at Gus.

"I don't spend hundreds of dollars on diesel sneakers so you can leave them all over the fucking house."

"Jesus Christ, what's up your ass?" Gus set the last plate down and smirked at his father.

"Nothing." Brian grumbled and lightly kissed my cheek as he passed me on his way to the wine.

"Well THAT'S not the truth. I hear you sometimes. *'That's it Justin. Fuck me.'*" He made a girly voice as he tried to imitate his father in the throws of passion. I blushed immediately and if looks could kill Gus would have been dead where he stood from Brian's eyes.

"Why the fuck are you so happy?" Brian asked as he poured himself and me a glass of wine. He sat at his normal place at the dinner table and Gus sat across from him, with a raised eye brow.

"I'm not allowed to be in a good mood?" Gus asked buttering his bread.

Brian raised an eye brow at him and swished his wine around in his glass. "Mmmm. Of course. So, how was school?"

"Awesome." Gus and I both answered at the same time as I brought dinner to the table.

Brian grinned at me and I touched his cheek gently. I know it sounds ridiculously lesbianic but I don't think I have ever been more in love than I have been this last year.

After the whole unconventional wedding Brian and I had at Michael and Ben's, our life could not have been any better. We waited until Gus was done with his freshman year at school and then took a month long vacation to Europe. But before leaving we both went for a full work up of testing.

STD's.

Almost every type of disease you could think of including diabetes and cancer.

And of course, HIV.

Our trip through Europe had to have been the best experience of my life. Just being able to be there with Brian in the most romantic cities on earth was a dream come true. When we went to Italy he made sure I got to see every piece of art there was to see. Statues, paintings, buildings, he made me see it all.

We did E in Amsterdam and danced till 5 in the morning. We made love on the balcony of our hotel room in Paris with full view of the Eiffel Tower. We got drunk and stumbled down the streets of Berlin, kissing and groping along the way.

He told me he loved me in front of Windsor Castle in England. He held my hand while we

walked through the Promenade des Bastions in Switzerland.

He told me he never knew it would be like this as he pushed inside me in our king size bed in a tiny bed and breakfast in Greece. He whispered how he couldn't wait to be inside me with nothing between us. To be able to feel me, feel us with no more hesitations. No more regrets. Nothing but me and him.

When we got back it was like nothing could touch us. Even though I was a little overwhelmed with trying to get 7 paintings done for the Philadelphia gallery that had told me they wanted to feature my work, and with the 3 new accounts Brian was trying to get under Kinnetik's belt. But none of that mattered. Brian and I were better than we had ever been.

And last night he stood in the doorway of my studio with the widest grin on his face that I had ever seen, waving two pieces of paper around in the air I knew that from now on nothing could break us.

All results from our tests had come back for the second time in 6 months.

Negative.

Negative.

I knew he wanted to fuck me right there where I stood. Just bend me over my art table and ram into me, no lube, no condom, no nothing, but he knew I needed more than that.

That this had to be done right. It had to be perfect for me. And he wanted to give me that.

Brian wanted to give me everything.

We knew Gus was going to be spending the night at Joey's tonight. So we decided, tonight was going to be the night. Nothing could ruin this. Nothing WOULD ruin this.

I had plans for a hot bath followed by candlelight love making in our bed. Okay, okay so a little too romantic even for Brian, but he was going to get to fuck me raw. I think he would be able to overlook it.

I was broken out of my daze by an odd declaration by Gus.

"I want to join band."

Brian stopped mid bite, his fork hanging in the air.

"Huh?" he asked.

"I want to join band," Gus said matter-of-factly.

"Wouldn't you rather play soccer?" Brian asked.

"Or join art club?" I chimed in.

Gus rolled his eyes and let out a huge sigh. "This may come as a surprise to the both of you, but I'm my own person."

"We never said you weren't Gus." I butter Brian's bread for him and he gives me a tiny smile.

Yeah, this is the way things are now.

"Okay, so what do you want to play in band, Gus? Guitar? Bass? Drums?" Brian asked.

"Violin." Gus answered.

Brian dropped his fork on his plate and it echoed through the kitchen like a knife in my stomach.

"No fucking way."

"WHY?" Gus asked, gaping at Brian.

"Cause there will be no violin music played in this house." Brian looked at me with fire in his eyes. *"Ever."*

Gus looked between Brian and me a few times and frowned.

"That's such BULLSHIT! You can't tell me what instrument I can play in the fucking band!"

"Why the hell do you want to join band anyway! You're not a fucking nerd!" Brian yelled.

I touched his hand and he calmed a bit.

"Uncle Mikey was a nerd! And you were friends with him!" Gus argued back.

"Uncle Mikey read comic books and wore loafers. He didn't play fucking violin in the fucking school BAND!"

"Brian, calm down. Gus should be able to do what he wants. He's 16 for Christ's sake." I had to admit Brian was being a little ridiculous about this.

But by the look on Brian's face the happiness he had been feeling since last night from the results he waved at me, was dissipating and fast.

"Gus, why the sudden interest in band? I mean you never once mentioned wanting to play an instrument before." I took a sip of my wine and waited for his answer.

Then I saw it again. That smile. That beaming smile that radiated through his entire body. And, oh my god, was he blushing?

"Is there someone IN band you like Gus?" I ask smirking at Brian.

A slow grin forms on Brian's lips.

"Maybe." Gus answers.

"What's her name?" I nudged Gus's arm and he batted at me playfully.

I sneaked a look at Brian and he wasn't grinning anymore. I knew it was Brian's wish that Gus would have turned out to be gay but I knew from Gus's recent crush on my sister, Brian may not get his wish.

"It's not a girl."

"That's my boy." Brian was smiling again and downed the rest of his wine.

"It's not a boy either."

"Uhhh Gus. That's really the only two choices you have unless you have some new found fetish with animals and if that's the case I think we have a larger problem than you just wanting to play violin."

Brian smacked my arm and looked intently at his son. "Well, if it's not a girl, and it's not a boy, than who the fuck is it?" Brian asked.

"It's a teacher."

Brian laughed and straightened up in his seat a little. "Is it your gym teacher?"

I glared at Brian and put my finger to my lips, giving him the shush sign. That was the LAST thing Brian needed to tell his son about. Its bad enough he told ME at 17.

"So, tell us about this teacher." I watched as Gus played with the food on his plate.

"He's the new music teacher. He's so hot."

"Well at least he's a guy." Brian chimed in.

"Would you be quiet?" I warned him. "Okay, hot new music teacher," I continued.

"Yeah, he's a genius. You should hear him play."

I smirked at Gus because the way his face was flushed and he couldn't wipe that smile off his face was just too adorable for words. It reminded me a lot of how I used to be when I first met Brian.

"An older man, huh?" Brian eyed me. "Leave it to him to take after you."

I had to laugh at that.

"Well, parent-teacher conferences are next week. We'll have to check this hot teacher out, right Brian?"

"Yeah, I'll be the judge of just how hot he is." Brian answered as I cleared the dishes from the table. Brian saw I was struggling so he grabbed a few from me and gave me a pat on the ass.

"What's this hot teacher's name?" I asked Gus as I got to the sink before Brian, bumping my hip into his playfully.

"Mr. Gold."

And that's when all the dishes Brian had in his hand ended up on the floor.

.....

# **Time Runs Wild**

## **Sequel to Kondo and Time After Time**

*"He loves me."*

*"Your dreamy-eyed school boy."*

*"In ways that you can't."*

*"In ways that I won't."*

### **Chapter 1**

"How do you know Ethan, anyway?" Gus asked from the back seat in a voice that sounded eerily like Lindsay when she was pissed.

"It's *Mr. Gold*," I said through gritted teeth.

Justin shot me a nervous glance and I pretended not to notice.

"*He* said we could call him by his first name," Gus shot back.

I gave him a look that promised a slow and painful death in the rearview mirror. He ignored it. He usually did.

"Well?!" Gus asked, leaning forward in his seat and frowning at the back of Justin's head.

Justin sighed and looked over his shoulder at Gus. "Put your seatbelt on."

"Tell me how you know him!"

Casting one more nervous look my way, Justin cleared his throat and spoke. "We used to... go out. A long time ago."

Well, that wasn't exactly the whole story, was it?

Gus frowned a little. "Oh."

I took the turn into the parking lot fast, and Gus slid across the back seat and bumped his head on the door.

"OW! Hey!"

"I told you you should wear your seatbelt," Justin mumbled.

He was avoiding looking at me. He knew exactly what kind of mood I was in, and it wasn't good. Before we'd left he'd actually offered to take Gus himself, but I wasn't having any of it. First off, I'd promised Lindsay to do the good father thing and be involved in Gus' education, whatever that meant. Secondly, I wasn't going to give Justin a moment alone with the fiddler if I could help it.

Not that I thought anything would happen. Because it wouldn't. Justin loved me. We were married. He didn't want the fiddler. Why would he? I was hotter, smarter, and better in bed than him by far. And the few things that asshole had given him, I did now. Or at least I tried.

But there was still this nervous, anxious part of me, deep down that knew... if Justin was ever going to leave me for anyone, it would be him.

We went into the school building and walked down the hall. Fuck, I hated going into schools. College wasn't so bad, but high school... well, there were more than a few bad memories associated with that...some of them from my school days, and some from Justin's.

That's why I insisted Gus go to this expensive private school in ml:namespace prefix = st1 />West Virginia. It was closer to home, it had a great reputation, it wasn't a religious school, and most importantly it was as different as it could be from the places Justin and I had gone.

Still... there were memories.

*"Brian?"*

*"What?!"*

*"What's that?"*

*"A bomb."*

*"What?!"*

*"Well, what the fuck does it look like?!"*

*"Why do you have a fucking bomb?!"*

*"To blow up the school. Why else?"*

We were going to the music department first. I wanted to get this over with, and Gus wanted to show off how hot his teacher was. Fuck. The fact that Justin had liked him was bad enough, but my own *son*?!

The music room was huge, and there was a crowd of teenage girls and their mothers gathered in the corner, surrounding someone with black hair.

Fuck.

"There he is!" Gus whispered loudly.

FUCK.

The black-haired man stepped through the crowd of women, smiling charmingly at them. "Sorry, ladies, I have more parents to meet. I'll see you on Monday."

The girls all made disappointed noises, their mothers included, and left the room, leaving us alone.

He turned to face us and the look of shock on his face would have been hilarious if I wasn't so fucking angry.

Standing in front of me wasn't the greasy, awkward, school-boy I'd known and despised so long ago. No, he'd grown up. He'd matured. He'd gotten... fuck. He'd gotten hot.

He was still short, compared to me at least, and thin, but he'd gotten a little more muscle tone. His skin was slightly darker, like he actually bothered getting a tan now, and his hair was a little long, wavy, but it looked freshly washed and not like he was using half a bottle of product anymore.

This was NOT good.

"Justin?" the fiddler asked, and walked to us, a look of amused surprise on his face.

Justin smiled and shrugged stiffly. "Yeah."

"These are my parents," Gus said, sounding bored.

The fiddler looked confused for just a moment, and glanced at me, then smiled widely and pulled Justin into a hug. And Justin hugged him back.

Gus' eyes were huge and his face was pink and I could FEEL the anger radiating off of him.

I just stood there, rooted to the spot, my expression carefully calm, but anger churned in my gut.

When they pulled apart, Justin was slightly flushed, but smiling.

"So, you're his *parents*?" Ethan asked, looking at Gus.

"He's my *real* dad," Gus said, jerking his thumb at me.

Justin winced. That was harsh. But I couldn't bring myself to care.

Ethan nodded, smiling. "I should have seen the resemblance." He gave me a look, sizing me up, and almost held out his hand for me to shake – but then didn't. He must have realized that there was no way I would shake his hand. "So the two of you are still together." He hesitated before continuing. "That's good."

Justin beamed at him.

I repressed a scowl.

Gus stepped between Justin and the fiddler and smiled charmingly at him. "I'm trying to convince them to let me take violin!"

I rolled my eyes and the fiddler gave me an amused look. Fucking asshole. He knew exactly why I wouldn't be exactly receptive to that idea, and it *amused* him.

"Well, you should really try a few instruments before you pick one," he told Gus. "I'm teaching most of the string instruments," he said. "With hands like yours, you might do well taking guitar."

I felt my shoulders relax slightly. Even if he was going to take lessons with the fiddler, at least I wouldn't have to hear that horrible noise every day when he practiced.

Gus frowned a little, considering. "Maybe," he said.

"I think that would be a better choice," the fiddler said, and gave me another amused look.

*Asshole.*

He turned to Justin and smiled. "Gus is doing well in his general music classes, though. He has talent. Although sometimes he's a little disruptive."

"Well, that's because sometimes your class is boring," Gus said cheerfully.

"Sorry," Justin said. "It's not *my* influence."

The fiddler chuckled charmingly and I wanted to strangle the life out of him.

"Say, would you like to have dinner? I'd love to catch up," the fiddler said, reaching out and touching Justin's arm.

*Bastard!*

Justin beamed at him. "Sure! I'd love to hear about your fabulous adventures in Europe."

The fiddler gave Justin a smug look, and I had the urge to kick the back of his legs **HARD** so he'd fall on his face and break his nose.

"Well, I spent a few years there, but I came home. It's a long story."

"How about tonight, then?" Justin asked.

"Sure," the fiddler said. "Do you know Mario's?"

Mario's?! The most expensive fucking Italian place in West Virginia?! The place *I* always took Justin when I was taking him on a not-date?! *Asshole!*

"Of course," Justin said. "How about six o'clock?"

The fiddler nodded, and then turned to Gus, who was fuming. "And I'll see you on Monday."

Gus forced a smile, and then stomped out of the room. I shot Justin a look, and followed him. Dinner?! Just the *two* of them?! Romance? Wine? Fucking *candles*?

As I followed Gus to meet his next teacher, Justin trailing behind us, I wondered just how much money it would really take to cover up a murder.

*It was ONE stupid mistake. Look how many times you forgave Brian!  
I NEVER forgave Brian. I never had to. Cause he never promised me anything. You did.*



## Chapter 2

So maybe that was a bad idea.

I had Brian pissed at me. I had Gus pissed at me. And the ride back from Gus's school was like Chinese water torture.

No one said a word. Gus I'm assuming because he was jealous and angry that I was having dinner with *'the man of his dreams'*. And Brian because he was jealous and angry because he thought I was having dinner with *'the man of MY dreams'*.

Either way maybe that wasn't such a good idea.

The minute I walked into Mario's, I wanted to turn right around and go back home. This restaurant was romantic and intimate. Just like Ethan always was.

The hostess ushered me to the table and as soon as Ethan saw me he flashed that toothy smile I had known so well 12 years ago. A smile, for a long time, I thought would be the smile I would see forever.

"Hey!" Ethan kissed my cheek quickly and pulled my chair out for me. Guess some things never change.

"Hey. You look great." And he did. Dressed in a tailored black suit jacket and pants, a purple shirt underneath with no tie. Perfect musician attire.

"I was going to tell you the same thing. Wow. You still don't look a day over 21." He flashed the smile at me again and I felt myself blush. Fuck.

"Brian says the same thing." I folded my napkin over my knees and looked down at the table.

"Well, he did like you young."

"Ethan..."

"Okay, Okay. I'm sorry. No bad remarks about Brian. Dually noted." He made a zipping gesture across his lips and I smiled at him.

"Thanks."

"So," He began. "Married. With children. Who would have thought?"

"I know." I took a small sip of my water and finally looked into his eyes. Okay, bad idea.

"How long you been married?" Ethan asked.

"Not long. About 6 months."

"Really? But..." He looked confused.

I let out a small sigh and began. "I spent 10 years in New York. I did pretty well out there. Had my own gallery. I liked it but..."

"But this was your home." He finished.

"Yeah. I missed it. I missed my family." I smiled. "I missed Brian."

"I guess some things are just meant to be." His eyes darkened with sadness.

"They are." I told him matter of factly.

He looked into my eyes and bit the inside of his mouth. That was a new quirk. I'd never seen that one before.

"So tell me about you." I said trying to lighten the subject.

"Well, I spent about 3 years in Boston doing the symphony there. Then I spent about 5 in Europe until I decided to come home. Tried to get a job at PIFA for old times sake but their staff was full so I sent out my resume to a few private schools and here I am."

"Wow. So a teacher huh? Never would have suspected."

"I like it. Makes me feel useful I guess." He shrugged and there was the vulnerability I knew all too well.

"So you live in West Virginia?"

"Yeah bought a house with my enormous wealth." He snorted.

I nodded.

"You?"

"Yeah, Brian and I have a house. Gus lives with us. He was living with his mothers in Canada but...it's a long story."

"I looked for you when I came back." He blurted out.

"I...what?" I asked.

"Just wanted to see if you were still...around. I figured you might have been cause of Brian but...the couple of people I ran into said you weren't."

"People? Like who?"

"Well I went to the diner and saw um..." He scratched his head. "Elliot?"

"Emmett?"

"Yeah! Him. He said you didn't live in Pittsburgh anymore. That's all he'd say."

Thank you Emmett.

"Ethan..."

"I'm sorry for what happened. You know, between us. I'm sorry I hurt you."

"I know. But Ethan, we were kids. I mean I was 19 for Christ sakes. Who knew if that would have lasted even if you hadn't of cheated."

He shook his head and fumbled with his silverware.

"That's why I did it."

"Huh?"

"That's why I cheated. I knew it wouldn't last. I figured, what does it matter? He'll go back to him eventually anyway."

Oh.

My.

God.

"I trusted you. I CHOSE you Ethan."

"No, you came with me that night to prove a point. That you could walk away. But I never really had you Justin. We both know that. And seeing you, now, with him still. Married, with a kid, and a house. I know I did the right thing. He's the one you were meant to be with. Not me. It hurts, because I thought about you for a long time. I probably always will."

I reached across the table and held his hand. His fingers intertwined with mine and he looked up at me, his eyes wet.

"Ethan, I loved you. I did. I cared so much about you. But..."

"I know. I know. You don't have to explain."

"I'm IN love Brian."

"I know that too."

We sat like that for a long time, holding hands. We talked about the past, the present. The future. He said he was seeing someone. Another teacher at the school. He didn't know where it would go, but it was a start.

I told him all about New York and Brian and Gus. He said he could see parts of me in Gus. That made my heart skip a beat.

When dinner was over, he walked me to my car and hugged me tightly. He told me how happy he was for me, and if I ever needed anything, or ever wanted to just hang out, he'd be there. I told him the same.

I drove back home, a feeling of sadness but fullness in my heart.

There were times I still thought about Ethan over the last 12 years. If I had made the right decision just leaving the way I did. Wondering if I should have forgave him. But he had done it not to hurt me. But to set me free.

I opened the door to my home and hung my jacket next to the door. I turned to find Gus standing at the bottom of the stairs, arms folded.

"Well???" He demanded.

"Well what?"

"What happened?"

"We ate. That's normally what people do in restaurants."

"Don't give me that crap DAD."

"Gus." I touched his shoulder and looked in his eyes. "Don't worry. He's all yours."

"Yeah?" His eyes sparkled and he followed me up the stairs. "Did he say that? Did he mention me? What did he say? DAD???"

I closed the door in his face as I walked into the bedroom. I found Brian sitting upright in bed, glasses on, reading over some paperwork, the 10 o'clock news on.

"Hey." I said gently, removing my shirt.

"Mmm." He murmurs.

"What's that?" I asked pointing the paper work in his hands.

"New account." He grumbled.

Great. He was still pissed.

I got dressed in my comfy flannel pajama pants and an old paint stained t-shirt and climbed into bed and tried to focus on the news. He was tense next to me. I could feel it. He finally set down the paper work onto the bedside table and removed his glasses. I shut the TV off and he flicked the light off.

The room was silent for a while.

"So what happened?" He finally asked.

"We fucked on the table. It was hot."

I heard him growl in the darkness. Okay so maybe that wasn't funny.

"Nothing Brian. We had dinner and talked. That's it."

He remained silent.

I rolled onto my side and threw one arm around him. I pressed my nose into his shoulder.

"He said the reason he cheated was because he knew eventually I'd leave him for you anyway."

Brian rolled his head and looked at me.

"Well it's true." He told me.

"I know." I whispered.

He wrapped his arms around me and kissed me, his tongue sliding next to mine gently.

"I told him I loved you. I only wanted you. I always have." He groaned and pinned me down onto the bed. His hands ran up my sides and he sucked on the patch of skin right underneath my ear.

"You know...we haven't...yet..." He whispered against my ear.

I moaned softly and wrapped my legs around his waist.

"Please..." I whimpered. "I'm yours."

"Mine." He growled.

He undressed me slowly, savoring the sight of my pale skin against the sheets like he always does. But this time as he was about to be inside me he didn't reach for a condom.

If there was one thing that would prove to Brian just how much I was his, it was that.

Inside me.

Raw.

*"You stupid little twat, never let anyone fuck you without a condom."  
"You're not just anyone."*

### Chapter 3

My Sunshine likes romance. My Sunshine likes flowers, and words whispered softly in his ear, and holding hands, and kisses on his cheek. I've done my best since he came back to accommodate that. I've done my best to remember to show him little signs of affection, to not hold back, to let him know how I feel. It's not easy. It's not something that comes naturally. It's not something I do every day. But I try to, for him.

So I was ready. I had firewood stacked next to the fireplace. I had a bottle of red wine that was about a hundred years old ready to be poured, and French silk sheets on the bed. I had candles. I did my research. Fire and alcohol and highly flammable fabrics equal romance. Don't ask me why. It seemed like if we weren't careful, we could easily burn the house down. But if my Sunshine wanted a fire hazard, he'd get one. Just don't ask me to understand why that's romantic.

We were supposed to do it the other night. We were ready. Gus was going to be out, and I had the sheets on the bed, and all I could think about was what we were about to do. Then sonnyboy brought up the fiddler, and all thoughts of fucking Justin raw were gone.

Surprisingly, Sunshine was understanding. I expected him to queen out or get angry that our evening plans of fire and fucking had been ruined, but he wasn't. He seemed to understand. He didn't even bring it up.

Then we saw *him*, and I knew all bets were off. After everything we'd been through, if there was one person who could lure Justin away from me, it was him. I was worried. I knew I should trust him, but I was worried. The fiddler understood things like flammable romantic gestures. He wouldn't have to TRY to be romantic. He'd just do it.

When Sunshine got home, I made sure to look like I was working. I had paperwork out, I had the news on, and I had my damned reading glasses that I've started to need more and more on. But I wasn't reading. I wasn't doing anything. I was just sitting there, waiting.

Would he come back looking pink, his lips swollen, all freshly fucked and glowing? Would he come back with that look in his eye that meant he wanted to leave? Would he come back smelling like someone else?

Then he told me how it went. He told me they talked, and the fiddler gave him some bullshit excuse about cheating on him. He told me nothing happened. And then he told me he only wanted me.

I was on top of him before I could think twice about it. I kissed him, and tasted him, and he said he was mine. I asked him. He said yes. He wanted it. He was giving up the fire and the candles and the alcohol. At least I'd put the sheets on just in case, but the rest of the romance was gone. Gus was probably downstairs, watching TV. It wasn't the picture-perfect romance novel setup that he'd wanted.

But now that it was about to happen, he didn't want those things. He didn't want superficial romantic gestures. He just wanted me. And somehow, ironically, that made me understand it. I understood why he'd want this to be romantic. I understood, because in that moment, I felt that overwhelming surge of emotion that I'd tried to ignore for so many years, that Justin made me feel all too often. I felt in love. I felt head-over-heels in love. Because as much as my Sunshine likes candles and flowers and hand-holding, in the end, he'd rather just have me.

And suddenly, romantic gestures didn't seem so difficult. Suddenly, I wanted to take him slowly. I wanted to kiss every inch of his body. I wanted to make him moan and sigh and whimper and turn ten shades of pink before I took him over the edge. I wanted to savor him. I wanted to make his entire body hum. I wanted to make love to him, though I'd never say it like that out loud. I wasn't just thinking about how tight, and hot, and wet, and amazing he was going to feel around me anymore. I was thinking about him. I was only thinking about him.

I kissed him, slow and hot, and he tasted incredible. His lips were warm and swollen, and when I brushed my tongue against his it was soft and tasted better than anything I could possibly imagine... except for other parts of his body. He whimpered against my lips and I slid a hand into his hair and he clung to me like he was afraid he'd drown, and I was all that was holding him up.

I knew how that felt.

When I broke the kiss and looked into his eyes, they were a deep blue, and they were glassy, and I just hoped he didn't start to cry, because I wouldn't be able to handle that. I started kissing his neck, just below his jaw, and kissed all the way down his throat, over his Adam's apple, down to his chest, and he shuddered. He shuddered and tightened his arms around me, and I licked him. My tongue ran down the center of his chest slowly, and then to the left to find a nipple. I circled it with my tongue and another shudder ran through his body.

"Brian," he whimpered, and my cock twitched so hard it was startling. I hadn't realized how aroused I was. I hadn't realized that my cock was throbbing, and leaking pre-come on the silk sheets.

I licked over to his right nipple and sucked on it gently, and he arched his back and moaned softly. Then I lifted my head and stared down at him. His lips were parted and red, and he was panting. His entire body was already flushed.

Fuck. We weren't going to last long, if I didn't do something about it.

I shifted downwards and wrapped my hand around the base of his cock and he jerked his hips.

"Brian! I... I'll-" he started to say, but I shook my head. If I didn't get us both off once before I pushed into him, we wouldn't get more than a few seconds before we came. That wasn't going to happen if I had anything to do with it. I wanted to savor him. I wanted to feel him, really feel him, and enjoy it.

So I ducked my head and wrapped my lips around his leaking cock, and started to suck. I don't give blowjobs that often, not to completion. They're a good way to get him aroused, but usually I'd rather have him come with me inside him. But right now, I wanted to taste him. I wanted to lick every inch of his cock, and suck him dry.

It only took a minute before he was coming, his fingers tight in my hair, his back arched, and his hot come pouring into my mouth and he was moaning my name.

I swallowed and licked and sucked him clean, and he was still hard. He was still throbbing. When I looked up, he was panting and writhing, and his entire body was a shade of pink so dark I hadn't seen him like that in years.

I reached down and touched my own cock, and it twitched hard. I had to come, too. I had to make it last. I started to stroke myself, but he swatted my hand away and grabbed my cock, aiming it at his stomach and chest, and began to stroke.

I wanted to look down at his pale, pink hand stroking my hard cock. Watching him jerk me off was always hot as hell. But I couldn't rip my gaze from his face. I couldn't look away from his eyes. Then he lifted his gaze to mine, and that was all it took. I moaned deep in my chest and came hard onto his body. He licked his lips and brought his hand to his mouth, and began licking it clean.

My entire body trembled. Somehow coming hadn't given me the control I wanted. Instead, it was just a promise of things to come. His gaze never left mine as he licked my come from his hand, and then reached down to smear it across his stomach and chest. He was marked now, on the outside. Now it was time to mark him on the inside.

I finally tore my gaze away from his face, and looked down at his body. Christ, I wanted him. I wanted him now. I couldn't think anymore. I couldn't do anything, except spread his legs and reach for the lube.

Then he grabbed my wrist and shook his head.

Fuck. He didn't want lube? I must have looked confused, because he opened his mouth and whispered, "I don't need it. I don't... I only want you."

And that was it. That was all I could stand. All thoughts of licking and kissing the rest of his body, of burying my tongue in his ass, of hours of foreplay were gone. There was time for that later. Right now, every ounce of self control I had was gone. I had to have him. I had to claim him.

My hands were trembling as I lifted his legs over my shoulders. I stared down at his ass, and spread it, and his hole was red and twitched a few times. I knew I should look into his eyes, but I couldn't. I had to see it. I had to watch it.

I pressed the tip of my cock against his hole, like I'd done a handful of times in the past few months, wishing that I could thrust in. We'd talked about it over and over on our honeymoon. I'd spread my pre-come over his ass so many times, while he moaned

and told me how much he wanted it, how he couldn't wait, how he wanted to fill him up.

But now that it was about to happen, he was silent. I was silent. There wasn't a sound in the room.

Then I pushed in.

I watched as the tip of my cock disappeared in his ass, and he clenched down around it, and dug his fingernails into my shoulders, and shuddered, and he let out a moan that was hungry and needy and helpless.

I froze, and sucked in a deep breath. I watched as his hole clamped down over and over around me. And I felt it.

Heat. So much heat. And the texture... fuck. He was soft, and I could feel the rings of muscle, and every detail. And he was tight... so fucking tight. I could feel it all.

I felt a shudder go down my spine as he clamped down again, and then he said it.

"More," he gasped, and that was the end of all conscious thought.

I thrust into him the rest of the way, until I was completely buried inside him, and he clawed at me, and his legs tightened around my shoulders, and I lifted my gaze to his face, and we stared into each other's eyes.

Then there was just heat, and friction, and the sound of his gasps and mewls and the smell of sex and sweat. Each thrust was slow, and purposeful. I don't know how long we fucked. It might have been hours. It was probably only a couple of minutes.

His eyes were dark, almost black, and I thought fleetingly of the first time I was inside him, and how he'd been then, and how I'd felt that first time, and how I'd tried to ignore it. I saw the seventeen year old boy who followed me home, and the beautiful, strong man he'd become at the same time. And I felt it. I felt a connection to him, like a magnet, like every time I pulled out, thrusting in was impossible to resist.

And then it happened.

I came.

I was blinded with white light, and the shudder that went through my body was so intense I couldn't breathe. And then I shot into him. And I *felt* it. I felt his ass clamp down so tight around me it almost hurt, and I felt my hot, thick come coat him, and pour into him, and then I felt him shudder.

He moaned my name so loudly it was practically a scream, and he grabbed a fistful of my hair and yanked, and I didn't even feel the pain. I just froze, buried completely within him, feeling the heat inside of him spread, and watched as his come shot across his chest and hit his face.

There was a moment, then, where neither of us were breathing, or moving, or saying a word. We were suspended, just for a moment, and stared into each other's eyes, and the feeling of being *this* connected was almost too much.

Then I inhaled, breathing in the hot, thick, hormone-filled air of the room loudly, and he did the same.

His body trembled as I lowered his legs, and his hands slid down my arms.



"Brian," he whispered.

"Justin," I echoed back. I couldn't think of what to say. I couldn't think at all.

I looked down slowly pulled out of him. I don't know what I expected to see, but it wasn't this. My cock was slick with come, and barely softening, and red. And then I was completely out, and I spread his legs, and he tensed, and a drop of come dripped out of him, and ran down his ass.

And I was gone again. I heard someone growl, distantly, and it must have been me. I grabbed his hips and rolled him onto his stomach and spread his ass, and ran a fingertip over his bright red hole.

More come leaked out of him, and my entire body hummed with need.

"Brian-" he gasped, and spread his legs further, arching his back.

I didn't think. I couldn't. I just spread him, and started to lick. I ran my tongue from just behind his balls, up to his swollen, sensitive hole, and licked my come away. He shuddered and mewled and clawed at the sheets, and I heard them rip, and I didn't care.

It was the most incredible thing I'd ever tasted. It was me. It was him. It was pure lust. I licked, and sucked and thrust my tongue into him. I had to hold his hips with a white-knuckle grip to keep him still, because I wasn't going to let him go, not until I had every drop of it, not until I'd tasted everything he had.

When he was whimpering and shuddering, and the rip in the sheets had extended halfway down the bed, I lifted my head and licked my lips. He was staring at me over his shoulder and he shuddered visibly.

"Brian," he gasped. "Please... again..."

I was inside him before he could brace himself, and this time there was no slow, savoring of sensations. This time it was hot, and fast, and rough, and moans, and screams and clawing, and scratching, and biting, and thrusting in, in, in, in...

I came quickly. I moaned so loudly it hurt my throat, and filled him up again with my come, and he shuddered and shot onto the sheets, arching his back so far it was a wonder he didn't break his spine.

We froze like that, trembling, drenched in sweat, and then I was done.

Without pulling out, I wrapped my arms around him, and rolled onto my side, spooning him. Tonight I didn't have to pull out. Tonight I didn't have to throw a condom out, worrying about diseases and hurting him.

Tonight I was going to stay inside him all night.

I yanked the covers over us, and he pressed back against me completely. I buried my face in his hair, wet and sticky with sweat, and inhaled.

He didn't say anything. I don't think he could. He was gone. And in the reflection of the dark window across from us, I could just see his face. He was crying. It was only a little, but he still was.

My chest tightened, and I brushed my fingers over his face, and he inhaled a shuddering breath. I tightened my arms around him, and he clamped down around my cock again, and I nuzzled my face into the back of his head.

"I love you," I said, and my throat was so raw, and I was so tired, it sounded just like it had the first time I said it. And like the first time, I didn't say it because I had to. I didn't say it because it would make him happy, or make him stay. I said it because it was true.

***Mom, this is Justin. Justin, this is...my mother.***

## **Chapter 4**

I felt the warm sunlight hit my face and his arm protectively around my waist. I smiled and pressed my back closer to him. He stirred, nuzzling his nose into my back and sighed happily. The feelings that were coursing through my body were indescribable. Some of them felt like happiness but that word couldn't even compare to fluttering of my heart and stomach. Some of them could be described as love, but I know now that after 15 years whatever it was Brian and I had together went beyond love. Beyond anything that this earth could handle.

As warm as it was in bed with him and as beautiful as it was with the sun shining into our bedroom, I needed to get up. I needed to wash myself of the dried come that was all over my aching body. I needed to make him breakfast. I needed to give him everything. But nothing I could do or say today or for the rest of my life could make up for what he did for me last night. What I waited 15 years for.

I gently got out of bed, brushing his hair from his face and kissing his forehead softly. Fuck he was so beautiful I could cry.

I showered quickly and padded downstairs in just my sweatpants. I found Gus sitting at the table, eating cereal.

"Good Morning." I said cheerfully. He turned his head and raised an eyebrow at me. No doubt he was a Kinney.

"Good Morning to you." He smirked at me and I smacked his head playfully as I walked by him.

"I'm going to make breakfast. You sure you just want to eat cereal?" I asked him as I turned on the coffee maker.

"Well I waited forever for you or Dad to get up." He slowly smiled again. "But I guess you two are pretty tired considering...."

"Considering what?" I leaned against the counter and pursed my lips together.

"Considering you up all night fucking. Don't think I didn't hear you. I heard you all the way DOWNSTAIRS. With the TV ON. LOUD. Was he trying to murder you or what?" He shook his head and shoved more captain crunch into his mouth.

I blushed 19 shades of red and ignored him.

I was half way through making an omelet when Brian walked lazily into the kitchen, scratching his bare stomach and yawning. Our eyes met from across the room and my

stomach did flip-flops. His eyes glazed over with what could only be described as love and I smiled brightly at him. He made his way over to me and wrapped his strong arms around my waist from behind. He leaned in, brushing his lips against my cheek.

"Morning Sunshine." He purred. I closed my eyes for a second and took in his scent, and his warmth.

"Mmm. Good morning it is." I purred back to him.

"You guys are gross. Stop it." Gus's voice shook me from my moment. I glared at him and went back to my omelet.

"Mmm...smells good." Brian said into my ear. But I knew he didn't mean the eggs. I heard a groan from the kitchen table and chuckled.

"We're making your son nauseous." I told him.

"Our son." He murmured and walked to the kitchen table and plopped down. "Morning Sonnyboy."

Gus groaned again. "You guys are ridiculous."

Brian grinned and opened the business section of the paper.

"What are your plans today?" Brian asked his son.

"Getting as far away from this house as possible. I know what you two do on Saturday's. I don't need another recap of last night's events." Gus shuddered and brought his bowl to the sink. He peered over my shoulder. 16 and taller than me. Like I said, definitely a Kinney.

"Extra Bacon?" He asked.

I smiled at him. "Yeah. Sure." I handed him the plate.

"Nice." He sat back down at the table and browsed the comics.

I watched with joy as my...wow son, and my...Jesus, husband sat at the kitchen table going about their morning routine. I realized in that moment, that I had truly arrived. That this was what I had waited my entire life for. This feeling of utter happiness.

I brought Brian his omelet and bacon and leaned down and kissed him forcefully. His tongue swiped across my lower lip and a low growl escaped my throat. "Later." I whispered against his mouth. He slapped my ass and picked up his fork.

The phone rang and it made me jump a little.

"It's probably Daphne." I said aloud.

"Checking up on how things went with Paganini Jr. I suppose." I heard Brian say but when I turned to look at him he was grinning. There was no more need for jealousy. Not after last night.

I answered the phone, a grin from ear to ear. "Kinney-Taylor house of pleasure. How may I service you?" I hear Brian laugh and Gus groan behind me.

"That had better NOT be one of my friends." Gus grumbled.

"Um, Yes. I'm looking for Brian?" A females voice came over the line.

"Um.." I eyed Brian. "Can I ask who's calling?"

"Claire. His sister."

"Oh. Um. Hold on." I pressed the receiver to my chest. "Brian? Its...Claire."

"Claire who?" He asked not looking up from the paper.

"Brian. You damn well Claire who. Here." I extended the phone out.

He shook his head. "Not today Sunshine."

I knew what he meant. He didn't want anything to ruin today. The way he felt. The fact that he was happy for once with nothing brining him down.

"He's not available. Can I take a message or...?"

"Alright listen. I know he's there. Fine he doesn't want to talk to me well then you can tell him yourself. His mother died." I heard a click of the receiver and the nasty voice was gone.

I stood there, frozen, the receiver to my ear for who knows how long.

"Justin?" I heard Brian call.

I hung up the phone and turned to look at him.

"What did the cunt have to say?" He asked with a smirk.

I walked to him slowly and sat down next to him. He raised an eyebrow at me. "Well?"

"Um, maybe we should talk upstairs." My heart was beating a mile a minute. I had no idea how to fucking present this. How to fucking say it.

"Just tell me. She pregnant again? Getting divorced or married again?" He popped his last piece of bacon in his mouth.

"She died Brian." I told him, my voice low.

"WHO DIED?" Gus yelled.

Brian raised his eyes and I got the look I expected. It was blank. His eyes were blank. His expression was blank. His movements. Everything. He knew what I meant.

"WELL?" Gus grabbed my shoulder.

"You're grandmother." I told him.

"Grandma Peterson???" His eyes immediately widen.

"No. My mother." Brian said to him, his voice monotone.

"Oh. Drag." Gus said in a non-caring voice and got up from the table.

"GUS!" I yelled.

"Justin, don't. He didn't know her. Why the fuck should he care?" Brian touched my hand.

"It doesn't matter. You're his father. I mean....Your mother died."

He shrugged and picked his plate up from the table and walked to the sink.

"Brian...do you wanna..." I'm not even sure what I was asking him. Did he want to talk? Call someone? Go out? Fuck? Shit, at that point I would have done anything.

He walked past me and when I tried to touch his arm he jerked from my grasp. I heard his footsteps across the hardwood floors and moments later his office door slammed. It made Gus and I both jump and Gus gave me a pained look.

"What is he going to do?" Gus asked me.

I looked blankly at the doorway of the kitchen and sighed heavily.

I knew exactly what he was going to do.

First he was going to pour himself a glass of beam.

Second, he was going to call Michael.

*My mother was a frigid bitch. My father was an abusive drunk. They had a hateful marriage, which is probably why I am unwilling or unable to form a committed long-term relationship of my own.*

## **Chapter 5**

Copyrights get bought and sold all the time, especially in the comic world. Sometimes when that happens, titles change, and characters get altered. But no matter how many times a title changes hands, and how many times that little company logo in the corner of the cover might change, a few basic things will always remain the same. The original team of writers are always there in spirit.

Batman might get darker, and more violent. He might have created the Joker in one continuity, and in another he just met him later on. He might be a ninja in one movie, and a paunchy white guy in another, but a few things will always remain the same. No matter what else they change, no matter what writers may take on the Batman title in the future, he'll always wear a cowl and fight criminals. And he'll always be The Bat Man.

That's sort of what had happened, I realized as I stood at the front door to Brian's mansion and rung the doorbell. Justin Taylor was the publisher that owned the copyright to the Brian Kinney Operating Manual, but when it came to the origin story, Michael Novotny still held the creative license. No one knew that part of the story better than me.

The door swung open, and Justin stared back at me. His too-blue eyes shifted from my face, to the giant pizza box I was holding, and back to my face again before he sighed and stepped aside to let me in. "He's in his office," he said.

I felt like an intruder. I came inside and tried to smile at Justin as if nothing was wrong. "Hey, you want some? There's plenty here!" I held the pizza box out to him, but he shook his head.

"You should go talk to him. He needs you," he said. His eyes weren't cold like they used to be when Brian needed me, but they weren't happy either. If anything, Justin just looked... disappointed.

"Look, um..." I said, trying to think of some way to make this okay. "He just... doesn't like you seeing him all..."

"I know," Justin said.

"I'm just the only one he doesn't mind seeing him depressed," I said quickly.

Justin's eyes narrowed and I realized how that had sounded. *Shit*. Me and my big mouth. "I mean, not that he doesn't *want* to talk to you!" I grinned nervously and shrugged. "I mean, probably he just doesn't want to bother you, or-"

"*Michael*," Justin snapped.

I tensed and shut up. *Shit*.

"It's fine. Just... go talk to him."

Realizing I had absolutely *no* chance of fixing the situation, I just nodded and went to Brian's office as quickly as I could. I like Justin. I like Justin a lot. He and Brian are happy. Fuck, I don't think I've ever seen Brian happier. But... I think he gets jealous of me sometimes. Brian's not very good at opening up to people, *obviously*, so I doubt he's told Justin very much about his past. I figured I should talk to him a little about that if I could... but I also knew I might not get a chance today. This wasn't going to be easy.

I didn't knock on the door to his office. I just went in, and shut the door behind myself, smiling widely. "Pizza delivery for Mr. Kinney!"

Brian was sitting on the futon sofa that Justin had recently insisted Brian put in his office, so he'd spend less time sitting on the floor, and he was drinking a glass of Beam. I wondered how many other glasses he'd drunk already. "Mikey," he said. "What the fuck is that?"

"It's pizza. Weren't you listening?" I plopped down next to him, and opened the box, revealing a huge supreme pizza with every greasy topping you can imagine. The only time Brian will eat truly unhealthy food is when he's either really depressed, or when he's too happy to care. Unfortunately, this was for the first reason.

Brian grabbed a slice and took a big bite, and then sighed heavily. "Claire actually expects me to be involved."

I grabbed a slice too, and chewed on it for a minute before replying. Timing was everything in situations like this. "She probably doesn't have time to plan a funeral very quickly by herself."

Brian just nodded and ate the rest of his slice. Fuck. This was bad. There wasn't even any music playing, and he wasn't talking.

"Did you know she was sick?" I asked as softly as I could manage. I knew asking him something like that was a risk, and it might just piss him off, but it was important to know.

He shook his head, and I felt relieved. At least he wasn't biting my head off yet. I watched him eat his slice and I ate mine, and I thought back to the first time I ever met Mrs. Kinney. That was one of the weirdest moments of my life up until then. I'd never seen a parent act like that to their kid. I hadn't known adults like that existed. I guess I was pretty sheltered.

*"I just need to get my skateboard. Then we can go to your house," Brian said, walking quickly to his room.*

*Michael followed him, glancing around eagerly. "We could hang out here!" Brian's house was so neat, and tidy, and so much different from his own.*

*"No," Brian snapped. "We can't. Come on." He shoved Michael into his room and shut the door behind himself, going to his closet to find his skateboard.*

*Michael stared around the room with wide eyes. It was so... neat. His own room was always a wreck, with comics everywhere, and action figures all over the place, and cookie crumbs in the bed. Brian's room was neat. Brian's room was tidy, even. And the bed was even made! Who makes their bed?! Michael didn't think anyone did.*

*"Fuck, it's not here. Fuck," Brian muttered. He pushed Michael aside and dropped to his knees, looking under the bed.*

*Michael walked to Brian's dresser and ran his finger over the top of it. There wasn't any dust. He frowned and looked back around the room. There were only a couple of posters on the walls, and a few comics (ones that Michael had loaned him) stacked neatly next to the bed. There were no toys lying around.*

*"Where are all your toys?" Michael asked.*

*Brian jerked his head back from under the bed, pulling his skateboard out with him. "What?"*

*"You don't have any toys. Or stuff." Michael frowned, glancing around more, as if he'd suddenly notice them in the small room, hiding in some corner he hadn't examined properly.*

*"Why the fuck would I have toys?" Brian asked.*

*"Because..." Michael faltered, then shrugged. "I have toys."*

*"We're in fucking high school. We don't need toys." Brian stood and ran a hand through his hair. "We should go."*

*Michael felt himself pout. He liked his toys. Just because he was growing up didn't mean he couldn't like his toys! They were important to him.*

*Brian opened the door and led Michael back out into the hall and quickly walked to the front door. Michael trailed after him, looking around more. As he looked around this time, he began to notice that as nice as it was that the house was clean and neat and didn't have creepy ceramic figures everywhere and all the furniture matched... it was sort of... cold.*

*"Brian!" a woman's voice called from the kitchen.*

*Brian stopped abruptly and Michael ran into his back, grunting. "WHAT?" he shouted back.*

*"Come here!" it shouted again.*

*"Is that your mom?" Michael asked eagerly. He loved moms. His own mom was crazy, but she was great, too. And all of the friends he'd ever had had mothers who loved him.*

*"Yeah," Brian grunted, and he turned to walk to the kitchen.*

*When Michael followed him into it, he found a woman leaning against the counter, a glass of wine in her hand. She looked old, older than his own mom, but Michael wasn't sure if that was because she really was, or if she was just one of those people who looked that way.*

*"What the fuck is it?" Brian snapped.*

*Michael gaped at him. If he'd talked to his own mother that way, he would have gotten slapped across the face and grounded.*

*Mrs. Kinney just stared at him with an icy-cold look, and then looked at Michael. "Who's this?"*

*"Oh, um, hi Mrs. Kinney!" Michael smiled and stuck out his hand for her to shake it. "I'm Michael Novotny. I have class with Brian."*

*Mrs. Kinney stared at Michael, and then at his hand, and then shook it with a loose grip, sneering as if he was dirty.*

*Michael jerked his hand back when she was done. Her hand had been freezing cold.*

*"You know you're not supposed to have boys over," Mrs. Kinney said.*

*Brian flinched and nodded. "We're going."*

*"Your father will be home soon," Mrs. Kinney said.*

*"I know! I said we're going!" Brian said back.*

*Mrs. Kinney looked at Michael and her eyes narrowed. Then she looked back at Brian and shook her head slowly. "If your father meets him he'll be very angry."*

*Brian's entire body seemed to tense up, and he glanced at Michael.*

*Michael frowned at him, confused. Why would Brian's dad not like him?*

*"Why can't you just make friends with a nice girl?" Brian's mother asked, sighing and swirling her wine in her glass. "If you did, maybe your father-"*

*"It's none of your goddamn business!" Brian shouted at her, his right hand gripping his skateboard so tightly that his knuckles were white.*



*Mrs. Kinney straightened up and her eyes narrowed, and suddenly Michael was very, very intimidated. "Do not take the lord's name in vain."*

*"FUCK you, and FUCK the lord!" Brian shouted.*

*Mrs. Kinney sneered at him. "For that, I suppose I'll have to tell your father about your little... friend."*

*Brian's eyes widened and his face paled, and then he grabbed Michael's arm so hard Michael winced. "Come on," he mumbled.*

*Brian dragged Michael out of the house as fast as he could, and slammed the door behind them. They walked quickly down the street towards the bus stop, and Brian was silent the entire time. Michael wanted to ask him what had just happened, and why his father would be so angry about Michael, but he had a sneaking suspicion that he knew why. He also had a feeling that all of this somehow explained the weird bruises that Brian showed up to school with all the time. Yeah, it explained all too much.*

"She wasn't really my mother," Brian muttered, grabbing another slice of pizza.

I blinked a few times, jarred out of my memories, and grabbed another slice. "What?"

"Debbie was more of a mother to me than she ever was," Brian said, staring across the room at nothing.

I felt my eyes sting with new tears and I forced myself to grin. "Yeah.." I missed Ma. I missed her so much that every day I still cried about it. Ben is great and understanding and supportive, of course, but... still. Ma was *Ma*, my best friend besides Brian, and my entire family all at once. Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever get used to not having her around.

"I shouldn't even be upset," Brian muttered, taking a swig of beer.

"Sure you should," I said softly, bumping my shoulder against Brian's gently. "She was your mom."

Brian shrugged stiffly.

"Even if she was a bitch," I said, grinning a little.

Brian shook his head, but when he glanced at me, he was grinning. "Remember when she caught us reading Captain Astro in my room?"

I felt myself smile. "Yeah, and she gave us those rosaries and told us to pray for our sins to be forgiven!"

Brian let out a short laugh. "We had to explain that comics weren't gay porn."

"And she took one look at them and said 'In God's eyes they're the same,'" I said, pitching his voice up to imitate her.

Brian laughed silently, his shoulders shaking with it. "Fuck. What a bitch."

"Well, no one can tell me Captain Astro wasn't gay. Even your mom thought so!" I said happily, beaming at him.

Brian ruffled my hair and grabbed the bottle of beam, pouring himself another shot. "You're so pathetic."

I couldn't stop smiling. I felt sad, of course. It was his MOM that had just died. And he'd never had any kind of resolution with her. Fuck, I don't even know if they'd talked in years. Brian doesn't tell me that kind of stuff anymore. Sometimes I miss it, and sometimes I'm just relieved. Justin can have that responsibility now.

Justin. Hm.

"You should talk to him," I said, bracing myself for a full Brian queen-out.

Instead, he just looked back at his glass of Beam and then drank it down quickly. "What for?"

"Well, so he doesn't hate me for knowing stuff about you that he doesn't, for starters." I grabbed another slice of pizza.

Brian sat his glass down on the floor and got up to get a box out of his desk. He sat back down heavily next to me and opened it, pulling out a baggy of weed and some rolling papers.

I watched him roll a joint while I talked. "He wants to know."

"He doesn't need to," Brian muttered. He wasn't looking me in the eye, but he wasn't yelling either.

"Of course he needs to," I said. I put my hand on Brian's shoulder, trying to get him to look at me. He didn't. "How is he ever going to feel really close to you if you hide stuff from him?"

Brian's lips quirked up in a funny sort of way, and the tips of his ears turned red like they always did when he was excited about something, or embarrassed.

"What is it?" I asked, scooting closer to him, so our legs were pressed together. "What?" He wasn't telling *me* something now.

"If he doesn't feel close to me after last night, he never will," Brian muttered softly, still not looking up.

I blinked at him a few times. What the fuck was he talking about?

Brian finally lifted his gaze to meet mine, pulling a lighter out of his pocket.

And then I knew. *Fuck*. "Oh," I heard myself say.

He winced slightly, the kind of wince that only I – and maybe Justin – would have noticed. "Mikey-" he started to say.

"No, that's great," I said quickly. And it was. It was great. It was totally fucking great.

A look of guilt was in Brian's eyes as he handed me the joint and lighter. He hadn't meant to tell me. Why not? Why shouldn't he? It was great. It was beyond great. It was wonderful. I was happy for him. Why wouldn't I be?

I lit the joint and inhaled deeply, shutting my eyes.

So why did I feel so fucking jealous? Because Ben and I could never...

I handed the joint to Brian, and exhaled, coughing loudly a few times. Brian patted me on the back.

"Careful, Mikey, don't kill yourself on it."

I took a deep breath and sighed, clearing my lungs out as Brian smoked, and with the smoke that came out of my lungs, I tried to let out the jealousy, too. Ben and I could never... do it that way. And that was fine. We didn't need to do that to be close. It wouldn't make us any closer even if we did. It would feel good, probably, but... we didn't *need* it. I had a feeling it meant a hell of a lot more to Brian and Justin than it would have to me.

"I'm happy for you," I said, looking Brian in the eyes. And I meant it.

He grinned a small, almost bashful grin, and then it faded and the light in his eyes faded, too. He exhaled and handed me the joint back. "But then Claire called."

"Yeah," I muttered. "Great timing, of course." I didn't smoke more. I didn't need to drive stoned, and I wasn't going to stay all day. So I just handed it back.

Brian smoked quietly for a long moment, inhaling from the joint, and exhaling little clouds of smoke. He was so beautiful. Sometimes I couldn't decide if he was more beautiful when he was happy, or when he was like this. Still, I preferred him happy.

"You have to talk to him."

Brian shut his eyes and sighed, exhaling another small cloud of smoke. "I do?"

"Yeah. You do." I said, eating more pizza.

"Fuck," he muttered.

I grinned a little and rested my head on Brian's shoulder, and he wrapped his arm around me, handing the joint back. What the hell. I took another hit before handing it back. It made the pizza taste better, and the memories hurt less, and there couldn't be anything wrong with that. "Remember when she met Lindsay?"

Brian laughed a little and tightened his arm around me, resting his head against mine. "She thought we were dating. She was so fucking relieved."

I smiled widely, remembering how smug Brian had been. Lindsay had been amused, too, but it had worked for both of them. They hadn't been ready to come out to their parents yet, so it was an arrangement that worked. I'd been jealous, of course, but I'm always jealous about something. Lucky for me, Brian seems to think it's more cute than annoying. Jerk.

"Then she met Justin," Brian said softly.

I blinked a few times in surprise. "She did?"

"She came over once," Brian said, his voice thick from smoking the joint. "We'd been fucking. Justin came down from the bedroom and introduced himself... he was all pink

and sweaty." He laughed and nuzzled his face into my hair a little. "It would have been fucking funny if it wasn't so fucking tragic. He actually tried to introduce himself and shit."

I shut my eyes and laughed softly. "Poor Justin."

"Let's just say it didn't go over well."

"Fire and brimstone?" I asked.

"She never did accept him... or Gus," he said, and now his voice was turning harder.

"Gus has plenty of grandparents," I said. "He didn't need her."

Brian nodded against me and sighed. "Fucking bitch."

"She was," I said.

Brian's grip on me tightened, almost painfully, and I could feel the anger welling up inside him. It was just like Brian to be upset, and depressed, and then all of a sudden be so furious that it was almost dangerous to be around him.

"That fucking *bitch*," he said louder.

I sighed and shifted against him, feeling my eyes droop. Weed always made me hungry, and then it made me sleepy.

Brian shifted so that my head fell into his lap, and he leaned back on the futon, getting comfortable.

Soon after that, we fell asleep, Brian's arm resting on me, the room filled with smoke and memories.

***You go do whatever you have to do for whatever reason you have to do it. I just want you to know I love you. And I'll be here when you get back...***

## **Chapter 6**

There are things about Brian, I will never know. Things about his past. Things about his childhood. Even things about his friendships that no matter how long we are together I will never be told. And I've learned to accept it. I've learned to brush it under the rug and not let it eat at me.

But that doesn't mean it still doesn't hurt.

Brian and Michael were in his office for almost 3 hours. Sometimes I heard laughter. Sometimes I heard raised voices. And I smelt the soft aroma of pot, pizza and beer. The Michael and Brian cologne.

Gus tried to get me tell him about Brian's mother. And after sitting there for a few minutes in silence I went upstairs and slammed my studio door shut. I shouldn't have

been angry. This wasn't about me. It was about Brian. But how come I couldn't tell my son for all intent and purposes, what his grandmother was like?

Because I didn't know. I didn't know jack shit about Brian's childhood.

But that was 2 days ago. And now here I stood in front of a coffin holding a woman I didn't know. A woman I knew nothing about. A woman, that for all intents and purposes was one of the main causes of Brian's pain.

And as fucked up as this sounds, I was glad she was dead.

But I knew her death wouldn't bring Brian any closure. Any sigh of relief. If anything all it would do was open the door to even more unanswered questions. Even more pain. Even more abandonment.

Lindsay came down for the funeral and stood next to me, a stone cold expression on her face. Brian, on my other side, looked everywhere but at his mother's coffin. Michael stood to the other side of him, his arm inside Brian's.

But Brian's cold hand, held onto mine for dear life.

I've come to the conclusion that it has to rain at funerals. I think there is some cosmic rule that no matter what it has to rain. Brian once said to me as we lay in bed, softly touching each other after the throws of passion that he was sure that on the day I died, the sun would still shine. I cried in the shower that night.

The only sound I heard, other than the soft sound of rain hitting the ground, was the constant wails from Claire. Every time her sobs drowned out the minister, and she would scream Mom over and over, Brian gripped my hand so tightly I was scared he would break my fingers. But I just held on. Cause what else can you do but hold on?

Gus stood perfectly still next to his mother. Sometimes he looked down. Sometimes he looked at me. But most of the time he looked at Brian with a worried look on his face.

There was a gathering at Claire's after the funeral. None of us went. Instead we went back to Michael's. Lindsay had brought JR down for the trip and Gus wanted to spend some time with his mother and sister. And I knew, right now, Brian needed his two best friends.

The ride home was silent. Gus was spending the night at Michael's, and except for some thank yous and tiny smiles, Brian had barely said a word all day. About 2 blocks from the house I finally spoke.

"You hungry?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"You didn't eat Brian."

He remained silent.

I trudged up the stairs, removing my jacket and tie along the way. I was exhausted. Emotionally more than physically. I knew Brian would be in his office till all hours, and I was just going to fall right into bed and sleep. I knew Brian wanted to be alone. And as much as I needed him, wanted him near me, I had to respect that this is just how Brian was.

So I was surprised as I lay in bed, half watching some awful reality show on VH1 when

the bedroom door opened. He removed his clothes and crawled next to me. I stayed perfectly still, waiting for him to either fall right to sleep or explode. He did neither. He took the remote out of my hand and shut the TV off and threw it onto the bedside table. I turned my head to look at him and he brushed a strand of my hair from his face.

He looked...so young in that moment.

"You okay?" I whispered to him.

"Shhh." He silenced me with a soft brush of his lips to mine. He was so gentle. His fingers gently caressed my face, and at first he just gave me soft kisses on my mouth, chin, nose. He was warm, so fucking warm, and I wondered if he had gotten drunk in the half hour he was down stairs. But he didn't taste like Beam. He tasted like him.

That taste I had in my mouth for the past 16 years. A taste I had grown to crave more than air. He pulled me closer to him, his hands gliding up to my hair and he twirled it around in his fingers.

I was surprised at how slow he was being. But if there is one thing better than being fucked into the mattress by his massive 9 and a half-inch cock, its being made love to by him. When he is like this its....perfection. His touch, his smell, and like I said his taste. It's intoxicating. It brings to be levels in my life I didn't know existed. It's like finishing the best painting of your life...and then some.

His gentleness is like chocolate, new paints, a sunrise, a sunset, newly fallen snow, a shooting star on a clear winter night, piano music, the Sistine Chapel, Paris in spring, and...just love all rolled into one.

I rolled onto my back trying to take him with me. He held onto my hip and pulled me closer to him. What was he doing?

"Brian..." I murmured against his lips. He ran his tongue along my bottom lip and his fingertips tickled my sides.

I giggled a little and writhed in his arms.

"Justin..." He whispered. God, when he says my name like that....

"Mmm?" I licked his neck.

"Justin..." He repeated, his voice low and rough.

I pulled back and looked at him. His eyes were soft, and again for the second time tonight he looked so fucking young. So innocent. So...beautiful.

"What Brian?" I asked.

He gently lifted himself off me and lay down on his stomach. I stare at his back for a while, breathing hard and getting used to the warmth of him leaving me. He lifted his head and looked at me and said it one more time.

"Justin."

And then it all made sense. It was like a lightening bolt went through me. My skin immediately caught on fire and my heart hammered in my chest.

He wanted me to fuck him.

To take away whatever it was inside him that was hurting him. To make him feel.

And the thing that made me want to cry more than anything was that he was choosing me. Me over drugs, or beer, or even his best friends. He wanted me to be the one to console him. To comfort him. To love him.

I rolled onto my side and smoothed my hand over his muscular, tanned back. Even at 45 he was....fuck...he was a god. My hand traveled more south and when my fingers brushed over his crack, he sucked in a small breath.

I leaned over, my tongue making small circles on his skin and I felt him clutch the pillow underneath his head. I savored him. I licked and nibbled and sucked every piece of flesh I could find. He arched, and writhed and moaned softly as I worshipped him.

My hot breath blew against his hole and he let out a small "oh" of surprise. I smiled against his ass and slowly licked a quick line against his opening. He pressed his face deeper into the pillow and I reminded him with a soft whisper to breathe.

I licked his hole and ran my fingertip around it getting him wet. I felt his leg quiver under my arm and I held it down a little firmer with my elbow.

"Just...do it." He moaned into the pillow.

I kissed his hole one more time, sat up and leaned back on my heels. My cock was so hard it hurt. I wiped some of the pre come off my tip and smeared it on his tight pink hole. He shuddered, as did I. Fuck that was so fucking hot.

I reached over to the bedside table and grabbed the lube, pouring a generous amount on my hand. I covered my cock, being careful not to tug too much or I'd explode all over his ass right there. He was patient, his breathing steady as I prepared him and myself. I pushed my lubed index finger into him and he sucked in his breath harshly. God, not only was he tight to begin with but he was tense.

"You have to relax Bri." I ran my other hand over his back to relax him.

His hole contracted and then relaxed around my finger and I took that as a sign and pushed my middle finger alongside the first. I saw his hands reach up and grab the edge of the mattress under his pillow and he pushed back and down onto my fingers.

My cock jumped; leaking all over his leg and I knew that enough was enough.

"You want me to...?" He asked quietly.

"No, its okay. Stay like that. Relax." I removed my fingers from him and lightly brushed my tip over his hole. It opened a little, then clamped closed and my wetness had already stuck to him. I stared at it, almost mesmerized at what I was about to do.

I was going to fuck Brian. Raw. I was going to come inside him. Mark him.

Brian was a lot of firsts for me. My first fuck. My first love. My first everything.

But I wasn't a lot of firsts for Brian. Yeah, okay so I was the first and only person he would ever be in love with. That is a big deal. But I would be the first person, the only person, to ever come inside him.

I shook my head of the thoughts or I would never make it through this. I leaned over him, almost completely lying in his back, one hand on the bed, the other positioning my dick at his entrance. I pushed in, ever so gently, and the first initial feeling almost made

me pass out.

It was tight, tighter than any other time I had ever fucked him. It was hot, hotter than any sauna I had ever been in. Hotter than any candle wax he had poured onto my body. And the feeling of his skin, the skin inside his ass, fuck. It was...soft and smooth, and the first ring of muscle has always been the best part. The first thrust, the first...movement inside him, but this...there were no words.

I only realized I had stopped moving, stopped breathing, when his hand reached back and touched my thigh. I was broken from my daze and I gripped his hip with one hand and held onto the bed for dear life with the other.

And then I pushed. I pushed my cock inside him as far as it would go. And when I hit the end, and finally breathed out, Brian let out the most thunderous, erotic, most orgasm-inducing moan I had ever heard.

"Oh god Brian, shut up or I'll..." I couldn't even finish my sentence. He couldn't make noises like that. I'd never make it. I was so close already it was embarrassing.

After a few seconds of gathering myself, I pulled out slowly and pushed back in, my fingers digging into his hips. He got up onto his knees a little, his back carrying me with him, and pushed back against me. My balls slapped against his ass, and he buried his face in his hands. My hand smoothed up his side, his back and up to his neck and I tugged on his hair. His head flew back; his mouth open and eyes squeezed shut.

So...fucking...beautiful.

I could feel the heat over taking me and that slow tingle in my spine and I knew I had only seconds left before I exploded. My hands gripped his hips and I fucked him, in and out only a few times, the sounds in the room bouncing between balls slapping ass, moans, groans, and wet sounds of lubed cock inside tight ass.

When I came, it came upon me so suddenly, I cried out like a little girl. It went from a oh god, to a loud groan to a scream when I unloaded into him. I felt it hit his tight walls and then wash back over my hard cock. He gripped the sheets, pulling them off the corners and pushed back, back, back, against me and his whole body quivered, convulsed and he shot his load onto the bed. He lets out this tiny purr right after he comes and I wouldn't have known he had come at all if he hadn't of done that. I was in some other world. A world where I had just come inside Brian Kinney.

He lowered himself onto the bed and I lay on top of him as gently as I could. My stretched my arms out above his head and he grabbed my hand, intertwining his fingers in mine. I kissed his neck, and nuzzled my face into his sweat-drenched hair.

"Brian..."

"Shh. No." He told me.

"I just..."

"No, Justin."

"Let me say it."

"Not now."

"You need to know."



"I do know. Shut up."

"Then I want to tell you."

"Don't Justin. Please." His voice was starting to crack.

I was still inside him, I was as close to him as I could possibly get. There wasn't a way I could be any closer to him now. There was no more fear of him leaving me. No more fear of him cheating. No more jealousy of Michael. No more sadness of things I didn't know or would never know about him. Who needed that when there was this?

I kissed his neck softly and squeezed his hand.

"Don't..." He pleaded.

"I love you."

"Shut up." It was too much for him. No matter what I had just done, no matter how close we had gotten, how far we had come, Brian Kinney, even at 45 years old, didn't believe he deserved to be loved.

"I do."

"Shut up Justin. Just please..."

"I love you. I've always loved you. I always will. No matter what."

And as I pressed my forehead against his back and let the night and warmth fall around us, I stayed awake and listened to him cry.

*Look, I told you, I'm not your lover. I'm not your partner. I'm not even your friend. You're not anything to me.*

*I could be, if you gave me a chance.*

## **Chapter 7**

When I woke up, I heard the soft sound of music being played downstairs, and young voices talking and laughing. I rolled onto my side to find Justin still lying there, deep asleep, with the most peaceful expression I'd ever see on his face. I lay there a few minutes, watching him sleep, and feeling... oddly content.

I kissed his forehead and slipped out of bed, putting on my sweatpants before leaving the room. He needed to sleep. I needed a little time to clear my head before he looked at me with those deep blue eyes again. The night before had been... intense wasn't a good enough word. I needed coffee, and painkillers for the dull pain in my ass, and a smoke before I was going to be able to process it.

So when I got to the door to my office and found it open, and Gus and Molly sitting on the futon, giggling and passing a joint between them, I was almost annoyed. And then I heard what the music they were listening to was.

*"Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;  
None but ourselves can free our minds."*

"Christ," I grunted. "That's some fucking irony."

"Shit!" Gus yelped, and then started coughing hard. "Dad, I-"

"Oh, fuck," Molly muttered. "Now we're in for it."

I snorted and walked into the room, shoved Gus aside to make room for myself on the left side of the futon, and snatched the joint away from him. The soft burn felt good in my throat and chest, and when I exhaled I already felt more centered.

"Dad, um-" Gus started to say.

I shook my head and nodded at the record player, which was softly humming as it played the record. "What the fuck are you doing going through my shit? And what's the youngest ml:namespace prefix = st1 />Taylor doing here?"

Molly smiled at me, shrugging. Her eyes were glazed over and bloodshot. "I ran into Gus at the diner and told him I'd give him a ride home, if he hooked me up. You always have the best stuff."

Gus looked unbelievably pleased to have Molly spending time with him, so I decided not to give him shit, at least not right then.

I nodded back at the record player. "I haven't listened to this record in..." I squinted at the record player and tried to remember exactly how long it had been. I couldn't.

"We only smoked a little," Gus muttered, and he was probably telling the truth. He got high fast, from what I'd witnessed.

"It's fine, sonnyboy," I said, handing the joint across him to Molly. "But next time ask first."

Gus slowly smiled at me, and Molly beamed.

I leaned back against the futon, listening to the music, and felt it sink into me. "Redemption Songs, huh?"

"What?" Gus asked, as Molly handed the joint back to him.

"The song," I said.

Molly nudged Gus and nodded at me. "I don't think his lesbian mothers have educated him very well in the ways of reggae."

I felt myself laugh. "Yeah, Melanie wouldn't approve of her son listening to what she considers *stoner* music. And..."

Gus coughed again, handing the last of the joint to me. "And what?"

"And it reminds Lindsay of me," I said. I finished the joint off and felt pleasantly buzzed and light. This was definitely the way to start a day off work.

"You and mom used to get high all the time, huh?" Gus asked, glancing at Molly.

"Mm, in college," I said, watching them.

"Is it true the two of you *dated*?" Molly asked, wrinkling her nose in a way that was uncomfortably similar to Justin.

"Fuck, no" I laughed, coughing a little. "That's just the shit we let our parents assume." I felt a pang in my chest at the memory of Joan's face when she first met Lindsay, and how hopeful she'd been that I'd finally be what she wanted. I pushed the thought aside easily, and mentally thanked the marijuana-gods.

"But you fucked," Molly said.

"Ugh, do we *have* to talk about this?!" Gus moaned, hitting Molly with a throw pillow.

Molly laughed and grabbed a pillow of her own, smacking Gus with it. "What? They're both your parents!"

"But it's still weird! And totally gross!" Gus said, laughing, as Molly smacked him in the face with the pillow.

I watched them silently. Molly hadn't just shown up at my place in years, and never to spend time with sonnyboy. Something was up.

"What happened?" I asked, looking right at Molly.

Gus blinked at me, and then turned to stare at her curiously. "What?"

Molly opened her mouth, then shut it and made a face. "You're too fucking perceptive, Kinney."

I snorted and shook my head. "You're just too obvious."

Molly stared at me, then shrugged stiffly. "My boyfriend and I... we sort of broke up."

Gus' eyebrows shot up, but to his credit, he didn't smile or show any sign that he was a little more than pleased about it. "Shit."

Molly sighed and rolled her eyes, running her fingers through her hair. "Well, we wanted different things, and neither of us were willing to compromise."

I couldn't help but laugh at that. Sometimes her similarities to her brother were too much to handle. "What, he didn't get down on one knee and offer up a diamond ring?"

Molly's cheeks flushed and she averted her gaze, shrugging stiffly.

Gus' jaw dropped. "He DID!"

It was my turn to be surprised. "No shit?"

"Yeah," she muttered, looking back at me with a nervous expression. "He was really rich. And hot. Maybe I made a mistake."

I snorted and shrugged, ignoring Gus' nervous fidgeting. "So why didn't you say yes?"

Molly made a face and got up from the futon, slowly pacing, fidgeting with her fingers. "He just... he was sweet. He was really sweet. He liked... holding hands, and having romantic dinners, and..." She sighed and dropped her hands to her sides, shrugging at us. "He was so boring!"

I burst into laughter, only stopping when Gus nudged me sharply in the ribs with his elbow. I pinched his arm and he scowled at me.

"I thought girls *liked* romance and diamonds," I drawled, reaching for another joint from my stash.

Molly made a face. "Not in the Taylor family. Justin's the one who likes that crap."

I nodded, smoking silently. She was right. She'd always been more level-headed than Sunshine.

"So you don't... want to get married...?" Gus asked slowly. I could see the wheels turning in his head.

"Well, not *now*!" Molly huffed and sat back down on the futon. "Maybe when I'm older... but right now I just want to date, and have fun, and go to college, and... not worry about that stuff."

Gus smiled at her and patted her on the back. "Sounds reasonable to me."

Molly shot him a look, brushing his hand off of her. "That's because you want me for yourself."

I stuck my tongue in my cheek, and tried not to laugh.

But sonnyboy surprised me. He handled it well. "Yeah, I do. But it's more important that you do what makes you happy. So if you wanna wait to get serious about anybody, then you should do that."

Molly flushed slightly and blinked owlshly at him.

Gus' face lit up with a huge smile and he patted her on the back again. "Of course, the fact that that gives me more of a chance just makes it even better!"

Molly laughed and shoved Gus playfully. "You Kinneys never give up, do you?"

"Ah, I'm afraid that's probably something he learned from your brother, not me," I said,, my voice thick as I exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"Ugh. You call my brother dad, and you seriously want me to date you? Plus you're in *high school*." Molly tossed her hair, looking superior.

"I'm mature for my age," Gus said, smiling toothily at her. "You'll give me a chance eventually."

Molly rolled her eyes, but said nothing. Maybe sonnyboy was right.

I was about to get up to go find a snack for us when I looked up to see Justin standing in the doorway. His eyes were comically large, his hair still a mess from bed, and he was wearing his old paint-stained jeans and a faded t-shirt. He looked fucking adorable.

"Hey, Sunshine," I said cheerfully.

Justin's jaw dropped, and I waited for the queen-out.

"What are you *doing*?!" he asked, stalking into the room. He glared at me, then Gus, then Molly. "What are you even doing here?!"

Molly shrugged. "Getting stoned."

Justin shot me a venomous look and I snorted, trying to repress a laugh. "You think this is funny?!"

"I think it's *hilarious*," I said cheerfully.

"It's no big deal, *dad*," Gus said, hopping up. He grinned at Molly. "I've got a huge box of Cap'n Crunch in the kitchen."

"With crunchberries?" Molly asked, eyes narrowed.

"What other kind is there?!" Gus asked, making a face.

Molly smiled widely and hopped up. "Lead the way."

I snorted, amused, and watched them walk past a very ruffled looking Justin as they left the room.

"You're a terrible influence," Justin muttered, walking over to me.

I grabbed him as soon as he was within reaching distance, and yanked him into my lap, grinning widely at him. "You should know." I handed him the joint, and he took it, inhaling deeply.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked slowly as he smoked.

I nodded and cocked my head, sliding my hands up into his hair. "Your sister rejected her boyfriend's proposal and dumped him, and now sonnyboy thinks he's got a chance."

Justin sighed heavily and rested his forehead against mine. "Well, what will be will be." He finished the joint and tossed the roach into the trash.

I shut my eyes and slid one hand around his waist, the other still in his hair. He smelled like sex and sleep. "Mm," was all I could say. I sighed happily when he started stroking his fingers through my hair. That felt good. Months ago Sunshine and I had gotten high together while Gus was at his friend's house. We spent hours just touching each other. He told me I was just like a cat when I was high, that I liked to be petted and that I purred. Maybe he was right.

"What's this?" Justin asked softly, lifting his head to look at the record player.

I blinked at him. "The Wailers," I said. What did he mean, *what's this*? "The original LP of 'Legend'."

"Oh," he said hesitantly.

"Please don't tell me you don't like reggae," I groaned, tracing my fingers down his neck. "First westerns, and now this?"

He giggled and swatted my hand away. "It's okay, I guess."

"Okay? It's *okay*?!" I pushed him off of my lap onto the futon and got up to flip the record over. "It's more than *okay*, Sunshine."

Justin was rolling his eyes at me. I didn't have to turn around to know that. Fuck, but why did I have to marry someone with such bad taste in movies and music? I made a mental note to burn every single one of his "indie rock" CDs in the fireplace. Now *that* would be romantic.

I turned around as the music started to play, and grinned at him. I knew I was being ridiculous. I knew I was high, and I should probably keep my mouth shut if I wanted to maintain my pride, but... fuck that. When it came to Justin, my pride was long-gone. "Bob Marley and the Wailers aren't *okay*."

Justin laughed and shook his head. "Fine, fine. They're good. They're *great*."

"Damn right they're great," I said, kneeling on the futon and crawling back over to him.

"So if they're so great, how come I haven't heard you play them before?" Justin asked as I put a hand on the center of his chest and pushed him onto his back.

I hesitated, staring down at him, grinning in what was probably an idiotic, stupid way. "It's not the kind of music I listen to unless I'm happy."

"And are you happy, Mr. Kinney?" Justin asked softly, running his hands up my bare chest.

I ducked my head and nuzzled my face into his hair, making him giggle.

"I'll take that as a yes," he said, sliding his hands up my arms.

I shut my eyes, pressing my face into his neck and the music began to play.

"Are you...humming?" he asked, half-giggling.

Shit. Was I? Yeah. I was. I chuckled at the realization, and hummed louder against his neck.

He sighed happily, running his fingers through my hair and down my neck and shoulders. "Guess you're feeling better after all."

I shrugged a little, and hummed, placing a kiss on the nape of his neck, then another one a few inches up, then another one. Little goosebumps raised up on his skin and I ran my tongue up the rest of the way to his ear, and then hummed softly into it.

Justin's voice was low and soft when he spoke. "Mm, you've never serenaded me to get into my pants."

I snorted and nipped at his ear, feeling light and just a little more giddy than usual. It was as if the heaviness and depression of the past few days was... not gone, but lighter. Turning to Justin the night before, letting him fuck me, letting him take care of me for

once... it felt like I had literally shared that weight with him. It felt... good. And right now, that's all that mattered.

"I wanna love you, and treat you right," I sang as low and soft as I could, against his ear.

He gasped softly, wriggling a little under me and giggling softly. "Brian," he said, in the tone he only uses when I surprise him by being nicer to him than he expects. As nice as that is, I wanted to get to the point where I could be affectionate and have him *not* be shocked.

So I kissed behind his ear softly, and kept singing along.

*"Only I thought you were gonna be the next Andy Warhol.*

*I changed my mind.*

*And after all the trouble I went through to make you the best homosexual I can. I can't believe you'd blow it. I know it's scary finding your own way than doing what's expected. I'm not scared.*

*You're fucking terrified. Just like the night you met me. I was sure you'd run back home but you didn't. You said 'I'm going with him.'*

*I cannot believe that you remember that. Considering you couldn't remember my name. And look what happened.*

*I turned into a big queer.*

*Yea, lucky for you otherwise I wouldn't be wasting my time. But it's too late now. There's no turning back."*

## **Chapter 8**

"Oh god, Brian. Yes right there. FUCK." I moaned and thrashed under him and he pinned me down with the weight of his body.

"Shhh." He whispered in my ear and pushed into me harder.

"JESUS FUCK YES!" I dug my nails into his back as his dick found my prostate over and over. I was so close, so fucking close I could barely see.

"Come on. Come on, Sunshine." He bit down on my shoulder to hold off his own orgasm I was sure.

"Right there, just a little more..." I nuzzled my nose into his sweaty neck.

"Right...*THERE?*" He pushes **HARD** into me.

"AHHHH YES FUCK GOD!" I unloaded between us, my vision blurred, my whole body buzzing and this constant ring in my ears.

He grabbed the headboard above me and pushed once, twice, three more times and I felt the warm thick come coat the inside of my ass.

This was the third time we had fucked already today.

God I loved Sundays.

He groaned loudly and nuzzled his face into mine. His unshaven cheek burned my skin, but to me it was the best feeling in the world right now.

"Mmmm. I'm done." I moaned.

He laughed, and rolled off me onto his back.

"Uh huh. You said that 20 minutes ago before you begged me to fuck you. Again."

"I did not beg. I asked nicely."

"I believe the exact words were '*God Brian, please now. I need you inside me now.*'" He pitched his voice higher than normal like he always does when he is intimating me.

"You need to get your hearing checked." I assured him.

"Right." He snorted.

He reached over onto the bedside table for his cigarettes.

"Thought you were trying to quit."

"Mmm." He inhaled deeply. "Stop trying to kill me with your sexual demands and maybe I can."

"Never heard you complain before." I took the cigarette from him and took a few drags.

"I'm not 28 anymore."

"29."

He rolled his head and glared at me.

"Fine. 29. All the more reason."

Just then my cell phone shrieked from the table.

"Fuck." I reached across him and he nibbled my ear.

"Stop." I giggled and flipped open my phone. "Hello?"

"Mr. Taylor?"

"Yes?" I sat up.

"My name is Sophia Meyers. I work for the Sidney Bloom Gallery in Pittsburgh."

"Oh, hello." I got up out of bed and half groaned.

"Did I catch you at a bad time, Mr. Taylor?"

"Oh no. And please call me Justin." I balanced my cell on my shoulder and threw on my robe.

"Thank you Justin. The reason for my call is myself, Sidney and the other investors in the gallery have decided to expand and we would love it if you would be interested in running the new gallery."



I sat down heavily on the recliner in the corner of the room. "Me?"

"We have been following your career for some time now, Justin. Your work is exquisite. I also hear you have been going to school to be a teacher."

"Yes, I have actually. I graduate next month."

"Well, if you chose that path I would completely understand but I believe this would be a wonderful opportunity for you. You would have full control over the gallery and that includes all business, construction, creative and artistic decisions."

"Wow. I really don't know what to say."

"Well I am hoping you will say yes, Justin."

"Well it is a big decision to make and I would really love to talk it over with my husband and family before I say yes or no Mrs. Meyers." Brian raised an eye brow at me and I put my finger up and mouthed '*1 minute*' to him.

"Please call me Sophia. And take all the time you need. I'll be anticipating your call."

"Thank you Sophia." I hung up and stared down at my cell phone in my hands.

"What was that?" Brian asked.

I got up, throwing my robe off and climbed back into bed next to him.

"Sophia Meyers from the Sidney Bloom Gallery wants me to run their new gallery they are opening."

"No shit?" He ran his fingers through my 'just fucked' hair.

"Yeah."

"So?"

"So then I couldn't teach, Bri."

"True. But...this is art Justin. Your passion. And it's your own fucking gallery. That's huge."

I looked up and smiled at him. "It is isn't it?"

He rolled onto his side and pulled me to him. His hands never left my hair.

"Listen, whatever you choose to do, whether it's teaching art or showing art, I'll support it. Everyone will. We just want you to be happy."

"I am happy."

"Me too."

"Really?" I nuzzled his scruff. God, I love him.

"Mmm hmm." He's silent for a few minutes, just running his fingers through my hair. I knew this was huge. Ever since I walked into my first art gallery at 16 years old, art was all I dreamed about. Creating art. Being in the art world. And I got a taste of that in New York. But the whole time something was...missing. But this time, if I did this, nothing

would be missing. I would have the gallery, and art, and...Brian. Everything would be perfect.

"You're gonna do it aren't you?"

"Yeah. I think I am." I kissed his neck and he grabbed onto my hair, pulling my head back.

"Good." He kissed me, slow and deep, his tongue finding its way into my mouth like it normally does. I sighed happily into him and rolled on top of him.

"I think we should celebrate." I purred in his ear.

"Oh?" His hands made their way down my back and onto my ass.

"Nah uh uh. You're turn Mr. Kinney."

He laughed and rolled me back onto my back.

"In your dreams, Warhol."

*"If you break his heart, I will break your face."*

## Chapter 9

Punctuality and reliability are the words I'd associate with Theodore Schmidt. Ted never misses work. When he's sick I have to practically force him to go home and rest. Whenever there's snow, he's here, even when it's life-threatening to drive. And if there's one thing Ted's never been, it's late.

Which is why when 9:30 rolled around and Ted still hadn't shown his face, I was beginning to feel concerned. Something must have happened. Although I supposed it was possible he forgot to set his alarm clock, I doubted it. Anal-retentiveness isn't just a character trait when it comes to Ted, it's a lifestyle choice.

"Boss," Cynthia said, poking her head into my office. "He's still not in."

I sighed and sat back, putting my pen down. I'd been signing checks all morning. Normally I didn't have to even look at money, but today there were bills to be paid, and I couldn't take a chance that Ted wasn't going to show at all. My hand was cramped from signing my name so many times. We had a stamp *somewhere*, but fuck if I could find it in Theodore's "organization."

"I'll call him again," I said. I was tired, worried, and pissed off. "He'd better at least have a fucking flu. Maybe crabs," I muttered, dialing his number for the tenth time that morning.

And then I heard it... that distinctly irritating opera ring-tone that always made me grit my teeth... and it was getting louder. Finally, through the door walked Ted, cel phone in hand. He was staring at it dumbly, as if he couldn't read the screen.

I hung up the phone loudly. "So good to see you, Theodore," I said. I sounded almost angrier than I was, which was good. A little fear would remind him how to behave.

"Sorry Bri," Ted mumbled, slowly lifting his head to look at me. His eyes were red and puffy and swollen and he hadn't shaved. His hair was a mess. He looked like he'd been up all night crying.

My anger faded and I sighed heavily, nodding at Cynthia to leave.

"I'll make some coffee," she said, giving Ted a worried look before leaving my office and shutting the door firmly behind her.

Ted stood there in front of my desk, silent, as we listened to Cynthia's heels click down the hall.

"Well?" I asked, folding my hands on my desk. "What happened? That flea-bitten creature you let sleep in your bed finally die?" He was always strangely fond of that cat of his. If it died it wouldn't be so bad. It might remind Justin why we shouldn't get one next time he started in on his 'I want a pet' speech.

Ted shook his head, and sniffled loudly. To my horror, I saw a few tears run down his cheeks. "N-no. Sorry for being late. I-I'll get to work right away."

"Theodore," I snapped. "Sit." I pointed to the chair on the other side of my desk.

He sat obediently, his eyes fixed on the floor.

"What the fuck happened, Ted?" I asked, softening my voice carefully. Yelling at Theodore never gets any results. If I wanted my head accountant back to work as efficiently as possible, I was going to have to do the unthinkable.

I was going to have to listen to him talk about his feelings.

Fuck.

Ted sniffled a few times, pulled out a handkerchief and blew his nose loudly, and then looked up at me again. "Blake left," he said weakly.

I stared at him silently. I had no idea what to say. Blake and Ted had been together for... fuck, over ten years. "Why?" I asked.

Ted shrugged and forced himself to grin. It was a pitiful sight. "We want... different things."

I rolled my eyes. I'd heard this song and dance before. Fuck, I'd lived it. "Theodore-"

"No," he said softly. "It's really over. We've... been having problems for a while. I wanted to get a bigger place. Maybe a house, with a yard. I wanted... to have some kids. Maybe adopt." He took another deep breath. "But Blake... he has his career to focus on."

I felt that odd, tight feeling in my chest that I knew was pity, and I felt like an asshole. Pity was the last thing Ted wanted or needed right now. So I just said nothing. There was nothing I could say.

"He's moving to ml:namespace prefix = st1 />England."

"England?" I asked, incredulous. "Why the fuck would he go there?"

"He got an offer from some university with a prestigious drug rehab program. They want him to come teach," Ted said softly, with a pathetic amount of pride in his voice. "He couldn't turn it down."

"And you wouldn't move to England," I said.

He shook his head weakly. "I could say it's because I don't want to leave Kinnetik, but... I'd leave in a second if he asked me to go."

Tongue in cheek, I said nothing. I understood completely.

"It's just the last straw," he said. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "We both work a lot, and our schedules don't line up. We've barely spent any time together in a year. And when we do, he's... distant." He grinned weakly. "I ask for too much."

"Like kids," I said.

"Like kids," he replied. "Guess you and he have that in common."

I glanced away and said nothing. Once again I was reminded of Justin's demands so long ago to have children. I'm not stupid. I know I'm not going to escape that fight forever. It's coming up, and soon, I think. Justin might set a particular fixation aside, but he never gives up completely.

"We fight all the time. About having kids, about where we should live, about work, about-" he hesitated. "Every year we fight more, about stupider and stupider things, and I... I..." Ted finally broke down and started to cry again.

I got up and walked around to the other side of the desk and leaned against it, looking at him. "Is he leaving soon, then?" I decided not to push him on what *else* he and Blake fought about. I had a feeling I knew.

"He already did," Ted said, scrubbing at his face hard with the palms of his hands. He was embarrassed. That was fine. So was I. "He's staying with some friends until he leaves for England. He... he said he'd be moving his stuff out today while I'm here..." Ted took a few short, choked breaths. "He wants us to stay friends..."

I snorted, but bit my tongue and said nothing.

"I can't do that, Bri," Ted said, finally looking at me again. "I just can't."

I put my hand on his shoulder. "I couldn't either."

Ted grinned weakly at me, blinking rapidly. "I don't know what I'm going to do."

I remember that feeling. I don't ever want to feel that way again, and the last person that deserved it was Theodore. I squeezed his shoulder gently. "You're going to go to the bathroom and clean yourself up. Then you're going to go to your office and try to get some work done. It'll keep your mind busy. Then after work, you're going to go with me and the guys to Woody's and get shit-faced."

"I don't drink, Bri," Ted said. "You know that."

"What better time to start?" I asked, smirking.

He laughed weakly and stood. "How about Babylon instead. I could use the thumpa-thumpa."

I nodded.

"Thanks," he said weakly. "I'll get caught up on whatever I missed this morning."

"Don't worry about it, Theodore. If you get behind, just make one of those underlings I pay so much help you."

He nodded again and turned to leave my office. I watched him leave, his head ducked, his steps smaller and without the confidence he'd built up after years of practice. It wasn't just pathetic. It was... sad. It was really, really sad.

I sat back down behind my desk and picked up the phone. I had two phone calls to make. I glanced at my address book to find the right number for the first one. I didn't usually call him. Despite the fact that we called each other friends (well, he did, and I didn't disagree) we never really went out of our ways to deal with each other. I never called him unless something was wrong, or if it was necessary. Which is probably why he sounded so confused when he answered the phone.

"Hello?" Emmet said hesitantly.

"Blake left Theodore," I said.

"Fuck," he muttered. "How's he doing?"

"He's here, but he's a fucking mess," I replied, picking my pen back up and glancing back at the checks in front of me. I might as well finish them at this rate.

"Does he know you're calling me?"

"Does it matter?" I asked.

There was a short hesitation before he replied. "No."

And this is where I really stuck my neck out for Theodore. This is where I went out of my way to help him. I don't like doing that for anyone. Usually getting involved just causes more trouble than its worth. But I'd known him long enough to know that this was something Ted needed, and I was the only one who would do it.

"Don't fuck up," I said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Emmet asked in a tense voice. He was already pissed. Great.

"You know what it means. Don't fuck up. Theodore needs you, and this is your chance."

"First of all, I don't know *what* you're talking about," he replied in his high-and-mighty queen voice. "Secondly, even if I *did* know, I wouldn't take advantage of my best friend like that!"

"It's not taking advantage if it's what he wants, too," I replied.

Another long silence. "I'll come see him for lunch. As his best friend. Not... whatever it is you're thinking."

I snorted. "Right. Well, plan on going to Babylon tonight, too. I told him we'd all go."

"Brian Kinney," Emmet said with some affection in his tone. "You really are a good friend."

"Shut the fuck up, Honeycutt." I dropped the phone back onto the receiver and sighed. Well, the rest was up to them. I picked up the phone again and hit the first speed dial.

"Isn't it early for phone sex? Usually you don't call until at least noon," Justin's voice came across the line.

I shut my eyes and felt myself relax into my chair. "Blake dumped Theodore."

"Fuck," Justin whispered softly. "For real?"

"It seems pretty permanent," I replied.

There was a short pause, and we just listened to each other breathe. Seeing Ted's face, thinking about how he must feel... it reminded me of the years I spent feeling like that, looking like that. It was something I'd never wanted to be reminded of.

"I'll bring you lunch," Justin said.

"You're busy, aren't you? You have that painting to finish--"

He cut me off. "I want to see you."

I could tell by his tone that he was thinking the same things as me. "I want to see you, too," I said softly.

He was smiling now. I could hear it in his tone. "Keep talking like that and you might just get lucky, Mr. Kinney."

Now I was smiling, too. "See you," I said.

"See you," he replied.

I hung up the phone and took a deep breath. Justin wasn't the one leaving. Justin wasn't going anywhere. We were fine. We were good, even. We were fan-fucking-tastic.

And when Sunshine brought up the 'having kids' thing, well... I'd just... have to deal with that problem when it happened. But neither of us was going to leave, even then. I felt certain of that. At least... as certain as I could. Pretty certain. Almost certain. Mostly certain.

I couldn't wait for lunch.

*Hey! Hey! You guys see him? We go to school together. His name is Chris Hobbs. He just called me a faggot. You see, Chris doesn't like faggots...Or maybe he likes them more than he thinks...He let me jerk him off! ...The faggot gave Chris Hobbs a hand-job! He loved it.*

## **Chapter 10**

When I woke up the blankets were thrown off me, bunched up at my feet. The bedroom was scorching and so bright from the morning sun. I groaned and rolled over in the opposite direction of the windows.

"Morning Sunshine." I heard Brian's oddly chipper voice in the room.

I grumbled some obscenity and buried my head deeper into the pillow.

I felt the bed sink and then his warm hands on my skin. I moaned a little, pushing back into his touch.

"Rise and shine...." He whispered in my ear as he sucked on my lobe. My bare cock twitched and I reached back and caressed his cheek.

He chuckled as I rolled over and attacked his mouth. He tasted like tooth paste.

When he finally broke the kiss, a little breathless, I wrapped my hand around his blood red tie and pulled him close again.

"I don't want you to go to work." I whined.

"Mmm." He nuzzled my neck and ran his hand through my bed head. "Have to. And you..." He hurled me up by my shoulder and sat me upright. FUCK. Why was it so bright?

"..you need to get up. You have a really big day today. Gus was up before all of us."

I smiled and rested my head against his silk tie and shirt. I was excited. It was a big day.

"I'm sleepy." I complained.

He laughed a little and got up off the bed leaving me there, tired and naked.

And hard.

"Well.." He began, straightening out his tie. "...if you hadn't of begged me to fuck you last night, you wouldn't be so tired."

"I begged you???" I said. "You practically raped me!"

He raised an eyebrow and gave me the Brian Kinney look. "I came in the bedroom and you were sprawled out on the bed, with your cock in your hand and the handcuffs on the bed. What did you expect me to do? Play checkers with you?"

Okay, he had a point.

"You think Ted is going to be alright?" I asked. He sighed and leaned against the dresser.

"Well if Emmett does his job correctly he will."

"Brian, you can't be serious."

"Honeycut and Theodore, I cannot believe I am fucking saying this, belong together."

"But its WEIRD Brian."

"Some might say you and I together are weird."

"WE ARE!"

He laughed and walked over to the bed and kneeled down in front of me.

"Some things are just meant to be Sunshine."

I smiled up at him, feeling the heat rise in my cheeks.

"But, you said the reason Blake left Ted was because Ted wanted things Blake couldn't give him. Like...kids." I watched as his face fell slightly and he brought his lips into his mouth. I had said it. The dreaded K word.

I did want kids. Eventually. I wasn't getting any younger and neither was he and it was something I had always wanted. And now that things were good between us, more than good, fanfuckingtastic to be exact, maybe now would be a good time to bring it up.

But, by the look on his face, maybe I was wrong.

"How do you know Emmett wants kids?" I asked, diverting the inevitable.

"Oh come on Justin. A baby to dress up in pink sequins and frilly things. EVEN if it's a boy? That's Emmett's walking wet dream."

I laughed and got out of bed slowly. Fuck I was sore.

"Now go get ready. Gus is already downstairs waiting for you." He gave me a huge wet smack on the lips and left the room.

Fuck I love being married.

I showered quickly and dressed. When I got downstairs, Brian was drinking a protein shake at the counter and Gus was eating a bowl of cereal.

"About time." Gus grumbled.

"I'm a little tired this morning." I told him, making my way around Brian for a glass. He smacked my ass and I smiled at him.

"Yeah. I heard." Gus shuddered. "We need thicker walls in this house."

"Put your headphones on." Brian told him.

Gus glared at us for a minute then laughed.

"Just wait till I bring someone home."

"If it's a boy, its fine. If it's a girl, you're going to their house. I don't feel like hearing hetero sex."



I smacked Brian on the arm. "You aren't having ANY sex yet." I ordered him.

"I'm 16! You were only 17..."

"That's not the point." I interrupted. "We aren't talking about me, we're talking about you."

"Stop being such a...god spare me the word...PARENT." It was Brian's turn to shudder.

I rolled my eyes and drank my orange juice.

"I gotta go." Brian picked up his suitcase from the chair and pulled me by my waist into an earth shattering, knee-weakening kiss.

I heard Gus groan. "Jesus Christ. Don't you ever get enough?"

Brian nuzzled his nose against mine and gave me one last soft kiss on my lips. "Never enough." He whispered.

I sighed and watched him as he left the kitchen. I was still staring off into space as I heard the front door close and the rev of the Vette's engine.

"Dad? We gonna go anytime soon?" Gus's voice awakened me from my bliss.

"Oh, right. Yeah, lets go. You have a notebook and camera?" I asked picking up my messenger bag.

"Yes DAD." He smiled at me and grabbed my arm to pull me along. He was excited. So was I.

Today was the beginning of construction for my new gallery. I hadn't thought of a name yet, I figured that would be one of the last things. Gus was taking an architecture class in his upscale 10,000 dollar a year school, and I decided to keep him out of school to take him with me. I figured he could take some notes and pictures for his final project.

It was also a nice way to spend some time with him. To do something with him that he's interested in and for him to see my passion as well.

Father Son bonding at its best.

When we arrived at the gallery, some construction had already been started. Scaffoldings and paneling were being put in and new large glass windows were being installed in the front. My heart felt like it was going to come out of my chest with anticipation and happiness.

This was it. I had arrived. Finally. This was my dream. This was mine.

"This is awesome, Dad." I heard Gus say next to me. I smiled at him and he bumped my shoulder. He was as tall as me now. He was going to be giant just like his father.

"Mr. Taylor?" A middle aged balding man in dirty jeans and a sweatshirt made his way to me, his hand out.

I shook it. "Yes. Hello."

"Great to have you here! I'm Russ. Russ Allen. I'm one of the head contractors here for the project. It's great to meet you."

"Thank you Russ. Everything looks great so far."

He beamed and let go out of my hand. "I'm so glad you think so. Please if there is anything you specifically want please tell my partner or me. We are here to make this place whatever it is you want."

"I do have some layout sketches if you want to take a look." I pulled out a bunch of papers out of my bag and handed them to him. He looked them over, a tiny smile on his face.

"Now I know why you're the artist here. These are better than some architects I've seen."

"Well, this is my son Gus. He is studying architecture in school."

Russ looked at Gus and shook his hand. "Well Gus, if there are any questions you have or anything you would like to see, please let me know."

Gus nodded, eyes wide in awe of the place. "Thank you, Mr. Allen."

Such a good kid.

"Please, call me Russ. I'm not a business man." He started to walk and we followed. "Take a look around Mr. Taylor. Like I said any changes or if you have any questions or concerns please let me know. I am going to show these sketches to my workers."

I nodded. "Thank you, Russ."

Gus and I made our way around the building checking out things here and there that were being worked on. The large ballasts I wanted installed in the main gallery were perfect, just the way I wanted. I knew Brian had already made some calls, making sure everything was ordered correctly.

The large stain glass door that I wanted to separate the main gallery from the conference room was already half way up and breathtaking.

"Dad, this is amazing." Gus said. He took out his camera and started shooting away.

Just like his father.

"Yeah, it's really...." I trailed off. My heart started to pound and suddenly I felt like I was going to throw up. My knees went weak and I had to hold onto a near by wall for support. I couldn't breathe. I could barely even see. The ringing in my ears was deafening. My mouth was like cotton and my body went into one uncontrollable spasm.

"Dad! DAD! Are you okay?? DAD!?" I heard and faintly saw Gus in front of me. But it was like I was under water. There was only one thing I could focus on.

Standing not 5 feet from me, looking over a blueprint with Russ, no different than the last time I had seen him, was Chris Hobbs.

*"You wouldn't think it was so funny if you'd been the one who was bashed."*

*"No one said it was funny."*

## **Chapter 11**

"What do you mean this isn't work-appropriate?" Emmett asked, pouting.

I frowned at the shirt Theodore was wearing. It was lavender, with sequins down the front. He looked appropriately humiliated. "If you have to ask, then there's nothing I can do to explain it," I replied.

"I'm going to change," Theodore moaned unhappily, turning to go back to the bathroom and change back into the clothes he'd come to work in.

Emmett sighed and sat across from me, crossing his legs. "Well, I thought a new outfit would cheer him up! Besides, if he's back on the dating market, he needs to think about looking good!"

I snorted and looked back at my computer. "Look good, or look insane?"

Emmett was silent for a long time, so I glanced back up at him. He was staring into space with an odd, strained expression.

"You have to-"

"What? Talk to him?" he said, cutting me off. His voice was low and tired. "What am I supposed to say? Gee, we've been best friends for half our lives and I know that the last time we dated was awkward and ended terribly, but let's try again?"

"I was going to say you have to fuck him. Just go in there, grab him by his tie, and don't let him go until he gives in."

Emmett wrinkled his nose at me. "Ever the romantic."

I shrugged. "It always worked for me."

Sighing dramatically, Emmett spun in the chair once, staring up at the ceiling. "It's stupid for me to even consider..."

I rolled my eyes and picked up a rubber band, and shot it at him. It bounced off his forehead. "Despite all evidence, you *are* a man. Start acting like one."

Pouting, he rubbed his forehead and picked up the rubber band, throwing it at me. "You're not very good at being sympathetic, are you."

Smirking, I sat back and shrugged. "The sooner Theodore gets laid the sooner his work gets back up to par. I need him in working order, Honeycutt."

Emmett sneered at me. "DON'T-"

"Call you Honeycutt. Right." I looked back at my monitor, hoping he'd go to the bathroom and suck Theodore off or get him to fuck him, or *something*, and leave me alone. I had a million things to do and I wanted to leave on time today.

Then the phone rang.

"Kinney," I said. Only a few people had my direct line. Important clients, mostly.

"Dad," Gus' voice came through the line, sounding panicked and breathless.

My heart raced and I sat up in my chair. Something was very wrong. "What's wrong?"

"We're at the gallery. He's just... freaking out!"

They were okay. They hadn't been in a car accident, and there were no bombs involved. I felt a temporary sense of relief, before I realized something must be very, very wrong for sonnyboy to call me like this. "What happened?" I asked. I was already standing and grabbing my keys.

"I don't know! Nothing! We were just standing there, and he started to freak out!"

"See if you can get him outside. The fresh air will help. I'll be there in five minutes." I walked past a very confused looking Emmett, and brushed past Cynthia as she entered the room. "Gotta go. I'll be back later."

Cynthia nodded, and I walked out the front door quickly, and practically ran to the car.

When I arrived, four minutes later and two red lights run, they were outside on the front steps to the half finished gallery. Justin was sitting on the steps, his arms around his legs tightly, and he was trembling so hard I could see it before I even got to them. Gus was standing next to him, rubbing his back and looking terrified.

Without a word, I kneeled down next to him, ignoring the filthy pavement and how it was going to ruin my suit. That didn't matter right now.

"Sunshine," I said softly.

Justin's head jerked up and he looked at me. He looked panicked, terrified, and his breath was coming in short gasps. His eyes wouldn't focus on me for more than a few seconds at a time. He was having a panic attack.

I slowly wrapped my arms around him and rubbed his back gently. His hands immediately gripped the front of my suit tightly, pinching my skin underneath. He buried his face in my chest and made a gasping, desperate noise.

I looked up at Gus. He looked terrified. "He'll be okay," I said in a soothing voice. "It's a panic attack."

Sonnyboy nodded jerkily. "I... I didn't... do anything..."

"It's not your fault," I said in the same calm voice. It was the same as dealing with a frightened animal. It didn't really matter *what* I said at this point, so much as how I said it. Sunshine needed me to sound calm and reassuring, so I would, despite how I felt. "Something must have triggered it. Where were you?"

"I-inside... we were just looking at the plans..."

I held Justin tightly as he clung to me, trembling and whimpering. Something had happened. Something really fucking bad. I hadn't seen him like this since... since right after he was bashed.

"Sunshine," I said softly.

Justin just shook his head against me. He didn't want to talk. Or maybe he couldn't.

"I'm here," I said, rubbing his back slowly. "I'm right here."

His chest started to jerk in little gasps, and I knew he was starting to cry.

"You're safe," I murmured softly, feeling my chest tighten.

Soon he was sobbing, silently, but I could feel his hot tears making my shirt wet.

I looked back up at Gus, who was watching us with that same scared look on his face. "Help me."

I stood, gently pulling Justin to his feet. His muscles were tensed, hard, and he didn't want to stand. "Come on, Sunshine," I said softly. "We're going to the car."

He nodded once and finally cooperated, standing and leaning against me.

Gus went to the curb and opened the passenger door, and I gently helped Justin into it. His fingers clung tightly to the front of my shirt, pulling on it hard when I tried to pull away, and a button popped off.

"I'll be right back," I said softly. "I promise."

Finally Justin lifted his head and stared at me. Tears ran down his flushed, blotchy face, and his lips were practically white. "Brian," he whimpered.

I winced. I was going to find out what the fuck had happened. I had to know what did this to him. "Stay with Gus," I said. "I'll be right back."

He shook his head, his breath coming in faster gasps. He didn't want me to leave his side, but I couldn't just take him home without finding out what had gone wrong.

"Watch him," I said to Gus. "If he starts to hyperventilate, remind him to breathe."

"Dad," Gus said, looking terrified. "I don't-"

I put my hand on his shoulder and gave him a serious look. "I'll be right back."

He winced, but nodded. What a fucking good kid. Lindsay and Mel had done right by him at least. I felt a distant sense of pride, and turned and went into the building.

There were construction workers standing around, installing windows, fixing plaster, laying floor tiles. Nothing looked out of the ordinary.

And then I saw him.

Even from behind, I knew who it was. I'd know him anywhere.

Chris Hobbes.

My heart raced, and I felt my lungs constrict. Christ, now *I* was going to have a panic attack. I looked around quickly, looking for the man I'd spoken to before, the one who was supposed to be in charge of this operation.

"HEY," I shouted when I spotted him, standing in the next room, talking to some men painting a wall.

He looked up and smiled at me. "Mr. Kinney, hello. I was just talking to--"

I stalked over to him and got in his face. His expression changed to one of fear. Good. He should be fucking afraid. "HE needs to go." I pointed to Hobbes, who still hadn't noticed me.

He blinked a few times, looking where I was pointing. "He's my business partner, Mr. Kinney. He knows more about construction than anyone else here. Without him--"

"I don't give a fuck WHO he is or WHAT he does!" I shouted. "GET HIM OUT."

"I... I can't *fire* him... what's *wrong*, Mr. Kinney?"

"Fuck this," I muttered. "I'll just fucking fire you all and get *another* company to finish it.

His eyes hardened and he folded his arms. "Another company will take months to bring on, and they won't do it as well as we will. Not to mention it's not your choice."

I tensed and for a moment seriously considered shoving him into a wall, but he wasn't the one I really wanted to hurt. That person was behind me.

I turned around and at the same time, Hobbes looked up.

Our eyes met, and his skin flushed a bright red, and then paled to a sickly white.

I don't remember crossing the room. I don't remember shoving him against the wall or holding him there, my hands fisted. I just remember finding myself that way, our faces inches apart.

And he was trembling.

"Why the *fuck* are you here?!"

"I... it's my job," he gasped. I could feel his heart racing through his shirt. His skin was pale, and he was breaking out in a sweat.

I suddenly realized he had no idea I'd be here either. "Do you have any *fucking* idea who you're building this gallery for?" I growled.

He shook his head quickly. "I... I don't... do the business part of things... I just... fucking build!"

I took a deep, slow breath, but kept holding him there firmly. "Justin Taylor," I growled.

Hobbes' eyes darkened and then he glanced around quickly, as if trying to find him.

"He's not here," I growled. I'd never heard my own voice so low and angry.

"I... I didn't..." Hobbes said, gasping a little for air.

A million thoughts raced through my mind. I saw Justin's smile as he turned, and the bat hit his head. I felt his blood seeping through my fingers. I saw him panicking, unable to even go outside alone for months. I remembered pink shirts and camo pants and finding a gun. I remembered months, *years* of pain caused by this one person. And I regretted, not for the first time, not killing him when I had the chance.

And then I remembered that they were outside, waiting in the car. I remembered that I was standing in a now silent room filled with people staring at me. And I slowly released him, taking one step back.

He gasped for air a few more times, his arms wrapped around himself. His eyes darted around the room nervously.

He was terrified. He was completely fucking terrified. And he was on the verge of a panic attack.

"I broke your leg once," I said, my voice as low and threatening as I could make it.

He looked at me, eyes wide.

"Now you're going to finish this project, and you're going to do the best fucking job of your life. You're going to make this the best fucking gallery he's ever seen, and you're going to get it done on time."

"The- there might be... a delay for the-"

"I don't give a *fuck*," I replied. "You're going to get it done on *time*. You're going to make the most fabulous gallery possible for Justin. You're going to treat him respectfully if you see him. You're going to call him MISTER Taylor. And if you even *think* the word faggot, or this gallery doesn't turn out *exactly* how he wants it and better, I'll do what I should have done back then."

He just blinked at me, pale and trembling, leaning against the wall.

I leaned in very close to him, so I could smell his breath. "If you think for even a moment that I don't have the wealth to get out of a murder charge, think again."

He was nodding, and I backed away. He grabbed his own tie, loosening it. He was drenched in sweat.

And then I realized that he was as scared of me as Justin was of him. He may have bashed my Sunshine, but I bashed him. I took out his leg. It took him months, *years* to fully recover. His future as a football player had been ruined by my hand. He knew I was serious. And he was terrified.

I looked back around the room at all of the other construction workers, all of whom were staring at me. I stalked back over to Hobbes' partner and growled in his face. "Your *partner* bashed MISTER Taylor's head in a long time ago because he hates fags."

The man just blinked at me a few times and glanced over at Hobbes with an odd look. He hadn't known.

"Keep a close fucking eye on him. If everything doesn't come out perfectly, neither of you will like the results."

He nodded and cleared his throat. "Of course, Mr. Kinney. Now, if you don't mind, we need to get back to work."

I smirked at him. "That's right. You do." I turned to leave, passing Hobbes on the way. He looked like he could barely stand, and shot me a terrified look.

Then I was out the door, and went back to the car. I got in the driver's side, and Gus was already sitting in the back. Justin was curled up in the passenger seat, his arms around his legs again, and his face buried in his knees.

"Sunshine," I said softly. I reached over and put my hand on the back of his head, gently stroking his hair.

He slowly relaxed and lifted his head. He looked like the same terrified, lost 18 year old he'd been so long ago, and my chest ached. "He's not going to touch you. I made sure of that."

He blinked a few times and sniffled loudly.

I leaned over and kissed him firmly, tasting salty tears on his lips. "We're going home."

He nodded again, and I fastened his seatbelt around his lap before doing my own and glancing at Gus, who was pale-faced and staring out the window in the back seat.

None of us said anything the entire way home.

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Gus had gone to his room as soon as we got home. I could hear him talking on the phone with someone in a muffled voice. I was glad he had a friend to call when his fucking parents traumatized him, just like I'd had Mikey. Tomorrow I'd make it up to him, and explain, and tell him how fucking proud I was that he handled it so well. But right then, I had more important things to do.

I didn't say anything until Justin and I were in bed. I'd locked the bedroom door, and turned off both of our cell phones. I didn't try to undress him. I just slipped off his shoes and removed my own shoes and jacket before getting in next to him. He clung to me as if he was drowning. I rubbed his back in slow circles.

"W-why is he there?" Justin asked softly, his voice scared and angry at the same time.

"He works for the construction company," I said in the calmest voice I could manage.

Justin sniffled loudly and rubbed his face on my shirt. It was already missing that button, and now it was drenched in snot and tears. A lifetime ago that would have bothered me. Instead, it was just a reminder that he was here, alive.

"What did you do?" he asked in a strained tone, trying to sound amused.

"What do you think?" I kissed the top of his head gently.

He lifted his face to look at me, all flushed and blotchy and pale, and grinned weakly. "I think you threatened to kill him."

I smirked, threading my fingers through his hair. "Why, Sunshine, would I do something like that?"



His expression crumbled again and I felt my own eyes sting. He looked exactly like he had at 18.

"If you want me to, I'll find a way to get rid of them. We can find a new construction company-"

"No," he said firmly, cutting me off. "It would delay everything. I... I'm a grown man. I can.... I can face him."

I sighed and pressed my face into his hair, holding him tightly.

"What?" he whispered, still clinging tightly to me despite his bold words.

"You're one fucking stubborn twat, you know that?"

He giggled softly. It was strained, and almost sad sounding, but it was something. "You don't think he'll do anything?"

"I don't think he'll even stay in the same room as you. He was scared out of his mind."

His face pressed against my chest, Justin spoke slowly. "He... probably had a panic attack, too. After all, you... hurt him. He's probably as scared as I am."

I doubted that. You have to be human to understand fear, and as far as I was concerned, Hobbes was no more human than my father, and didn't deserve an ounce of pity. But I kept it to myself. If Justin was trying to deal with things in a so-called healthier way, I wasn't going to say anything to disagree.

We sat there in silence, Justin clinging to me for dear life, and me clinging back, holding him as tightly as I could and still allow him room to breathe. After a few minutes, he began to cry again. It wasn't a hard sob like it had been before, but a weak, slow, shivering cry. After five minutes of that, I cried, too, glad that he wasn't looking up and that I was good at hiding it.

"I should apologize to Gus," Justin finally whispered against me. I didn't know how much time had passed. A half hour? Two hours? Longer?

"Sonnyboy's going to be fine," I said, wiping my own face on his hair. Time to man up, Kinney.

Then Justin lifted his face and brushed his fingertips over my cheeks. Fuck. He could always tell, no matter how careful I was. "I'm so selfish."

"What?" I asked, squinting at him.

"You... must have been really scared, too."

My eyebrows shot up, and I laughed quickly, feeling myself smile a little. "Brian Kinney doesn't *get* scared."

Then *he* smiled, and I felt relief wash over me. It was weak, and scared, and forced, but if he could smile, he would be okay. "Oh, right. I forgot."

*I like dick. I wanna get fucked by dick. I wanna suck dick. I like sucking dick. And I'm good at it, too.*

## **Chapter 12**

It had been a long fucking weeks. Between the gallery and the Hobbs thing, I felt like my brain was about to explode and my body was gonna give out on me at any second. Not to mention I started to take my anxiety meds again. Something I hadn't done in...a very long time.

But 2 weeks into the building of the gallery and so far not one panic attack. A little heavy breathing and heart races but no attacks. I stayed clear of him, and him of me. Brian must have really scared the shit out of him. That thought makes me smile every time I see him DART from a room when I enter it.

Brian Kinney. My hero.

I drop my keys on the counter and frown at the unfolded laundry in the basket sitting on the kitchen table. Gus had 3 chores. One, take out the garbage. Two, keep your room clean. And three do your own fucking laundry.

He has a problem with all 3.

I groan and like always, begin to carry the laundry basket full of his clean clothes up the stairs.

I tell Brian all the time he needs to put his foot down about Gus. He needs to have rules and chores. Brian just gives me that adorable smile, tells me he's just a kid, and then I end up taking out the garbage or putting his fucking clothes away.

I balance the laundry basket on my knee and open the door to Gus's room.

My eyes widen and I drop the laundry basket at the site in front of me:

Gus sitting up on his elbows, head thrown back, moaning, pants around his ankles and a boy, A BOY kneeling in front of him, sucking his fucking dick.

THIS is so wrong for so many reasons.

SO MANY REASONS.

"WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?" I scream.

Gus sits up frantically, pushing the boy onto his butt on his carpeted floor and struggles to pull his pants up.

"DON'T YOU KNOCK!?"

"What are YOU DOING HERE? WHY aren't you at SCHOOL?!"

"I had a half day. Midterms. WHAT are YOU doing here?"

"I LIVE HERE!"

The head giver finally stands up, wiping his mouth.

"WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU!?" I scream at him.

"Uh. Kelly. My names Kelly."

"Well, Kelly. GET. THE. FUCK. OUT." I point toward Gus's door and Kelly RUNS as fast as he can out of the room and down the stairs.

I turn and GLARE at Gus.

"Are you out of your FUCKING mind!?" I ask him.

"WHAT!? I'm SEVENTEEN. I'm allowed to DATE."

"THAT'S NOT DATING! That's getting your DICK sucked in your bedroom when your PARENTS aren't home!"

"SO!? How old were you..."

"STOP right there." I hold my hand up. "This isn't about me, or when I started becoming sexually active."

"Sexually active?" Gus does the Brian eyebrow raise and my blood boils.

"Gus. This isn't funny. You DO NOT bring some boy home and do...THESE things in this house when me or your father isn't home!"

"WHY?"

"WHY???" I ask.

"Yes. Why?"

"Because..." My god, why can't I think of a reason right now. "Because..."

Gus keeps his eyebrow raised.

"BECAUSE I SAID SO." I kick the laundry basket into his room. "Now clean this FUCKING room NOW." I slam his bedroom door and lean against the wall, trying to will myself to calm down.

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I am sitting at the kitchen table, smoking a cigarette, when Brian finally arrives home.

He does the eyebrow raise thing and it makes me want to put the cigarette out in his eye.

"Thought you quit?" He asks, putting his briefcase down on the counter.

I don't answer.

He walks to me slowly and puts a hand on my shoulder. "Something happen at the gallery?" He asks.

"No." I answer bitterly.

He kneels down next to me and touches my arm. "Justin."

I stub the cigarette out and turn towards him. "You need to talk to your son."

"Oh?"

I nod.

"What happened?"

"I..." I begin to talk and the images flash before my eyes again. Gus. Pants down. Dick out in the air...blowjob...I feel myself getting sick. "He had a little friend over today."

"Okay...." He's confused.

I LOOK at him.

"What? Justin spit it out. They get in trouble?"

"They were..." I LOOK at him again.

"They were....what?"

I sigh and rub my hand over my face.

"Justin."

"HE WAS GETTING A BLOW JOB IN HIS ROOM BY SOME KID!" I finally yell, probably a little TOO loud.

Brian stares at me for a few seconds then laughs. "Is that all?" He stands and heads toward the fridge.

"WHAT!? Is that ALL!?"

"Yeah." He grabs a beer, opening it and leans against the counter. "So?"

"SO!? He can't just...DO THAT!"

"Why?"

"WHY!?" I get a flash back of Gus asking me the same question up in his room hour's earlier, THE SAME expression on his face.

"Yeah. Why?"

"Because I SAID SO. ITS WRONG! HE can't just...bring some KID here and get sucked off when we aren't here!"

"So you'd rather us BE here when he does?" He starts to walk toward the door. "I'll let him know."

"BRIAN. This is SERIOUS."

He turns around smiling at me. "No. It's not. Justin. He's seventeen. It's normal."

"No. He cant just..."

"But you could?"

"I didn't in my PARENTS house!"

"That's only because your mother would have dropped dead where she stood and your dad was a homophobic prick who probably would have killed you and me."

"So? Just because we're openly gay and not as strict AS WE SHOULD BE MIND YOU, that gives him the right to just DO what he WANTS!?"

"He could be doing worse stuff."

"LIKE?"

"Like drugs. Going to clubs and hooking up with strangers. Going home with men 12 years older than him. LIKE YOU did at Seventeen."

I can feel my blood boil inside my body. "This isn't about ME. This is about GUS."

"You're right. It is. And I'm his father and I say he at least he came HERE and didn't go to some BATHHOUSE or back room. And at least this KID was his own age!"

HIS father?

"Would you still feel the same if it was a GIRL giving him a blow job??" I fold my arms and give him a challenging look.

Brian bristles. "Yes."

"Liar."

He walks to me and glares down at me. God, I hate being so fucking short.

"Gus is a good kid. He gets good grades; he doesn't give us any fucking trouble. He's not running the streets selling drugs. If this is the WORST thing he is doing at seventeen, we should be thanking God or whatever the fuck."

I'm so angry.

"Well you know WHAT!? Gus is MY SON too and I say its WRONG for him to be getting head in his bedroom WHEN WE ARENT HERE."

I'm breathing hard, hands fisted at my sides. Brian's eyebrows are raised and an amused smile is planted on his lips.

He thinks I'm funny.

"You're so adorable when you're mad."

I push him, half playfully, half serious. "Shut up."

He pulls me to him and wraps his arms around me. I bury my head in its perfect place underneath his chin.

"Why are you really upset?"

God, I hate how he knows me so well.

"I don't want him to get hurt."

I feel Brian tense.

He knows what I am talking about.

"How do you know he's the one who's going to get hurt? Maybe he will do the hurting."

I look up at him. "That makes it better?"

Brian brings his lips into his mouth. He shakes his head. "No, I guess not."

I relax into his arms and he stands there for a while hugging me. He knows this brings back memories and feelings of how I felt at 17. Newly gay, out in the world, trying to figure myself out. Falling in love with someone...maybe I shouldn't have been with at 17.

"This isn't even about us not being here, Justin. Or that he did it in this house. You're far too liberal of a parent for that. This is about you. And your..." I feel him swallow above my head. "...about how I treated you at 17."

He's right.

I nod into his chest.

He hugs me tighter.

"I'm sorry." He finally whispers.

"For what?" I mumble against his chest.

"For...how I treated you."

"It doesn't matter."

"Yes. It does. It obviously does. Look how you just freaked out on Gus."

"I know...I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I'm sure he's not crying about it. If anything, since he is so much like me, he's amused more than anything."

I giggle a little.

"Drama Princess." He plays with a strand of my hair on my neck.

I tickle his stomach.

"I should go talk to him." I say pulling away.

He looks at me, eyes so green and fuck he's so beautiful. "Nah. I will. I think it's time Sonnyboy and I have a talk anyways."

I nod. He leans down and kisses me, hot and passionately. I moan into it and grab his tie.

He laughs a little, pulling out of my grasps. "Later Sunshine. Later."

*"Id rather spend an eternity of eternities burning in hell than one good day in heaven with you!"*

### **Chapter 13**

When I tried to open the door, it stuck, just like it always did. With practiced ease, I nudged it with my shoulder, and it swung open. I stood in the doorway, staring into the house where I'd spent most of my miserable childhood. For the millionth time, I wondered what I was doing here.

Then I felt a warm hand take mine, and I glanced at the man standing next to me. My husband. My partner. He was the reason. He squeezed my hand gently. "If you aren't ready..."

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be," I replied, and stepped into the house.

Immediately there was that feeling of drowning. The air was too thick, and stank of alcohol and cigarettes and barely concealed hatred, just like it always had.

I walked to the front window and popped it open. It, too, stuck, as if the house itself was fighting against me. Maybe it was. A gust of cool, fresh air blew in and I breathed it in deeply.

"Joan never had the windows open," I muttered. "Even when it was hot, she'd barely crack them. Said she had allergies."

Justin just stood in the living room, awkwardly staring at me.

"She didn't have any fucking allergies," I finished, glancing around the room. Most of the furniture was covered in large sheets to keep it from getting dusty until the Goodwill could come pick it up. Other than that, nothing had been touched. No, she hadn't had allergies. She just didn't want the neighbors to hear... anything.

"Hasn't Claire come by yet?" Justin asked, his voice sounding strained. I wasn't surprised at how nervous he seemed. When a place is full of hate and violence long enough, you can feel it, even after the events themselves have passed. I may not believe in God, but I believe in what I can feel.

"Of course not," I said a little louder than I meant to. Like whistling in the dark. "She said she'd come by tomorrow, after I told her there was no fucking way I was finding everything on her fucking list that she wanted."

Justin offered me a small smile, and I felt myself grin back.

This wasn't going to be easy.

"Brian," Justin said softly, as I passed him and walked into the kitchen. I opened those windows, too, and felt the air in the house start to flow.

"Brian," Justin said more firmly.

I turned to glance at him.

"Tell me what we're doing here," he said, lowering his voice again.

Tongue in cheek, I stared at him. Wasn't it obvious? "Goodwill will be here in two days. They're taking everything that's left."

Justin nodded slowly.

"I have to get all the important paperwork," I finished, walking past him again to head up the stairs. I knew most of the legal documents were in her room, tucked away in her closet, under her hat boxes. Of course, that wasn't the only reason, but fuck if I was going to spell things out for him.

Justin followed me closely, as if he was scared to be alone here.

The fifth stair creaked, just like it always had, but I stepped on it just the same. I stopped and stared down at my foot, resting on the creaky step, and felt myself smile.

Justin almost bumped into me, then put a hand on my back, looking up at my face with confusion. "What's so funny?"

"I always had to skip over this step," I said, looking down at it. "It squeaks." I pressed my foot back down on it again, hard. It squeaked loudly. "Now it doesn't matter how much noise I make." It felt liberating, like the first time your parents leave you home alone, and you stand with the refrigerator door open and drink straight from the carton.

Justin followed me up the stairs, stepping on that step hard, too. I glanced back and he grinned at me.

I hesitated at the top of the steps, and then walked to the door that had once been my room. No, cell is a better word. It had once been my cell. I pushed it open.

Justin stared into it, eyes wide. There was that shitty hard old single bed, a few soccer posters on the wall, ratty and torn. The dark blue curtains were pulled shut, and the light sneaking through them caught dust floating in the air. I entered the room, hands in my pockets, glancing around.

"This... was your room," he said softly.

"Once upon a time," I replied. It was mostly empty. I'd taken everything that was important to me when I'd moved to college. But there were still a few things here and there.

Justin walked to my old dresser and lifted the small trophy from it, eyes wide. "This is yours?"

I nodded, glancing over his shoulder at it.

"You played soccer?" he said, turning his head to look at me.

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, but don't spread it around. People might think I'm straight."

He laughed and nudged me with his elbow, setting the trophy down. "Soccer players aren't straight. Look at their little shorts."

I laughed. It felt good to laugh in here. I wondered how many times I *had* laughed in this room before. Not many, I thought.

"I want to take this home. Gus will think it's great," he said.



"If you want. I'll be right back," I said. "I'll just get the paperwork."

Justin caught my arm in his hand and gave me a searching look. "What is this about, Brian?"

I stared in to his eyes and sighed heavily. Time to `fess up. "You always ask me questions about my past."

He nodded slowly, an odd expression on his face.

"Well, I guess I thought now was as good a time as ever to answer them."

His face paled slightly and he released my arm, sitting on the edge of my old bed. "Okay," he said softly.

I could tell he was nervous. Fuck, I was nervous. But this was the last chance. I wasn't going to take these memories back to our home. This is where they belonged. Sunshine wanted to know about my childhood? Fine. But this is the only place I was willing to talk about it.

Joan's room was perfect, as always. The bed was made, the curtains were pulled closed, and the clock appeared to be set to perfect time. There were three crucifixes on the walls. I went to the closet and pulled it open, remembering the last time I had to do this. When Jack died. A shudder went down my spine and I pulled Joan's hat boxes down, finally finding the box that contained all of the important paperwork I knew we needed.

Birth certificates, hospital records, the paperwork on the house... it was all here. And so was the photo album. I grabbed them all, shut the closet, and went back into my old room.

Justin was sitting on the edge of the bed, looking around in wonder. I'd forgotten that he'd never even been here before. He'd never met Jack. Part of me regretted that. I would have loved to rub Justin in his face. But the rest of me was glad. He didn't need to know that evil fucking old man. He didn't need to be touched by him.

I sat down next to him and opened the folder.

"Is everything there?" Justin asked.

"Everything we need," I replied. The first few papers were just birth certificates. Justin took mine and smiled, brushing his fingertips over the footprint at the bottom. "You were really small," he said.

I snorted. "Thanks, Sunshine," I said sarcastically. "That's a real turn-on."

He chuckled and nudged me, setting the papers aside.

"What's this?" he asked, holding one up.

"My baptism records," I relied.

He looked at me, eyes wide. "You were baptised?"

"Irish Catholic, Sunshine. They do it when you're a baby. You don't really get a choice."

He blinked a few times, then laughed.

"What?" I asked, tense.

"I just think it's funny," he said. "You were baptized, and you ended up fucking a priest. Who would you confess to?!"

I felt myself smile. "I don't know, but I think it would have taken more Hail Marys than I could do in a million years to make up for it."

Now we got to the fun part. The hospital records. I shifted to sit closer to him, our legs and shoulders pressed together. Suddenly there was a lump in my throat. Part of me wondered if I was doing the right thing. Maybe I should just hide all of this from him. Maybe sharing it would only distribute the poison, not stop it.

But he had the right to know.

"What's this?" Justin asked, looking over the first page.

"My hospital records," I said. I cleared my throat. The words were hard to find.

"There's... a lot of them," Justin said slowly.

I didn't meet his gaze. I couldn't see the look on his face. "Yeah," was all I said.

The papers were in order. The first page was my first hospital visit, after I was born. I didn't remember it very clearly. I'd only been five. Broken arm, it read.

"I fell down the front steps," I said, my voice strained.

Justin tensed. He knew what I meant. "You had help," he replied.

I shrugged, and pulled out the next page. Broken leg.

"Fall down the steps again?" he asked. His voice was strained.

I shook my head. "Fell off my first bike."

"Kids don't break their legs falling off a little bike," he said. He sounded angry, but it was a cold anger.

"No," I replied. I turned the page again. Bruised ribs. The next one was for a mild concussion. The next one was just a superficial laceration. Five stitches. The next one was a broken toe.

I grinned and nudged him. "This really was my fault," I said. "Soccer."

He shifted forward to force me to look into his eyes. They were glassy. "Brian," he said softly.

"Hey, you wanted to know," I replied defensively. I didn't want to hurt him. Fuck, but I didn't want to hurt him by showing him these things.

He took my hand gently and rubbed it with his thumb. "Go on," he said softly.

We went through the final few papers. Another broken arm. Fractured collarbone. A few more stitches. One more concussion. A few other things, here and there. It was a history of my life, from five to eighteen.

We got to the bottom of the pile and I felt like I was going to throw up.

"I didn't know," he said softly.

I looked at him again. "I didn't let you."

He grinned slightly. "I'm glad you are now."

I shrugged. "It doesn't do any good."

"It does," he insisted, taking my hand again and squeezing it. "I need to know. Otherwise I'll never really know you. Not like Michael does."

Ah. There it was. The jealousy. "You already know me better than him."

"But he's always had this part of you. He knew you when..."

"He knew me in middle school," I said. "He doesn't know about any of this. And I sure as hell didn't ever talk to him about why, or what happened. He just figured it out."

Justin nodded once, and then brushed his fingers through my hair and kissed my cheek. I felt my heart beat a little faster, and my stomach settle.

I set the paperwork aside, and opened the photo album. The first picture staring up at us was the first one ever taken of me.

Justin burst into giggles and yanked the book out of my hands. "Oh my god! Look how cute you were!"

I groaned and rolled my eyes, but grinned. "Well, I always *have* been."

He smiled at me and turned the page. There were pictures of me in my crib, naked and grinning widely. He laughed again. "You still smile like that."

I watched over his shoulder as he turned the pages. There were baby photos. Photos of me in my baptism gown. Photos of Claire holding me. I hadn't looked at this photo album in a very long time. Somehow there had never seemed to be a point. What good was it looking back at a childhood that was nothing but shit? But suddenly, sharing it with Justin, I saw the small pieces of good that were there.

He paused over a picture of me and Claire, both standing in front of the house holding our bookbags. "First day of kindergarten," I said.

He chuckled. My hair was a mess in it, sticking up in the front, and I had a huge cheesy grin on my face. "You look excited. I never wanted to go to school."

"It was a way out," I said simply.

His shoulders tensed again and he nodded.

Then there were pictures of me growing up. There I was with my first bike, then my first skateboard. My first haircut. There were pictures of Christmas presents. My first Lego set. My first Atari. My first Star Wars action figures.

There were also photos of me with my first cast. My first stitches. My first crutches.

He would hesitate over each page, examining the faces of the people in them closely.

"Your mother's not in many of these," he said.

"She took most of them," I replied. "She didn't like to be in the photos. Just like she didn't like to be around for anything else."

He looked at me again, his expression sad, but not full of pity like I expected. Just... sad. "She wasn't around much?"

"She was here physically," I replied. I pointed to a family picture that must have been taken by an uncle or something. Joan held a wine glass, Jack held a beer. Claire and I sat on the floor in front of them. I was scowling. "But she was usually drunk."

"They both were, weren't they?" Justin asked, brushing a finger over my face in the photo.

"Yeah. But when Joan was drunk, she'd disappear. When Jack was drunk..."

"He'd lash out," Justin said.

I just nodded, my stomach tensing again. As if he knew, Justin's hand found mine again, holding it gently.

Then there was a photo of myself and Mikey. I was really smiling in that one, and we had our arms around each other.

"That's the first picture of us," I said.

"You look happy," Justin said, staring intently at it. "He really meant a lot to you."

"He was the only way to escape," I replied. My voice was strained now.

Justin just nodded, and kept turning the pages. There were more photos of me and Mikey, and less of me and Claire.

"Where are the photos of your sister?" Justin asked.

"There's other photo albums of her," I said. "There's just this one of me."

"You grew apart?" he asked.

I hesitated before replying. "I started taking the beatings Joan wouldn't. It was me or Claire. I didn't want Jack beating on her. I thought... even though she was the older one, it was my job." My voice was shaking now, and I squeezed Justin's hand harder. The words were almost impossible to say. "I resented her after a while. She wanted to pretend everything was okay."

"She still does," Justin said. His voice was hard.

"Yeah. She still does."

The last few pages were mostly me from high school. There were no more pictures of me playing soccer. Instead, there was me and my science club friends. Justin grinned and giggled a little, mumbling 'geek.'

Then there were pictures Mikey and I took, wearing outfits I would rather forget.

Justin laughed softly. "What were you *wearing*?!" The acid-washed jeans and t-shirt I had cut the sleeves and bottom off of so my stomach showed looked ridiculous now. At the time, though, I knew exactly how hot I was.

I nudged him with my elbow. "It was the 80s. We looked very cool, trust me."

"Oh, sure," he said, his voice sarcastic. "Nice mullet," he said.

I made a face. "Tell no one."

He grinned at me weakly, shutting the book.

The last photo had been me with my luggage in front of my shitty old first car, leaving for college. The look on my face was resolute. My eyes were dark. I wasn't ever coming back.

"I'm sorry," Justin said. His eyes were starting to get even glassier, and red. He was going to cry. Fuck.

"Don't," I said. "It's in the past."

"But... but Brian, this is... this is *horrible*!" he insisted, turning to face me. He took my face in his hands. "I had no idea! Why didn't someone report them?! Why didn't social services take you away?! Debbie should have--"

"Deb tried. Things weren't like they are now. People thought it was best not to get involved. And if a father beat his son once in a while, it was probably because the kid deserved it."

"Brian," he said softly, a few tears trickling down his cheeks.

I looked away, pulling my head from his grasp. I didn't want to see that. "Besides," I said casually, throwing my voice into a well practiced Irish accent. "We were Irish, and that's the way the Irish are."

Justin giggled a little, wiping his face on the back of his arm. "That was hot," he mumbled.

I snorted and looked at him again. "I didn't show you this because I want pity. I don't."

He nodded quickly. "I don't pity you."

I arched an eyebrow at him.

"I pity them," he said.

Now I was confused.

"They never even knew you," he said. His eyes were darker now, and I couldn't pull my gaze from them. "They missed out."

I felt myself grin just a little. "They didn't deserve to know me."

"No," Justin said. "They didn't."

I had expected more yelling, to be honest. Yelling and queening out. Or maybe sobs, and pity. I expected him to make a big deal out of it, and make me extremely uncomfortable.

Instead, he took my face in his hands again, and pulled me to him. Our foreheads bumped gently. "I love you, Brian."

I shut my eyes tightly. Was that the first time I'd ever heard that in this room? In this house? I swallowed hard.

"I love you," he repeated.

Moments later, he had his arms around me, and my face was pressed into his hair. And if I cried a little, he didn't say anything.

We left an hour later, a box of paperwork and photos under my arm, along with that stupid trophy. I left everything else. I didn't want or need anything from Joan and Jack. I never had. I never would.

And maybe someday sonnyboy would ask about his grandparents. Maybe someday he'd ask about my childhood. And when he was old enough, I supposed he'd have the right to know, too. Although... I'd probably hide the worst from him. Justin was the only person who'd ever know the full truth.

I locked the front door and took a deep breath, staring back at the house that had meant so much hell.

"We moved here when I went into middle school," I said. "Jack had a new job. Sometimes I thought I'd never escape." I was being far more honest than I had ever even been with myself, let alone Justin. It felt... good.

"But you did," he said. He kissed my cheek, having to lean up on his tiptoes to do it. I turned to face him. "Let's go home," he said.

Home. This place had never been home. I never thought I'd have one. But now I thought to the country manor that I'd bought us, and the furniture we'd put in it, and the fireplace we'd fucked in front of so many times, and the way it felt to sit down to dinner with... with my partner. And my son.

The past didn't matter anymore. Maybe I'd never fully escape it. Maybe I'd have nightmares forever. Maybe part of me would always be a scared little boy. But that was okay. Because I had someone to share it with, and that made it... a lot easier, somehow.

'Duh,' I could hear Debbie saying in my ear. 'Of course it does, what do you think I was always telling you?!'

I felt myself smile. "Yeah. Let's go home."

***Thanks to you he has visions! Babies! Weddings! White picket fences! Dancing in his blonde little head!***

## **Epilogue**

"We're gonna put this right next to your Dad's soccer trophy." I tell Gus, ruffling his hair. I set his newly earned Violin recital trophy up on the mantel next to Brian's as promised.

"Oh no your not. There will be NO violin achievements of any kind next to my soccer shit." Brian goes to grab the trophy and I smack his hand.

"Gus worked really hard for that. Now show some support for your SON."

He rolls his eyes and turns back to beaming and proud Gus. "Good job Sonnyboy."

"Thanks Dad!" He goes over and stares at his name perfectly engraved on the tiny plaque.

Gus Peterson-Marcus-Kinney  
2nd Place. Goodwin Academy Emerging Musicians Show

"You did good, Gus." I tell him. Brian wraps his arm around me tightly. I rest my head on his shoulder.

"Mr. Gold said I can sit first chair next year!" He was so happy. I had never seen him so happy.

A low grumble comes from Brian's chest and I rub his lower back. "At least he didn't call him Ethan."

"Your friend seemed nice." Brian speaks up.

Gus turns around and blushes softly. "Oh. Tyler? Yeah. He's...nice."

"You should invite him over for dinner one night."

Gus and I both look at Brian with wide eyes.

"Really?" We both ask at the same time.

Brian rolls his eyes again. "Yes really. Stop acting so shocked. That's what families do right? They meet their kids...whatever the hell he is."

"He's a friend. A good friend."

"Yeah? Good like he walks you home from school? Or good like he gives you head during study hall?" Brian smirks at his 17 year old son.

"Both." Gus winks at us and heads upstairs, taking 2 steps at a time.

"He's growing up, Brian."

"I know. Don't remind me." Brian flops down into the recliner, undoing his tie. I curl up in his lap and nuzzle my face into his neck.

"You were still the hottest Dad there." I tell him. His arms wrap around me so naturally. We cuddle like that, yes I said cuddle, for a while.

"I love you." He says quietly against my shoulder. I almost don't hear him, and if there was anyone else in the room they wouldn't have heard what he said. But I always know when he says it. He doesn't say it loud and he doesn't say it often. But when he does it's meaningful. He said it now because of what we had gone through the past few months. His mother dying, the Chris Hobbs thing, the building of the gallery, Ethan, and Gus growing up into a smart and talented young man. A young gay man at that which I know in a way makes Brian more relieved than anything.

I smile against his neck. "I know." I tell him, my fingers in his hair.

We are interrupted by the door bell.

"What the hell?" He murmurs. He swats my ass and I get up from his lap, groaning. I was so comfy. He squints at the clock on the mantel.

"It's 4:15 on a Saturday. Who the fuck would be coming to see us?"

"Maybe it's a girl scouts trying to sell us cookies." I giggle, following him to the door.

"Right." He opens the front door and we both blink oddly at little older lady standing on our front door step.

"Can I help you?" Brian asks.

"Yes. Hello, my name is Mrs. Travers. I am from the division of youth and family services for the state of New York. I'm looking for a Mr. Justin Taylor?"

I raise my hand and step from behind Brian. "I'm Justin Taylor."

"Hello, Mr. Taylor." She extends her hand and I shake it cautiously.

"Do you know a woman named Melissa Crowley?"

"Um. No, not that I recall." I look at Brian and he raises an eye brow at me.

Mrs. Travers reaches into her briefcase and hands me a piece of paper. "Do you remember this, Mr. Taylor?"

I take the piece of paper and look down at it, reading it carefully. It was from the Kings County Hospital. I swallow hard. "Y-Yes."

"Well, that's a start. May I come in?"

I nod and move to the side so she can enter.

"What the hell is this about?" Brian asks with a worried expression. I just look at him, my heart racing.

"I'll try and make this quick Mr. Taylor. Melissa Crowley went to Kings County 4 years ago and was inseminated with your sperm. She became the proud mother of a little girl, Aileen 9 months later. Unfortunately Ms. Crowley was killed in a car accident, 4 months ago."

"Okay..."



"WAIT ONE MINUTE." Brian interrupts. "YOUR SPERM?"

"Shhh." I tell him.

Mrs. Travers gives Brian a gentle smile. "Ms. Crowley had no family. Her parents died many years back and we tried to locate any other family she had with no prevail. She had a will made out as it was just her and Aileen. She said if something were to happen to her, Aileen would go to her natural father. It took a lot of detective work. But we finally tracked you down."

"Wait...me? I'm her..."

"Next of kin. Yes."

"But...I don't even...I..."

"I know this must come as quite a shock to you, Mr. Taylor. I take it...you did not know your sperm was used?"

"Well, no. I mean..." I look at Brian."...I did it when I first moved to New York. I had to pay for school and rent. I mean...my old roommate told me it was a good idea. I didn't even think..."

"Most men in that situation don't. But unfortunately these things happen. I have schedule Aileen to be brought here..." she hands me a folder with a photo of Aileen paper clipped to the front.

"WHOA, wait one minute! I can't just...take her! How do I know she is even MINE?" I stare at the picture then IMMEDIATELY regret what I said. She looks JUST like me. Curly blonde wisps on top of her head. HUGE smile and bright blue eyes. She's pale and tiny. And...perfect.

Mrs. Travers blinks at me. "We can run tests if you need proof. Are you not in a good place in your life to take a child, Mr. Taylor?" She eyes the mansion with a raised eye brow.

"No! I mean I didn't say that, but...I don't know the first thing about a child." I hand the folder to Brian as his hand is reaching out for it. His eyes widen at the picture. I watch his face closely. I wish to hell I could read minds right now like some sort of super hero. Maybe I could ask Michael which super hero reads minds. That would be awesome...okay wait. Back to reality here.

"Well, if you refuse she will then be put in the system and hopefully we can find a stable foster home to put her in."

"No." Brian finally speaks.

"What?" My mouth hangs open at him.

"Can you bring her by tomorrow? At noon?"

Mrs. Travers smiles. "Sure." She hesitates. "May I ask...are you married, Mr. Taylor?"

I swallow. "Yes. To him. This is Brian. Brian Kinney."

She shakes his hand and he looks like a deer in headlights. "That's wonderful. Aileen will need a stable home to go into if you two choose to keep her. She has been through a lot."

"Of course..." I feel like I cannot breathe.

"I'll see you tomorrow at Noon, Mr. Taylor. Mr. Kinney." She opens the front door and gives us one last smile before she leaves.

Brian and I stand there, dumbfounded, staring at the door.

"Say something. " I finally tell him.

He doesn't.

"Are you gonna yell?" I ask.

I see him shake his head out of the corner of my eye.

"Are you mad?"

Another head shake.

"Brian...I..."

"What's going on?"

We both turn to find Gus standing at the bottom of the stairs, looking at us with a puzzled look. "Who was at the door?"